

# THE SPECTATOR

The truth about Bellingcat  
Owen Matthews

On being sacked  
Lynn Barber

Why French kids aren't fat  
Gavin Mortimer

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How the EU used Ireland to take control of Brexit  
By James Forsyth



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# THE SPECTATOR

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## Modern family

Whether it was intended so or not, the decision by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to choose Australia as the place to announce that they are expecting their first child was a public relations triumph. For years the royal family was criticised for having a tin ear when it came to reading and dealing with the public, but no one could say this now. The tone of the younger royals' tour to the southern hemisphere has been one of approachability, without compromising the dignity of the positions which Harry and Meghan hold.

Their visit also runs counter to the conventional wisdom of some republicans — in Britain as well as Australia — that support for the monarchy is dependent on personal affection for the Queen and that the institution will be doomed upon her death. Now that Elizabeth II is, for reasons of age, no longer able to conduct long-haul tours, her grandchildren have achieved what her children never quite managed: to show that they have the ability to follow on and capture the support of the public where she leaves off.

Royal marriages have long been about survival — many throughout history have been about ending wars, uniting kingdoms or resolving hostilities between warring families. While the unions of Harry and Meghan, and William and Kate, are about none of those things, they have in their own way obeyed the same principle: they are marriages which have been instrumental in restoring the reputation of a royal family which was deep in the doldrums just a few years ago.

First, we saw a middle-class woman whisked — and welcomed — into royalty. Now, with Meghan, the world has witnessed a mixed-race woman similarly join the world's best-known royal family. There has been no awkward match-making by courtiers, no

attempt to block the prince's choice of partner on the grounds of class, race or marital history. In 1936 the king's love affair with an American divorcee nearly broke the royal family. In 2018 it has been accepted without a murmur. For the first time in decades the royal family looks in tune with the times — and without having to strain itself in order to do so.

It is good that it does. There is nothing to say that Britain, Australia or any other country has to have a monarchy. It would be

*The younger royals' marriages have been instrumental in restoring the reputation of the royal family*

perfectly understandable if Australia decided to break its monarchical ties with Britain. There are many who would argue that it would be an essential step in Australia's coming of age, the point at which it would finally outgrow its colonial master. There are few in Britain who would seek to stand in the way of Australian republicanism.

Yet monarchy has proved remarkably durable in Australia. We are nearly a generation on from 1999, when Australians voted 55 per cent to 45 per cent to retain the monarchy, defying the wishes of a Constitutional Convention of appointed worthies. In the event, every state bar the Capital Territory rejected the proposed appointed presidency. There is little indication that the result would be any different now. While some polls have put support for a republic at just over 50 per cent, the polls in 1999, too, showed republicanism on course for victory. In the end, however, the public denied the political class what it wished for — which was its own aggrandisement.

That is the point about republicanism — in Britain, Australia and elsewhere. While it can seem notionally attractive, its appeal tends to wane when people realise what would almost certainly replace it: a party politician as head of state. 'Would you like Britain to be a republic?' is a question which is sure to elicit a different answer to 'Would you like Tony Blair or David Cameron to be installed at Buckingham Palace and to swan around the world representing Britain?' The current incumbents of the White House and the Elysée Palace do nothing to promote the cause of republicanism — one a narcissist and the other with the air of Napoleon. It is marked how modest, both in lifestyle and cost to the taxpayer, Elizabeth II — and all other monarchs of western democracies — seem in comparison.

The beauty of a constitutional monarchy is that it keeps politicians in their place — while still ensuring that ultimate political power lies with the people. For an elected leader, the presence of a monarch is a constant reminder that he or she is a servant of the state and that the election was a job interview, not a confirmation of personal power.

The institution of the monarchy and the character of the monarch are different things, of course. It is quite possible to be in favour of one and not the other. There are those who support the monarchy, but who do not look forward to Prince Charles becoming king.

Yet, following a rough patch in which the lives of the royal family seemed to descend at times into a bad soap opera, it has become easy to support both royals and monarchy alike. Republican sympathies are in abeyance in Britain — and on the evidence so far of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's tour to Australia, they are unlikely to triumph in the near future in that country either.





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**Cover** by Morten Morland. **Drawings** by Michael Heath, Castro, K.J. Lamb, Russell, Dredge, Geoff Thompson, Nick Newman, RGJ, Grizelda, Adam Singleton.  
[www.spectator.co.uk](http://www.spectator.co.uk) **Editorial and advertising** The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP, Tel: 020 7961 0200, Fax: 020 7681 3773, Email: editor@spectator.co.uk (editorial); letters@spectator.co.uk (for publication); advertising@spectator.co.uk (advertising); Advertising enquiries: 020 7961 0222 **Subscription and delivery queries** Spectator Subscriptions Dept., 17 Perrymount Rd, Haywards Heath RH16 3DH; Tel: 0330 3330 050; Email: customerhelp@subscriptions.spectator.co.uk;  
**Rates** for a basic annual subscription in the UK: £111; Europe: £185; Australia: A\$279; New Zealand: A\$349; and £195 in all other countries. To order, go to [www.spectator.co.uk/A263A](http://www.spectator.co.uk/A263A) or call 0330 3330 050 and quote A151A; **Newsagent queries** Spectator Circulation Dept, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP, Tel: 020 7961 0200, Fax: 020 7681 3773, Email: dstam@spectator.co.uk; **Distributor** Marketforce, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP. Tel. 0203 787 9001. [www.marketforce.co.uk](http://www.marketforce.co.uk) **Vol 338; no 9921**  
© The Spectator (1828) Ltd. ISSN 0038-6952 The Spectator is published weekly by The Spectator (1828) Ltd at 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP  
**Editor: Fraser Nelson**



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I remember someone in the 1990s asking what my rates were and I said £1 a word, but I only said it because Martin Amis did and it sounded good  
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Curiously, toplessness seems to have caused less offence to Victorian sensibilities than trousers  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Roger Kimball**, who writes about Melania Trump's wardrobe on p10, is an American art critic and social commentator. He edits and publishes *The New Criterion* and Encounter Books.

**George C. Herring** is the author of *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, soon to appear in a sixth edition. He reviews Max Hastings's history of the Vietnam war on p33.

**Anne Margaret Daniel**, the editor of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *I'd Die For You and Other Lost Stories*, reviews Haruki Murakami's Fitzgerald-influenced new novel on p31.

**Lynn Barber** is a journalist, award-winning interviewer and the author of *An Education*. She describes on p20 how she was recently fired.

**Lucy Mangan** writes about the joys of *Little Women* on p30. Her own latest book is *Bookworm: A Memoir of Childhood Reading*.



# PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



CLIMATE CHANGE HURRICANE BREXIT REACHES HOUSE OF COMMONS

## Home

Brexit was in crisis as the European Council (of heads of state or government) met. Theresa May, the Prime Minister, told the House of Commons that it was time for 'cool, calm heads to prevail'. These proved in short supply. Dominic Raab, Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove, Penny Mordaunt, Chris Grayling, Liz Truss and Geoffrey Cox openly ate pizza in the office of Andrea Leadsom. The EU rejected Mrs May's proposal that the UK as a whole could remain under the EU customs union for a definitely limited time after 2020 (when the planned transition period ends). Some hoped for no deal; some hoped for no Brexit. Mary Midgley, the philosopher, died aged 99. Failure of overhead electricity lines led to services from Paddington being cancelled. At Manchester Oxford Road station, 68 per cent of trains this year were found to be late.

John Bercow's position as Speaker was called into question by Dame Laura Cox's independent report on the House of Commons, which found bullying and sexual harassment in a culture of 'deference, subservience, acquiescence and silence' and concluded that the changes needed would be hard to make 'under the current senior house administration'. Mr Bercow called for an independent body to be set up to investigate such allegations and told friends he would resign next summer. So-called religious hate crime cases grew from 5,949 last year to 8,336 this year, according to the Home Office; 52 per cent of the crimes were directed at Muslims. Not content with that, the Home Office

announced a review of whether hatred of men, old people and goths should be added to the list. The Duchess of Sussex is expecting a child in the spring, who will be seventh in line to the throne.

Pay rose by an annual rate of 3.1 per cent in the three months to August, the highest rate in nine years. Inflation fell back to 2.4 per cent from 2.7 per cent. Unemployment fell by 47,000 to 1.36 million, remaining at 4 per cent. The government decided to introduce Universal Credit more slowly after much criticism of injustices in its application. Cuadrilla began fracking operations at Little Plumpton, Lancashire, after a legal challenge failed. A man appeared in court charged with fraudulently claiming a £2,525,485 lottery win in 2009. Clinical trials proceeded on the effects on depression of the horse anaesthetic and popular party drug ketamine. The Ecuadorian embassy in London, where Julian Assange has enjoyed refuge since 2012, instructed him to attend to the 'wellbeing, food and hygiene' of the cat that shares his company.

## Abroad

Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, met Saudi leaders in Riyadh as Turkey and Saudi Arabia wrangled over the disappearance of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who Turkey said had been murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October. The United Nations warned that 13 million people in Yemen were facing starvation after three years of civil war. The US military said it had killed about 60 al-Shabab militants in an

air strike in central Somalia. Paul Allen, who co-founded Microsoft, died aged 65. Sears, the US department store chain that employs 90,000 people, filed for bankruptcy. A food company in San Francisco that grows chicken nuggets from chicken feather cells plans to make them available in restaurants before the year is out.

The Russian Orthodox Church severed its connections with the Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople over the latter's recognition of independence for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. MPs in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia debated the adoption of the name North Macedonia after a referendum on the question attracted only a third of the electorate, too small a proportion to make it valid. The Pope canonised Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador shot in 1980, and Pope Paul VI, author of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

New laws in the western Chinese region of Xinjiang prescribed detention in 'vocational training centres' for people such as Uighur Muslims who refused to watch state television. Sierra Leone cancelled a £300 million project, financed by China, for a new airport outside its capital, Freetown. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, gave half of the 20 ministerial posts in his administration to women, they being, he said, less corrupt. Audi (owned by Volkswagen) accepted a fine of €800 million from German prosecutors investigating breaches of diesel emission rules. A Frenchman out shooting in the Alps killed a Welsh chef on a bicycle by mistake. CSH





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# DIARY

Matt Ridley



When I land on the east coast of America, people tell me they've never met a Trump voter. When I land in the middle, as I did last week in Kentucky, I meet lots. I chatted with my driver, who did not like Trump at first, but would vote twice for his re-election if he could, because of the jobs boom and the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. He's a retired salesman who tutors kids from poor backgrounds in reading and maths. 'I guess that makes me a conservative,' he says.

I had to lecture in semi-darkness in Louisville, after a power cut plunged most of the university into darkness. I timed it so that just at the moment when the power company had promised the lights would come back on, I had reached the bit where I said that artificial light is now 60,000 times cheaper than in 1800, in terms of the amount of time you have to work to earn a given quantity of light — a calculation by the economist Bill Nordhaus, who won the Nobel Prize the day before my talk. But it stayed dark, and stiflingly hot.

That day Hurricane Michael slammed into Florida, causing devastation and killing 26 people. It had the third lowest recorded atmospheric pressure (919 millibars) of any hurricane to make landfall in America. The lowest (892mb) was the Labor Day hurricane of 1935, which killed 423. Yet the media continues to imply that recent hurricanes are linked to climate change, as if they would go away if we stopped driving cars: 'The Hurricanes, and Climate-Change Questions, Keep Coming. Yes, They're Linked', said a *New York Times* headline on Thursday. I find almost nobody knows that there is no upward trend in the frequency or strength of such cyclones over the last four decades — a fact reconfirmed in the latest UN report last week. Globally, deaths from floods, droughts and storms are down by 98 per cent in a century, not because of less bad weather, but because of better technology and forecasting.

Donald Trump now says of climate change: 'I don't think it's a hoax, I think there's probably a difference. But I don't know that it's man-made.' The climate activist Eric Holthaus

said: 'The world's top scientists just gave rigorous backing to systematically dismantle capitalism.' Both are wrong. The truth is that climate change is happening, but more slowly than expected. It's now 30 years since James Hansen of Nasa raised the alarm and, as climate scientist Pat Michaels and hurricane expert Ryan Maue have pointed out, 'it's time to acknowledge that the rapid warming he predicted isn't happening'. Our own government's climate-change committee, and the hysterical BBC, should take note.

"Agrigento?  
Isn't that some  
kind of bitcoin?"

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BROADENING HORIZONS

At a meeting in California I attended a remarkable talk by Hugh Herr, who is a double amputee developing new bionic limbs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. By attaching people's leg muscles to each other during an amputation, he has reduced both the phantom pain and the deadness of their limbs. Robotic, motorised ankle prostheses can pick up signals from the muscles and enable the person to lift, roll and tap their 'feet' again. He showed a video of a patient climbing the sheer cliff in the Cayman Islands where he fell and lost a leg some years before, using his robotic foot to cling to crevices in the rock.

An afternoon whale-watching off Santa Barbara proved almost ridiculously productive. A mother humpback whale and her calf decided to spend the afternoon seeing who could jump higher out of the water, while a thousand common dolphins joined in. Globally, humpback whale numbers have increased from 10,000 in the 1960s to 80,000 today. They are not bothered by the fact that the waters off Santa Barbara are stained when calm with thin oil slicks. It's entirely natural: 10,000 gallons of oil oozes into the water every day in a six-mile stretch just off the beach, from seepages on the ocean floor.

Also on the boat was Oskar Eustis, artistic director of New York's Public Theater and one of the people behind *Hamilton*. He tells a fascinating story of what came out of the moment when the audience booed vice-president Mike Pence at a showing of the musical in 2016. Hundreds of thousands of pro-Trump Americans signed a petition to boycott the show, but instead of patronising them as philistines, Eustis realised that most of these people would never get to see it anyway. 'They aren't boycotting us,' he says, 'we're boycotting them' — by making theatre an exclusive preserve of the bi-coastal elite that does not address the concerns or come to the towns of middle America. He is now taking Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, about job loss and drug addiction in the Rust Belt, for free to community centres in the heart of the country, and reactions have been spectacular. An encouraging example of the two Americas reconnecting. Britain needs this too.



POLITICS | **ROGER KIMBALL**

# Melania stays true to herself

I am not sure that Melania Trump had the introduction of *Henry IV Part 2* in mind when she sat down for her free and frank discussion with the jackals of the — er, with a respected ABC correspondent during her recent trip to Africa. But time and again she dilated upon the ‘unpleasant’, erring and intrusive ‘speculation’ of the media.

In Shakespeare’s play, the action starts with a warning: ‘Rumour is a pipe/ Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures/ And of so easy and so plain a stop/ That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,/ The still-discordant wavering multitude,/ Can play upon it.’

There are a lot of chattering, still discordant heads on view in Tom Llamas’s sit-down with the First Lady. ‘Once, a private woman,’ the two-L Llamas declares in his opening voice-over. ‘Now, the most deeply personal details of her life on full display.’

Well, not really. ‘No topic is off limits,’ Llamas excitedly bleated. But although there were several embarrassing questions — the *Access Hollywood* tape made an appearance, as did Stormy Daniels — somehow the embarrassment pooled at the feet of the interviewer, not the interviewee. ‘Why are you asking her that?’ was a question I found myself posing frequently when wading through the muck of this interview.

The Slovenia-born Melania was a fashion model before meeting Donald Trump, and she is easily the most glamorous First Lady since Jackie Kennedy. Indeed, once you scrape off the fetid glint of Kennedy mystique, she is probably the most glamorous ever. Yet when she wears a white pith helmet on her trip to Africa the press goes wild. Isn’t a pith helmet a ‘symbol of colonialism’ and (alleged) European exploitation of Africa?

No. It’s a pith helmet. She wore a safari hat on a safari, as one of Melania’s spokeswomen tartly observed. Get over it.

‘But she posed in front of the Sphinx dressed like some character out of *Raiders of the Lost Ark!*’ ‘There’s fashion and there’s costume,’ intoned one talking head, ‘and this is costume.’

Melania had the perfect comeback: ‘I wish people would focus on what I do, not what I wear.’

I suppose it is not surprising that clothes should loom large in a discussion of Melania Trump. She is a beautiful woman with a striking sense of fashion and a closet full of fetching duds. Really, she is just following Polonius’s advice: ‘Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy/ But not expressed in fancy, rich not gaudy...’ But of course the media interest in Melania Trump’s wardrobe is an extension of their hatred of her husband.

Heading down to Texas to meet the children of illegal immigrants, she wears a coat with the legend ‘I really don’t care, do you?’

*This interview was meant to demean the First Lady. Like so many press gambits these days, it backfired*

‘Oh my God! Is that a callous message to the poor children, cruelly separated from their criminal parents by the mean man in the White House?’

No. As Melania explained, the message was intended for the purveyors of fake news, the left-wing media who spend their time spinning webs of hostile innuendo.

Melania Trump wears a white pantsuit to the State of the Union Address. But... but isn’t the white pantsuit Hillary Clinton’s emblem? Is Melania covertly dissenting from her husband and declaring her solidarity with Hillary?

First of all, not to be cruel about it, no one would mistake Melania Trump in a pantsuit

for Hillary Clinton in similar attire. Contrast the Venus of Urbino and the Venus of Willendorf. Second, the skein of what Melania calls ‘speculation’ is so patently catty bloviation intended not to illuminate but to wound. Why pay it any attention?

In the interests of full disclosure, I should acknowledge that I rarely watch television news any more than I am in the habit of bathing in polluted water. But a journalist’s lot can be demanding. Asked to comment on the kerfuffle over Melania Trump’s ABC interview, I decided to forego the advice proffered by Sydney Smith — he never read a book before reviewing it, he said, because he found that it prejudiced his opinion — and actually watch the interview.

For someone like Sydney Smith who enjoys having his prejudices confirmed, it was in some respects a pleasant experience. The many clips of carping, malicious newscasters amply bolstered my low opinion of that tribe. And Melania Trump, calm, cool and collected, was a model of patient dignity.

The interview was supposed to be a racy game of ‘Gotcha!’ ‘What about that *Access Hollywood* tape, eh? What about his rumoured infidelities? Did the President apologise to you?’

I liked the White House response: yes, the President often apologises to Melania — ‘for all the media nonsense and scrutiny she has been under since entering the White House’. Good for him.

Melania Trump set the tone for her entire hour-long interview at the beginning. Tom Llamas began with the question ‘Melania Trump is ...’ and asked her to complete the sentence. Here, too, she ended by following the sage advice of Polonius. That’s a hard one, Melania said, and then provided the perfect inventory: ‘a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, the First Lady of the United States, caring, compassionate, strong, independent, very detail-oriented, and staying true to herself.’

This interview was meant to demean Melania Trump and damage her husband. Like so many press gambits these days, it backfired and reflected brilliantly on them both.

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# THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

Can you think of a serious crime which does not involve hate or, at the very least, contempt? You must hate people to murder them, rape them, rob them, beat them up, post excrement through their letterbox or even defraud them. This intense hostility is a good reason for punishing such actions. The concept of 'hate crime' ignores this. It fastens on particular hatreds, making it worse for, say, a black person to call a white person a 'white bastard' than for him to call a black person a 'f\*\*\*ing bastard' (or vice versa). Why? Racism, religious enmity, anti-gay feeling etc are sources and triggers of hate, so they are often important factors in a crime, but once they are specially categorised they skew the system to downplay all other forms of hate. People have come to realise this, so now they want to invent other categories of hate crime — misandry, ageism, hostility to sensitive groups such as goths, and so on. This process is a dead end because hate crime is, by law, self-defining. Ever since the Macpherson report on the Stephen Lawrence affair, incidents of hate crime are automatically logged if a 'victim', 'or anyone else', perceives them to be such and reports them. Thus hate crime figures constantly rise (94,098 last year, apparently, 'up 17 per cent'), without the law being able to establish the evidence — let alone secure a conviction — in all but a tiny minority of cases.

It would not be a better society, for example, if class prejudice became a hate crime and we had to lock up John le Carré. He has just declared that Etonians are a 'curse on the earth', but I think it would be prudent to let it pass. He taught there once upon a time, after all, and so his views deserve respect. Others have held such opinions. In his gripping new biography of Churchill, Andrew Roberts draws attention to a speech in 1940. 'Hitler,' said Churchill, 'in one of his recent discourses declared that the fight was between those who have been through the Adolf Hitler schools and those who have been at Eton.' Churchill was speaking at *his* old school, so he continued: 'Hitler has forgotten Harrow, and he has overlooked the vast



majority of the youth of this country who have never had the chance of attending such schools, but who have by their skill and prowess won the admiration of the whole world.'

Sir Mark Sedwill, the acting cabinet secretary, wrote to the *Times* on Tuesday to defend the honour of Olly Robbins, the Prime Minister's EU adviser, who is credited, if that is the *mot juste*, with delivering Brexit. He was right to do so, because Mr Robbins is not allowed, by the rules, to defend himself, and ministers have unfortunately become readier than in the past to brief against civil servants. (And, it must be said, civil servants to brief against ministers: look at the torrent of leaks against Boris Johnson while he was Foreign Secretary.) But I would ask Sir Mark to consider the question as it looks from the outside. I suppose I know several scores of existing and former civil servants and diplomats quite well, some very well. Among them, I have come across three or four who are pro-Brexit, quite a large minority whose views are genuinely unidentifiable, and dozens and dozens who are anti-Brexit, some passionately so. One told me, with burning anger and as if this were the knock-down argument, that if we Brexited, there would be fewer dinner invitations in Washington DC for British diplomats. Pro-EU views are natural among the senior official classes, because the EU form of government is bureaucratic rather than democratic, and therefore seems more rational to the official mind; but in such volume they undoubtedly add up to a bias. Sir Mark writes, 'Civil servants have always trusted that our fellow citizens, whatever their views, know that we are doing our duty to implement the decisions of the governments they elect.'

Possibly, but Brexit is not a decision of a government, but of the people in a referendum. Pro-Brexit fellow citizens recognise that the mandarins are conscientious, but it is simply not possible to believe that they are doing their best to get us out. Whitehall thinks Brexit is dreadful, so it tries to accomplish it not with maximum success, but with minimum damage. Its definition of damage is anything which separates Britain from the EU. It is an overwhelmingly negative and fearful frame of mind, and I am afraid Mr Robbins exhibits it. Sir Richard Dearlove, ex-head of MI6, and one of the very few brave enough to swim against the Whitehall tide, wrote to the *Times* the next day to ram this point home.

So it may sound contradictory to agree with Lord Ricketts, former head of the Foreign Office, when he complains that the Foreign Office 'has had its limbs amputated' by being shut out of the Brexit process. Isn't it good, after all, to keep that nest of Europhiles at bay? No, because the Foreign Office has the knowledge, contacts and skills, if given proper political leadership, to negotiate. Excluded, it has an incentive to weaken the process. One reason life is so ghastly for Mr Robbins is that Mrs May made the huge error of 'taking personal charge' of Brexit, which she is ill qualified to do. Thus she removed her ability — so valuable for a prime minister — to keep some distance from the actions of her own government, and earned the undying enmity of those who know most about the subject.

The funeral took place last week of my much-loved cousin Alice Cherry, who lived at Weston Manor, Weston, Herts. One of the hymns chosen was 'The Day Thou Gavest'. The penultimate verse begins, 'The sun that bids us rest is waking/ Our brethren 'neath the western sky'. At Alice's insistence, 'western' was printed as 'Weston', which was pleasing and touching. By the way, both Alice's father and her husband were wounded fighting the Germans in the second world war. I wonder how common that honour was.



# The Irish problem

Thanks to her own incompetence, Theresa May now faces an impossible choice

JAMES FORSYTH

The story of Britain and Ireland's relationship has, all too often, been one of mutual incomprehension: *1066 and All That* summed up the view on this side of St George's Channel with the line that 'Every time the English tried to solve the Irish question, the Irish changed the question.' But Theresa May's problem right now is that the Irish — and the European Union — won't change the question and the only answers they'll accept are unacceptable to Mrs May and her cabinet.

To the astonishment of many, the Irish border has become the defining issue of Brexit. There is now a serious and growing risk that the issue will lead to the UK and the EU failing to reach a withdrawal agreement — with all the dire consequences that would entail.

It's easy to see why the issue didn't receive the same attention during the referendum campaign. The Irish border is 300-odd miles long with trade of about £6 billion going across it; the Dover-Calais trade is worth 20 times that. But the problem is harder to solve because the EU is saying that, while it is prepared to wait to solve all the other trade issues, it wants the Irish situation resolved by the time Britain formally leaves the EU in March.

The EU's proposed solution is crude. It wants to maintain frictionless trade on the island of Ireland by, if it deems necessary, imposing checks on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is a rhetorical trick to say that this safeguards the Good Friday Agreement. This EU plan violates the delicate balance struck by Good Friday more than Brexit does. It would ease Northern Ireland away from the UK and push it more towards Dublin's orbit. Under the Barnier plan, if a Northern Irish business objected to a proposed new regulation, its best bet would be to lobby a member of the Irish government. You don't have to be from the 'Ulster Says No' school of politics to regard this threat to Northern Ireland's status as unreasonable, even provocative.

The EU has always had three conditions for a Brexit deal. Britain must agree how much it will pay in the future, even before we know what we'll be getting in exchange for the money. Next, the EU wants to resolve the

rights of three million EU citizens already living in the UK (which ought to be easy). The final condition is Ireland. This bit never quite made sense: how could Irish border arrangements be finalised, without knowing what the post-Brexit trading relationship would be?

But the EU wanted Ireland included to show that this small member state wouldn't be hurt by its large neighbour leaving. As one Secretary of State said to me recently, Brits don't quite appreciate how much the EU regards itself not just as a postwar peace pact,



but as a way of stopping small states being pushed around by large ones. The Greeks would be entitled to a wry smile at that.

More importantly, the EU also realised that insisting on progress in Ireland could tie Britain's hands in the trade negotiations to come. And if Britain had also signed away the money in the withdrawal agreement — which is the plan — Brussels would have got the Brits to throw away their best cards before the main negotiations even began. They remain tantalisingly close to this goal.

In a post-election panic, Theresa May went along with this bizarre sequencing of the talks: agreeing money, agreeing Northern Ireland, and then discussing everything else. Worse, she accepted the argument that any additional infrastructure at the border could not be accepted for security reasons. So the

obvious solution — using technology — was in effect ruled out. This is why the talks are taking so long: every time the EU stalls, the Prime Minister comes under more domestic pressure and then offers more up to the EU.

At various points, Mrs May's negotiators have believed they were the clever ones, that they could somehow use the Irish border issue to get the EU to agree to a special deal for the whole of the UK. After all, what could work on the Irish border could surely be applied to the English Channel too. As late as last month, the government believed that it could pressure the EU to engage with its Chequers plan, that would have seen the UK effectively remain in the single market for goods and preserve several of the benefits of customs union membership, on the basis that it was the only approach that worked for the Irish border. But despite positive sounds from the Irish, this pleading had no effect on Brussels — and was rejected, in brutal form, by the European Council President Donald Tusk in Salzburg.

Mrs May now stands embarrassingly exposed. In December she signed up to a plan saying that if the trade talks failed, the UK would offer guarantees on Northern Ireland. It would 'maintain full alignment with those rules of the internal market and the customs union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 Agreement.' What did this mean? At the time, No. 10 told ministers it didn't mean very much: just making sure UK standards were no lower than European ones. Don't worry, No. 10 insisted, it will all become clear in time.

But in one of the many inexplicable acts of incompetence by the UK government during this process, the government didn't seek to put its interpretation into writing. When the EU produced its own legal definition, it became clear that No. 10's assurances had been wrong. Mrs May had signed a document agreeing that, in the event of no-deal, Northern Ireland would follow EU rules — even if Britain did not. She had unwittingly given herself a choice: soften Brexit beyond all recognition or abandon Ulster.

May was quick to declare that jettisoning Northern Ireland would be unacceptable



to any British PM. But in truth, it was particularly unacceptable to her because she is reliant on the Democratic Unionist Party for her parliamentary majority. On nearly every issue, the DUP have a price. But not the Union: that is priceless to them. If they sense that Mrs May is putting the Union at risk, there will be no repairing that breach, no matter how much special funding for Northern Ireland is on offer.

May is now faced with an unpalatable choice: a Northern Ireland-specific backstop that would enrage the DUP, alarm the Scottish Conservatives and upset Unionist MPs, or a UK-wide backstop that would allow us to leave only with the EU's permission. This would enrage her party and be the bad deal she has so often warned about.

On Sunday Dominic Raab, the Brexit Secretary, went to Brussels to stress that a deal couldn't be done on these terms. Mrs May cannot proceed with anything that leaves her choosing between stiffing the DUP or stiffing the Brexiteers. But the EU is unsympathetic: Michel Barnier worked hard to back the Brits into this corner. Why let them escape now? The widespread belief in Brussels is that the UK will, in time, swallow whatever deal is offered — however unpalatable — because

*At various points, Mrs May's negotiators have believed that they were the clever ones*

Mrs May has closed off all other options. It sees how the UK has backed down before in these talks. It sees how little serious no-deal planning has been done. It calculates that there is another climbdown coming. But this is a dangerous assumption. It overestimates Mrs May's room for manoeuvre. Tellingly, when she met the cabinet this week, no one wanted to accept what the EU was offering.

What happens next? Well, the best option in the current circumstances is an all-UK backstop that would come with an exit mechanism. The House of Commons would almost certainly prefer this kind of deal to no deal.

Another option is being whispered about in private by cabinet ministers: a mitigated 'no deal'. The UK would pay the EU money in exchange for a series of mini agreements that would ensure that the planes could keep flying, that customs checks were kept as manageable as possible, and the EU and the UK could trade together in the way that advanced economies do when they don't have a trade agreement. It would be expensive. I understand that at cabinet this week Philip Hammond explicitly argued that the UK should pay the EU almost all of the £39 billion, even if it leaves without a deal, to facilitate these kinds of arrangements. An acrimonious no deal is still an option, with Mrs May reneging on whatever she promised last December — with significant disruption. Ironically, this would hit Ireland as hard, if not harder, than the United Kingdom.

## The Quiet Life

You're not ready for the seasons  
to go out of fashion — reliant as ever  
on the shutting of doors  
against September chill,  
on streets emptied of tourists,  
schoolchildren and the usefully employed.

Not ready to let go what might be  
the last of the quiet life, before all  
the hiding-places have been exposed  
and the mind-reading technologies kick in  
and the innocence of solitude  
and thought itself, is no more.

Here's to seeping birdsong, in fields  
of marshy calm; of wondering which  
is rain-cloud, which the lateness of afternoon,  
as your diligent neighbour wheels  
a bicycle and her day  
through the gates and home.

— Ian Harrow

There has been a subtle shift in recent days within the cabinet. Ministers who used to say Britain could not possibly leave without a deal are now starting to say they could not possibly give in to this pressure from Brussels. One cabinet member — a Brexit swing-voter — now believes Mrs May should start to tell voters how tough no deal will be but that the EU may well have left us with no respectable alternative. The threat of cabinet resignations has also receded (for the time being). Nothing is being agreed with the EU, so there is nothing to walk out over.

But no deal still poses a host of problems. First, the lack of preparation — which is, amazingly, deliberate. Mr Hammond was reluctant to fund no-deal planning, worrying that if he gave his colleagues a plan for how to deal with no deal, they'd take it. Serious planning only started this summer. It would be a special kind of incompetence to end up in a no-deal scenario, while not having properly

prepared for it. Public anger at EU intransigence would soon be replaced with irritation at the bungling British government.

This is assuming that no deal is allowed to proceed. The reason that so many Remain-leaning MPs put up with John Bercow staying as Speaker — despite the culture of bullying he has presided over — is because they think he'll help them block a no-deal Brexit.

A second referendum is still a possibility. Voters would be asked to choose between a no-deal Brexit, or abandoning the whole idea of Brexit. With the Tory party split on what to do, handing this choice over to the electorate might become the easiest thing to do. The EU would certainly move the March deadline, if it thought the Brits would come crawling back. Or there could be a reasonable deal. But that would require both sides to realise what the other can and cannot accept. The EU cannot expect the UK to, essentially, cede a part of its territory. Nor can the UK expect to keep so many benefits of EU membership, having decided to leave.

The issue of the Irish border has made both the UK and the EU forget these truths. But if no deal is agreed, the outcome would be precisely what both sides say they do not want: a hard border in Ireland.



*'How many shopping days are there till Brexit?'*

### BREXIT: DEAL OR NO DEAL?

*Spectator subscribers are invited to join James Forsyth, David Davis, Ken Clarke and Fraser Nelson on 29 October to debate what happens next: tickets available at [spectator.co.uk/nodeal](http://spectator.co.uk/nodeal).*



## ANCIENT AND MODERN

### Death and the Romans



World Mental

Health day raised again the issue of suicide, still regarded as happening only among those 'whose balance of mind is disturbed'. Not necessarily, Romans would have argued.

For Romans the manner of one's death was as important as that of one's life. As Seneca said, 'Like a story, the important thing about life is how it is played out. It does not matter where you stop. Stop wherever you want to, but just attach a good ending.' On his deathbed the emperor Augustus invited those gathered round him to applaud him for acting well his part in life's comedy.

The key was to face death like a man, or a woman. Lucretia won everlasting fame when she committed suicide after Sextus Tarquinius raped her. Arria showed her condemned, but hesitant, husband how to die, saying 'Look, it doesn't hurt,' as she stabbed herself. Cato the Younger, bitter enemy of Julius Caesar, killed himself rather than allow Caesar to 'forgive' him. Seneca praised three gladiators who, rather than killing others, killed themselves, one by suffocating himself with the sponge with which Romans wiped their bottoms ('that really was a way to tell death to get stuffed'). Seneca suggested one should take action before physical incapacity set in so that one would not die 'lying there, inert and helpless'.

Death brought as much anguish to the living as it does to us, but for Romans there was no modern notion that death and ageing were disastrous aberrations of nature. Typical epitaphs suggested the dead were very relaxed about it all: 'We are all going the same way'; 'Live for the day, because there is nothing else'. One, celebrating freedom from arthritis, starvation and debt, exclaimed 'In fact, my lodgings are permanent, and free!'; another imperiously dismissed the whole phenomenon — *non fui, fui, non sum, non curo* ('Wasn't, was, am not, don't care'). Take that, Grim Reaper.

*Atlantic publishes Peter Jones's Memento Mori: What the Romans can Tell Us about Old Age and Death on 1 November.*

— Peter Jones

# Grosse negligence

Why are French kids thin and British ones fat?

GAVIN MORTIMER

A decade ago a book called *French Women Don't Get Fat* took the Anglophone world by storm. It was a bestseller in Britain and America because, as the blurb explained, the French author 'unlocks the simple secrets' of why her people aren't fat. So here is my sequel: *Why French Kids Don't Get Fat*.

Admittedly, there are a few who look like they know their way to the boulangerie, but in general most are slim, healthy and fit. The stats back me up. Last year, the French ministry of health reported that obesity levels among nine- and ten-year-olds had fallen to just 3.6 per cent. In Britain, an official report last year said 'nearly a third of children aged two to 15 are overweight or obese'. This summer, Public Health England said obesity levels at age 10 and 11 were at a record high. The *British Journal of Family Medicine* warned that if these children don't slim down, their adult years will be blighted by diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

How can there be such a contrast between two countries separated by 20 miles of water? Please, not the old nonsense about the 'Mediterranean diet'. There's nothing Mediterranean about Paris in winter. It's just like Britain: cold, grey and miserable.

My 13-year-old daughter goes to school in Paris and after all the years I've spent waiting for her at the gates I can count on one hand the number of obese kids I've seen waddle out. And it's not just the middle classes. Her mother teaches in a state school in Seine-Saint-Denis, one of the most deprived regions in France. Her pupils are diverse in colour and creed, but none is obese. Their parents take pride in their appearance because they see it as an extension of their education.

It helps that parents have the full support of the authorities. Vending machines are banned in French schools and, as of last month, so are phones. Recreation is about running, jumping and letting off steam, not gaming and texting. Schools don't permit packed lunches except in cases of severe allergies. Pupils eat in the cafeteria and get a well-balanced diet with fresh, nutritious ingredients. My daughter's school's website has a 'menu' tab and last week she could choose between pâté or green salad with Gruyère for a starter, fish or veal with veg-

etables for the main course, and Mimolette cheese or natural yoghurt for dessert. Water is the only drink available. There may also be croissants and brioche for breakfast, a crêpe or cake for *goûter* (tea). Crème brûlées, tartes Tatin and eclairs, too. But French children do not snack on crisps, chocolate and fizzy drinks outside of meal times.

I feel sorry for British children. Supermarkets and corner-shop shelves groan with confections and sugary drinks. Shop assistants ask customers if they'd like to add a supersize chocolate bar to their basket. For years the NHS has been alerting us to the dangers of obesity, as they did about smok-

*Vending machines are banned in French schools and, as of last month, so are phones*

ing. We heeded those warnings and smoking rates are at a record low (only 7 per cent of 15-year-olds now smoke against 20 per cent in 2006). But, as if to compensate, we stuff our faces. And far from condemning the obese for the damage they do to themselves, we cosset them and celebrate fat as 'fabulous'.

The French are not shy about this. 'Fat-shaming', or *grossophobie*, is commonplace, a point made last year in a book by a massive madame called Gabrielle Deydier, who moaned about the discrimination she faced. The *Observer* claimed the book 'ignited her native France'. It did no such thing. If you are grossly overweight in France, you are regarded as weak, lazy and undisciplined.

The author of *French Women Don't Get Fat*, Mireille Guiliano, did fatten up during her time as an exchange student in America, and was told by her father that she looked like a sack of potatoes. So she slimmed down and wrote about it. The French couldn't understand all the fuss about 'unlocking of secrets' that so astonished the Anglo-Saxons. What she wrote was, to them, common sense. Like keeping an eye on what your children eat.

The reason for the supersize difference in weight between British and French children is simple: the French are better parents. They are stricter and more mature. They don't see their children as their friends; they are their offspring, to be educated, disciplined and controlled. The French aren't afraid to say *non*.



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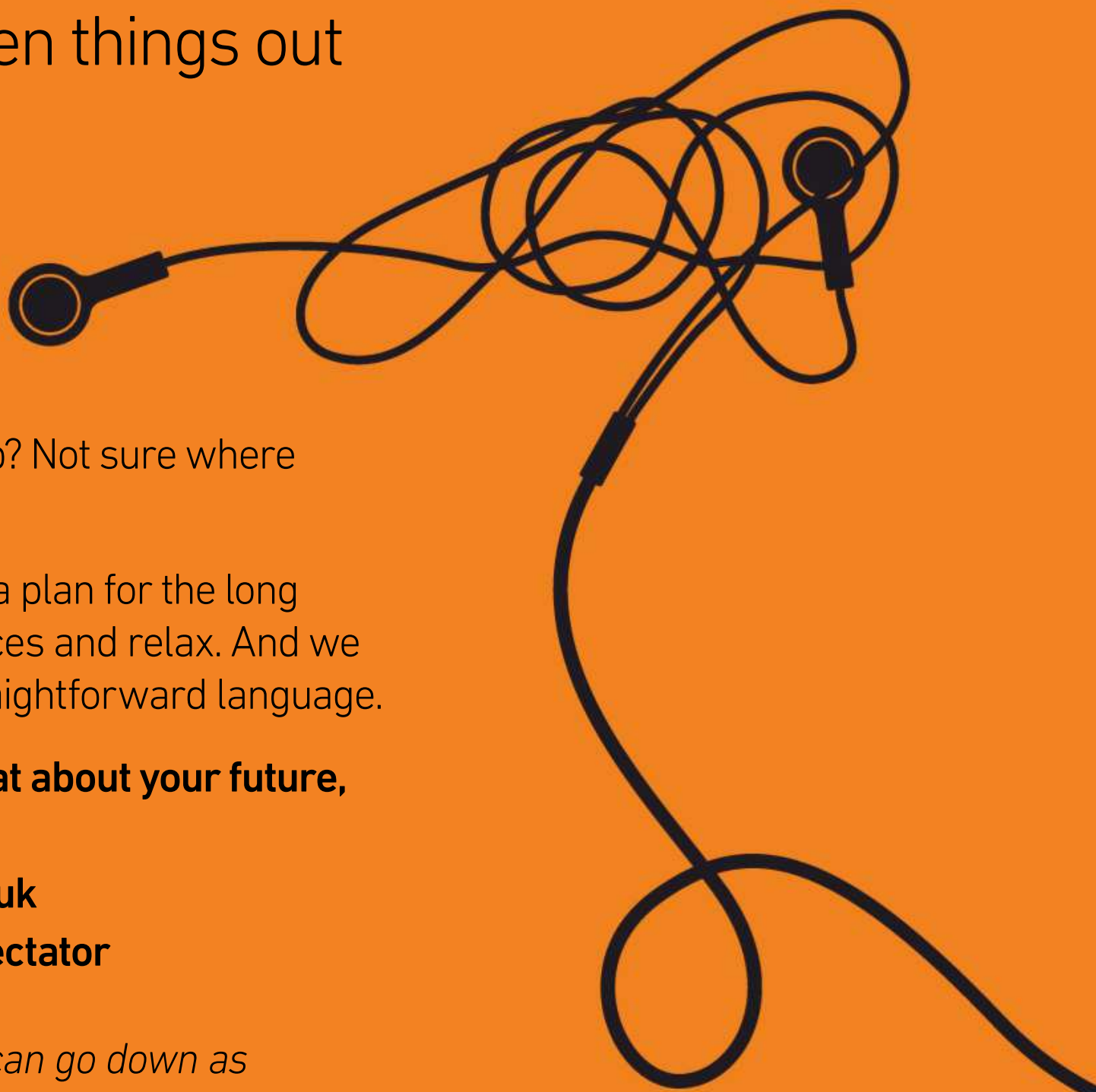
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ROD LIDDLE

# Good news – now everyone can be a victim



We are terribly remiss in our coverage of women's sport in *The Spectator*, so I thought I would try to put this right a little by drawing your attention to last week's 2018 Masters Track Cycling World Championship – in particular the sprint category for 35- to 44-year-old women. The gold medal was won, in Herculean style, by the Canadian Rachel McKinnon.

Her appearance on the podium provoked some discussion. It wasn't simply that Rachel was quite obviously a man, but that she hadn't even the grace to disguise herself very much. Usually when men transition, they put a bit of effort into it – maybe some lippy, a pair of staple-on breasts etc. It's not usually very convincing but hell, at least they tried. Not Rach. She just looked like a large bloke in spectacles. If you rummaged around in her shorts, I wonder what you would discover – possibly the usual frank'n'beans, so to speak. Rach tells people she identifies as a woman, which allowed her to enter into the race (and of course win it, much to the very great chagrin of the bronze medallist Jennifer Wagner, who suggested it 'wasn't fair').

Rachel McKinnon also identifies as a 'doctor', having completed a PhD in Specious Twattery at some dimbo college in Canada. His – sorry, Rach, I'm not going along with the charade any further – Twitter page also lists several other things he identifies as: 'Public Intellectual, Trans Woman, Queer Chick, Strident Feminist, Athlete, Vegan'. Yes, of course, vegan. I think we'd get along terribly well. He was about 29 when he decided to tell people he was a lady and has subsequently decided that he is also a lesbian, which seems to me to be having your cake and eating it. McKinnon accepts that men have certain advantages over women when it comes to many, if not most, sports, but suggests that tall people or powerfully built people also have advantages over those who are short or feeble and so the issue of gender doesn't matter one bit, really.

It is an absurdity of course. And yet this narcissistic idiot's fragile sensibilities are totally indulged by the authorities, infuriating his female competitors and making a mockery of the sport. How did we get to this stage,

where a shrill but microscopically tiny percentage of the population get to have things their way, to the detriment of everybody else?

The gap between male and female ability at sport is immense (and not noticeably narrowing): to take an extreme example, both the Australian and USA women's football teams – among the best in the world – have been beaten by sides composed of 15-year-old boys. An average pub team would hammer the England women's team. Unless, of course, the England women's team was comprised of Raheem Sterling, Harry Kane, Jordan Pickford et al, who had suddenly decided to identify as women for the afternoon.

*All crimes will be hate crimes, to the point where the term itself becomes utterly redundant*

The authorities now try to police the issue by focusing on testosterone – but that is a red herring, and does not account for those other advantages enjoyed by men such as height, weight, spatial awareness, speed, musculature, and not being impeded by a pair of mammary glands bouncing up and down. There is only one meaningful test: what chromosomes do you have? Everything else simply evades the issue and does a huge disservice to the women who have trained long and hard for their sports only to find themselves outgunned by a bearded person who has decided to acquire the soubriquet Loretta.

Simply to say this, of course, is to be committing a hate crime. And yet it is also



*'Things have changed since I was a lad.'*

incontestably true. It worries me that many things you can say these days are both true and a hate crime. It speaks to me of a society which is trying desperately hard to distance itself from the most pernicious and inconvenient of things – reality.

Meanwhile, the government is thinking of expanding the term 'hate crime' until it covers absolutely everybody in society, even straight white men. In other words, all crimes will be hate crimes, to the point where the term itself becomes utterly redundant, even if it wasn't already.

In one sense this is fine – it means that people will no longer be treated as if they had 'protected characteristics', because it will be against the law even to hate people because they don't have 'protected characteristics'. That is, all characteristics, or a complete lack of them, will be protected. But it is also a further expansion of the lucrative anti-hate industry, which is doing the same as all other pressure groups and attempting, in the end, to encompass the entire world in its glorious victimhood.

You might remember that when the disability charities started out they were fighting for rights for a tiny proportion of the population who were both discriminated against and, of course, handicapped. They even used that word. But eventually, in pursuit of more money and having seen their early goals attained, and through the immense hubris which attends to people who run campaigning bodies, we were told that one in five of us is disabled, and then one in three. And disability was no longer about not having any legs, or being blind, but having a bit of a bad back. Just as the LGBTQI lobbyists – who once stuck up for a persecuted tiny minority – will tell you these days that one in three of us are gay or bi or, hell, something which Jesus Christ didn't like very much.

In other words, we can all be victims of something. But if we really are all victims, then it seems to me that there are no victims at all. It is all just life, with its tiresome vicissitudes, its hurtful impositions, its utter unfairness. Someone tell Rachel McKinnon.

**SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE**

*The argument continues online.*



# Fact cats

The inside story of Bellingcat and the Skripal scoop

OWEN MATTHEWS

**B**ellingcat is an independent group of exceptionally gifted Leicester-based internet researchers who use information gleaned from open sources to dig up facts that no other team of journalists has been able to discover.

Or, Bellingcat is a sophisticated front used by western intelligence agencies to disseminate stories that would be considered tainted if they came from an official source.

Which is it? The answer matters, not just because Bellingcat's investigators — a tiny outfit with just 11 staffers and around 60 volunteers around the world — have apparently identified Sergei Skripal's would-be assassins, pinned the blame for chemical weapons attacks in Syria squarely on the Assad regime and the responsibility for the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17 on the Russian army. It matters because Bellingcat's methods have transformed the way that news — and intelligence — is gathered.

Bellingcat's pioneering technique involves cross-referencing social media posts, tweets, news photographs, publicly available databases, Google Street View and maps into a detailed mosaic of apparently irrefutable data. Their information has been judged watertight enough to be used by the official commission investigating the downing of MH-17 and has been cited in the United Nations as proof of Syrian war crimes.

And if Bellingcat truly is a group of dedicated nerds armed with nothing more than an internet connection and a talent for creative Googling, they've proved not only more effective than other journalists but they have quite possibly outdone the West's intelligence agencies too.

'I'd say they're way ahead of us on many things,' admits a senior British security official. Bellingcat's methods are 'way too innovative for the great majority of lemmings in government,' says one former CIA officer. Today's spooks live in constant fear of enquiries over possible failures. 'MI5 would just hold them back, almost certainly' if researchers strayed into illegality, says the source. Bellingcat's willingness to buy information on the black market or scoop it up



from private sites makes them better than governments at gleaning information from open sources in 'almost all' cases, he says.

Of course, if you believe that Bellingcat is an MI6 or CIA front, then the West's traditional spooks would have every interest in standing up the upstarts' credibility. 'Bellingcat looks to me very much like the information warfare department of MI6,' says former Russian member of parliament Sergei Markov. 'Very professional people are working on this falsification... they are liars and work

*'I'd say they're way ahead of us on many things,' admits a senior British security official*

for British intelligence.' For Charles Bausman, editor-in-chief of the pro-Kremlin *Russia Insider* alternative news website, the story that Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins 'is just a remarkable young man doing God's work sells well to a large, dumbed-down MSM [mainstream media] market... But the alt-media universe holds him up as a classic example of subversion and fake news.'

Bellingcat's latest scoop — unmasking the identity of the Skripal hitmen — has also been their most controversial. In a departure from their earlier adherence to only open-source material, the group admitted using confidential human sources for some of their information. To many, that rang alarm bells. Julian Assange's Wikileaks was once fêted by western media for its willing-

ness to release suppressed information — for instance, footage of US choppers shooting up unarmed civilians in Iraq — but later turned into a channel for political dirt stolen by Kremlin-sponsored Russian hackers. Was Bellingcat also allowing itself to be manipulated by the spooks in the same way? 'Might not the group's good name be being used to get information into the public domain that officials do not want to vouch for?' asked Mary Dejevsky in the *Independent*. 'And, if so, would this be to inform, or to mislead?'

**B**ut the inside story of Bellingcat's Skripal scoop, reported here for the first time, paints a very different picture — not of a group using unsourced leaks, but rather of researchers willing to break the law and use Russia's thriving commercial black market in personal information to obtain confidential data from the state.

For their investigation into the identity of the Skripal suspects, Bellingcat teamed up with a group of investigative journalists in Russia who publish the *Insider* — a site that regularly investigates corruption and came to prominence in 2014 when it was able to independently corroborate the accuracy of much of a trove of stolen Russian government emails leaked by a Russian hacktivist group. The *Insider*'s founder, Roman Dobrokhotov, was a prominent opposition activist before going into journalism.

Initially, Bellingcat wasn't interested in the Skripal story — until the suspects appeared on the Kremlin-controlled RT channel with their now-infamous cock-and-bull story about wanting to visit the '123-metre-tall spire' of Salisbury Cathedral. The ham-fisted official denial confirmed to Bellingcat that the Russian state was covering up something juicy. 'If it hadn't been for the RT interview, we probably wouldn't have looked so closely,' says Higgins.

The first assumption checked by Bellingcat's team was whether any of the personal details in either passport used by 'Alexander Petrov' or 'Ruslan Boshirov' were actually true. To do that they needed the passport data of millions of Russian citizens — which



turned out to be the easy part. 'In Russia there are a lot of people who have access to this kind of data,' says Aric Toler, a Bellingcat staffer. Bellingcat's researchers downloaded a 650-gigabyte file of passport data for free from a Russian torrent site (where it is still available today), and cross-referenced it with other publicly available databases. 'Ruslan Boshirov' came up with no matches. But one man — Alexander Yevgenyevich Mishkin, a military doctor — shared a birthday and first and patronymic names with the fictional Alexander Yevgenyevich Petrov.

Then came the legally dubious part. Russia has a thriving black market in personal information. 'These services are very cheap, which shows that there is low risk and high demand,' says Roman Dobrokhov. A search on Yandex, the Russian equivalent of Google, does indeed turn up dozens of such agencies offering, more or less coyly, to obtain passports, driving licences, business registration documents and marriage certificates for a fee of around 100 euros. Bellingcat commissioned several searches from such agencies. One turned up the original passport application for Petrov and Boshirov's nearly consecutive fake passports, issued by an office dealing exclusively in officials' passports and stamped 'Do Not Give Out Information'. They also obtained Mishkin's real passport and driving licence.

The agency paid to leak information was one of Bellingcat's controversially confidential sources — and Dobrokhov says that they protected the agencies' identity from journalistic principle, not to protect a hidden leaker. 'If you are sent a document, that is the least reliable possible source,' he says. 'It means someone wants to prove something... If you find the documents yourself, that's very different. In this case... we ordered the copy of [Mishkin's] passport from a person who knew nothing about our investigation.'

Is it possible that Bellingcat were being played? Dobrokhov went on to order legal copies of publicly available information on Mishkin, such as his apartment and car registration (his vehicle turned out to be registered at the headquarters of Russian Military Intelligence at Moscow's Khorošovskoye Shosse, 76). He also sent a reporter to his home village in the Russian Arctic to question friends and family members. 'Several sources correspond to each other,' says Dobrokhov. 'Each single stage can be falsified — but all together they can't.'

The search for 'Boshirov' was more challenging. Since cross-referencing Boshirov's fake passport with real information hadn't yielded any results, Bellingcat trawled the social media accounts of military men of similar age who had attended Russian military intelligence academies in the early 2000s. The organising principle of the Russian social media site Odnoklassniki (literally 'Classmates') helped — the site works

on the principle of uniting people with old school and university contemporaries. A group photograph of the Far Eastern Military Command Academy yielded an image of a man who resembled 'Boshirov' — one Anatoliy Chepiga, whose later photographs and personnel records had been carefully and systematically expunged from social networks and official photographs, immediately arousing suspicion.

Bellingcat also used a Swedish-designed app widely utilised in Russia called Truecaller, designed to crowd-source telephone numbers by scraping the telephone address books of all its users — to identify people who could be connected to Chepiga. Using that data, Bellingcat approached some of Chepiga's old comrades to verify the identity of the man in the photograph — confidential sources again, but covered by journalistic source-protection rules rather than to conceal a targeted leak, insists Toler. And Bellingcat also obtained a copy of Chepiga's passport through the same agency route and found a clear match in the photographs. A flood of open-source information — including car registration data and official records of Chepiga's being honoured as a Hero of Russia by Vladimir Putin — confirmed what the human sources had told them.

*Bellingcat has stumbled on a dangerous truth: it is impossible to keep analogue lies in a digital world*

'We are not being approached with anything at all,' says Toler. 'We don't do that. With human intelligence, we have only done that kind of stuff when there are no other options.' Obtaining passport information from shadowy agencies 'was the nuclear option for us. We did this because [we had] exhausted all other info. This was the only thing left for us. This will not be a habit. Ninety-nine per cent of our work will remain very open source.'

If anything, Bellingcat's buccaneering approach to data mining actually strengthens the case for them being a genuinely independent outfit willing to do things most government agencies would balk at. The use of black-market information 'is more than a little WTF,' says the former CIA source. 'I'd say it proves Bellingcat is non-government (or non-government linked).' But if Bell-

ingcat isn't linked to government, who is it linked to?

The alt-media universe has made much of Higgins's now-lapsed affiliation to the Atlantic Council, a conservative thinktank in Washington DC ('Higgins's real identity as a neocon, Atlantic Council stooge is being brought to light,' says The Duran blog). The frequently anti-Russian tone of Higgins's tweets have also come under attack ('Higgins either vehemently hates, or has been told to hate Russia, and Russia's president Putin... his Twitter timeline can read at times like one man trolling an entire country,' writes sometime RT journalist Graham Phillips, aka The Truth Speaker). And even the entirely mainstream Dejevsky claims that Bellingcat 'has never, so far as I am aware, reached any conclusion that is inconvenient to the UK or US authorities.'

In reality, despite Higgins's personal Twitter stance, plenty of Bellingcat's reporting has attacked the US — and even exonerated Russia. When a mosque in Al-Jinah, a Syrian village located in the western part of the Aleppo governorate, was bombed in March 2017 a Bellingcat investigation linked photographs of bomb fragments taken by a Dutch journalist to stated US air raids on that day to prove that a US AGM-114 Hellfire missile was responsible, not the Russians. And one of Bellingcat's most consistent ongoing projects has been keeping track of airstrikes in Yemen — including on a hospital and a market — by Saudi aircraft using US supplied munitions.

Bellingcat's funding also has every appearance of transparency. Higgins says that some 60 per cent of the funding for his 11 staffers comes from giving training seminars on their investigative techniques to journalists and researchers (sample topic: 'How To Scrape Interactive Geospatial Data'), and the rest from grants from NGOs such as the Google Digital News Initiative, Adessium (a Dutch free speech foundation), the Open Society Foundation and, later this year, the Dutch postcode lottery.

If these guys are for real, the question becomes, why isn't everyone, from spooks to newspapers, doing what they do? Part of the answer, at least in the case of news gathering, is simply time. Some Bellingcat investigations — for instance, a recent report on how social media can act as a gateway to fascist organisations — take dozens of contributors months of work.

The real secret of Bellingcat is that they have stumbled upon a disturbing truth: that it has become impossible to tell analogue lies in a digital world. In an age where almost all personal data is searchable and every event photographed, the most secret information is often hiding in plain sight. All you need to know is where to look for it — even if that means delving into the internet's darkest corners.



*'If there's global warming then how come there's a cold war?'*



# On being sacked

How do I feel? Bruised, but not surprised

LYNN BARBER

It was a shock but not really a surprise. I came back from holiday at the beginning of August to find an item in the *UK Press Gazette* saying that Decca Aitkenhead had just been appointed chief interviewer at the *Sunday Times*, and an email from the *Sunday Times* magazine editor, Eleanor Mills, saying we needed to meet. It was not difficult to put two and two together.

Eleanor suggested we meet at the Flask in Highgate — which was kind because it's near my home — and when I arrived she was already sitting there with a glass of red wine lined up for me. Such unprecedented thoughtfulness made me wonder for a mad moment if she was planning to offer me a rise instead of sacking me, but no. She announced within seconds that she had been 'rethinking contracts' and that mine was for the chop. But, she added, she would pay me till the end of September, which she seemed to think was generous and I thought was bloody mean, given that it was already August and I'd been at the *Sunday Times* for nine years. So then I drank up my wine and went home and read my contract (possibly for the first time) and found that the paper could indeed sack me at a month's notice, and for no stated reason. This was ironic because my contract ran from October to October and I'd habitually spent every September worrying about whether they'd renew it and then going 'Phew!' in October thinking I was safe for another year. But actually I was never safe.

How do I feel? Well, naturally I feel bruised but, as I say, not really surprised. It had been more or less open warfare with Eleanor Mills ever since she arrived at the magazine three years ago (I got on fine with her predecessor, Sarah Baxter). It was hard to deal with an editor who didn't seem to like reading — sending articles to her was like dropping stones down a well. And then there was the showdown over Katie Price, when Eleanor actually wrote a sentence starting 'As a feminist' into my article. I said she'd either got to take it out or change the byline and she took it out, but after that it was only a matter of time.

Because everyone was on holiday when I was sacked, I spent a couple of weeks just

licking my wounds and wondering if I should sign up for pottery classes. But then journo friends started ringing to say they'd heard this rumour, so I put the news on Twitter. This was an entirely good move; I was overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of the response. I said in my tweet that I was looking for freelance work — 'Interviewing a speciality but also up for travel freebies or anything that looks like fun.' I assumed I'd get lots of interview offers, as that was what I was known for, but nary a one. Instead, I was deluged with travel commissions. I didn't even know there were that many travel pages in the world, but apparently the young, having given up hope of ever buying a flat,

*Aged 74, I am sailing the choppy waters of freelance journalism and realise how incredibly adrift I am*

spend all their disposable income on travelling. I immediately accepted a commission from the *Financial Times* to spend a weekend celebrating the champagne harvest in France, which cheered me up no end.

So now, at the age of 74, I am sailing the choppy waters of freelance journalism and realise how incredibly adrift I am. Many of the editors who contacted me asked me my rates. I didn't actually know, because I hadn't been a freelance since 1982 when I joined the staff of the *Sunday Express*, and I moved seamlessly from there to the *Independent on Sunday*, *Vanity Fair*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Observer* and finally the *Sunday Times*, under contract all the way. I remember someone in the 1990s asking what my rates were and I said £1 a word, but



*'I don't care what the sales are so long as they're healthy.'*

I only said it because Martin Amis did and it sounded good. (Does anyone get £1 a word nowadays? I know A.A. Gill did, and possibly Jeremy Clarkson, but it must be rare.) I consulted a very successful freelance friend, Tanya Gold, who said I should ask for 70p a word and settle for 60p. But in the first scary weeks I settled for almost anything, as I just wanted to see if I could still get any work at all. And there are some publications — hello *Spectator*! — who can get away with paying peanuts because they know writers want to come to their parties.

But discussing fees with editors was comparatively straightforward. What was really baffling was the number of people who rang and asked me to 'join their platform' or their website or their brand. They invariably mentioned the *Huffington Post*, but when I asked what they paid, they talked about 'participation', which seemed to mean nothing at all. Some of them wanted me to meet them for breakfast (out of the question) but several offered lunch and I'm always up for a good lunch. One charming man took me for lunch at Robin Birley's private club 5 Hertford Street, which I was pleased to visit (lovely decor, mediocre food), but even after two hours I still didn't understand what he wanted me to do, or what (if anything) he paid.

As a journalist, I am a dinosaur. I like reading words on paper. I like writing long interviews when everyone nowadays seems to want short. I hate dealing with PRs. I don't follow any celebs on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram, because I don't know who half of them are. One of the last interviews Eleanor asked me to do at the *Sunday Times* was with Nick Grimshaw, the Radio 1 DJ. I'd interviewed him before and knew he was a likable bloke, but I was rather baffled as to why *Sunday Times* readers were supposed to be interested in him. I was told the answer was 'clicks'. Apparently he has a large Instagram and Twitter following among the under-thirties and the idea was that they would read the article and retweet it and the *Sunday Times* would accumulate more clicks. I've no idea whether this worked and frankly I don't care. I can't write for clicks. I need to know who I am writing for and why. But I mean to go on writing.



JAMES DELINGPOLE

# Hell hath no fury like an irate teenage girl



Something troubling is happening to our girls. I noticed it again most recently at this year's Battle of Ideas — the annual festival of free speech staged at London's Barbican by Claire Fox. It's a wonderful event, where ex-revolutionary communists like Claire rub shoulders with Thatcherite radicals like me and we're reminded how much we have in common. I feel right at home among the bright, engaged, friendly crowds and when I speak I generally get a warm reception.

But there are always exceptions, aren't there? On this occasion the trouble came from a bloc of teenage girls in the audience for my panel. Judging by their accents and dress and demeanour I'd say they probably came from one of the more selective London day schools. One after another they stood up to denounce me, just like my own teenage female does most of the time when she's at home and I venture an opinion. Except Girl is away boarding at the moment, so I did rather feel: 'What did I do to deserve this busman's holiday?'

My panel's topic was gun control in the US. More specifically, it was about how since the Parkland, Florida school shooting, the debate appears to have been hijacked by photogenic teen survivors of the atrocity with their #neveragain campaign, their endless appearances on CNN and their nationwide protests featuring bussed-in parties of winsome, placard-wielding kiddies warning that next time it could be them.

Had I really wanted to wind my audience up I could have said — as I more or less believe — that every man, woman and child should be obliged to have a gun from the age of eight onwards. But because I was in an emollient mood, I decided instead to focus on a slightly more nuanced point about the way that, increasingly, kids like the slightly spooky Parkland survivor David Hogg are being used to advance political causes. My view is that it's one of the more disturbing trends of our age.

Partly, what I object to is that the mere state of youth is being used as a substitute for argument: 'Look at these fresh young

faces! See their innocence and promise! They want guns banned/CO<sub>2</sub> emissions radically reduced/animal cruelty ended/Britain to remain part of the European Union. What kind of monster would you have to be to deny our most precious commodity the brighter future they crave?'

Also, it's yet another manifestation of the ugly identity politics which is causing such needless division in our culture. It has set women against men, ethnic minorities against white people, trans activists against the 'cisgendered', and — as was very much evident in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, where older people were repeatedly

*It's as if young women these days have been encouraged to believe that righteous anger is enough*

urged to hurry up and die for having voted the wrong way — the young against the old.

And I really don't want to live in a world where I have to go round hating kids just because they've been trained up, like the Red Guard or the Young Pioneers, to strut round making themselves objectionable with half-baked, second-hand political opinions. Not — as I was at pains to stress — that I blame the kids themselves for this trend. I blame the adults, mostly on the left, who are taking advantage of those characteristics that make the young so ripe for exploita-

tion: their naivety, their impulsiveness, their passion, their idealism, their vulnerability to peer pressure, their lack of restraint, the fact that by definition they are unwise because they have not yet had the experience to form a mature, considered view.

This was the point where — according to an audience member who was sitting among them — the girls' ears started to blow steam. And when the time for questions came, they stood up, one after another, to tell me how very, very cross they felt, how totally entitled to their brilliant opinions they were and what an awful, stupid old man I was.

No doubt I'll be accused of more patronising sexism by some of the girls when, inevitably, their parents draw their attention to this column. But I'm afraid that what I say is true: nothing that any of the girls said, not one thing, presented anything by way of a lucid, viable counter to my argument. It was pure 'muh feelings' emotionalism, laced with burning entitlement and more than a hint of cry-bullying passive aggression.

I've noticed this a lot. On school and university visits, in panel discussions, on social media, the kind of normal discourse that previous generations took for granted has been twisted to the point of unhingement by girls alternately sobbing like victims and then shrieking at you and trying to get you banned or — in their dreams — locked up. No one seems to have told them that if you're going to chip in and you can't make an intelligent point, then at least make a funny one. It's as if young women these days have been encouraged to believe that righteous fury is enough: merely being angry is a moral act which relieves them of any obligation to truth, wit, logic, justice or indeed feminine grace, subtlety and charm.

Of course, girls have always had it in them, this tendency. But it's only in the last few years that this consuming rage has been weaponised in the name of 'empowerment'. Except that it's not empowering. Far from showing women at their best, it often brings out their worst. Truly, I say, as the adoring father of a teenage daughter, our girls deserve better than this.





**BAROMETER**Twists and turns

Jeremy Hunt, taking a group of EU foreign ministers around the maze at Chevening House in Kent, likened it to Brexit. It is not surprising if he finds the maze at Chevening difficult, because it was deliberately designed by the 2nd Earl of Stanhope, a mathematician, to be a greater challenge than garden mazes which preceded it. Most at the time had a simple rule: if you kept your hand on one hedge you would eventually reach the centre. This was known as a 'simply connected' maze. Chevening, however, was one of the first 'multiply connected' mazes, which don't have a simple rule to find the centre.

Procreating royals

The Duchess of Sussex is expecting a baby 'next spring'. How long does it take a royal couple to produce a child after the wedding?

Prince Charles and Diana, Princess of Wales.....	11 months
Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex.....	10-12 months?
Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson.....	2 years 1 month
Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge.....	2 years 3 months
Princess Royal and Captain Mark Phillips.....	4 years 0 months
Prince Edward and the Countess of Wessex.....	4 years 5 months

Carbon data

How is the UK getting on with reducing its carbon emissions? There are two ways to measure a country's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions — 'territorial' basis, which includes only those emissions within the country itself, and 'consumption' basis, which includes emissions spewed out around the globe in the cause of manufacturing goods and providing services for that country's people.

MEASUREMENTS IN METRIC TONS CO<sub>2</sub>

	<i>Territorial Basis</i>	<i>Consumption basis</i>
1995.....	<b>560</b>	<b>654</b>
2005.....	<b>564</b>	<b>727</b>
2015.....	<b>416</b>	<b>596</b>

So territorial emissions have fallen by 25% in 25 years but consumption emissions by only 9%. *Source: globalatlas.com*

Falling FTSE

The FTSE100 fell by more than 10%, which is generally regarded as a 'correction'. How does that compare with other ones recently?

Dec 1999–March 2003.....	<b>-49.6%</b>
Oct 2007–March 2009.....	<b>-47.5%</b>
April 2010–June 2010.....	<b>-16.1%</b>
Feb 2011–Sept 2011.....	<b>-16.7%</b>
March 2012–May 2012.....	<b>-11.8%</b>
April 2015–Feb 2016.....	<b>-21.9%</b>

# Virtuous vice

The rise of ethical decadence

COSMO LANDESMAN

It hasn't always been easy being a progressive-minded man who prides himself on his sensitivity to issues of race, gender, feminism and sexual exploitation — and still gets to walk on the wild side. Political principles tend to get in the way of politically incorrect passions. You like to watch porn, but as a good feminist man you know that porn exploits women. You like to take cocaine, but it exploits poor Latin American farmers and enriches corrupt drug cartels. And maybe you have a secret passion for prostitutes, but you hate the idea that you're paying for sex with some underage Albanian who's been trafficked for your gratification. No porn. No drugs. No sex. What's a poor would-be decadent to do? Take up golf? Knitting? Stamp collecting?

Nowadays, though, you can indulge your more dissolute pleasures and still occupy the moral high ground. Welcome to the era of ethical decadence, where yesterday's shameful vices are repackaged and promoted as today's politically correct virtues. A good example of ethical decadence is the growing market for what is called vegan bondage. Vegan devotees of S&M can now purchase a wide range of 'cruelty free' and 'ecologically aware' equipment: whips, handcuffs, neck chokers, gags and harnesses — and they're

all made without leather. After all, there's nothing worse than having to stop mid-flogging to ask, 'Is this whip suitable for vegans?'

The British sex industry is also getting a moral makeover, to allow it to cater to a new type of politically aware consumer who wants sex to be not only erotic but also ethical. Belinda Brooks-Gordon of Birkbeck, University of London, and the author of *The Price of Sex: Prostitution, Policy and Society*

*No porn. No sex. No drugs.  
What's a poor would-be decadent  
to do — take up knitting?*

argues that there is a big demand for this. Consumers, she believes, would prefer to know that the people appearing in porn films, engaged in live sex acts or hired through an escort agency are there by consent, earn decent money and have access to health and welfare services. I'm sure she's right, because that way you can totally exploit women and do it with a clear conscience.

These ethical concerns help to explain why the number of lap-dancing clubs, sex shops and sex cinemas in the UK has fallen by a third over the past five years. Who needs the embarrassment of going into an old-fashioned sex shop full of sleazy, sweaty



men when — thanks to the internet — you can do everything from the privacy of your own home?

Those shops of old failed to move with our enlightened times, and take the sexism out of the sex trade. Instead of embracing gender politics and feminism, they remained male bastions of erotic exploitation. But where we once had dirty-mac wearers scuttling out of Soho sex stores with their brown bags full of sinful pleasures, we now have well-lit, female-friendly sex shops like Harmony on Oxford Street, where the smiling staff are always happy to help.

These days you can sit back and enjoy pornography and still be a sensitive and caring #MeToo Man, thanks to the growing market in 'feminist porn'. No longer are you some sleazy onanist objectifying women. You're actually 'empowering' them by providing support for women of all races, genders, sexual identities and sizes as they get their kit off. There are even celebrated feminist porn directors such as Cheryl Dunye. You may laugh but I will have you know that Ms Dunye's film *Mommy Is Coming* won the Orgasmic Original Concept prize at the 2012 Feminist Porn Awards.

There's another kind of mainstream porn available, one that is far too high-minded ever to admit its pornographic nature. This uses surveys, scientific research, statistical



*'I want you to know I'm seeing someone else.'*

data — often with hardcore visual aids — to unravel the mysteries of female pleasure. It wants all of us to have good, healthy sex so that we can become good, healthy people. Let's call it enlightenment porn.

The website OMGYes is a perfect example. It's like a book club for your vagina. Here women talk 'honestly' and share with each other their favourite sexual techniques. Each topic comes with an explicit how-to video that left even an old degenerate like me blushing. But of course OMGYes would never think of itself as porn. It, too, is all about empowerment. It lets women speak out and break the 'silence' and 'bust the taboos' that repress female sexuality. You're not some sexual narcissist concerned with your own gratification, but a member of a pro-orgasm movement that is setting women free. The ethical,

the educational and the erotic become one. Even drugs are now sold with the imprimatur of moral goodness. When I was a teenage druggie in the 1970s, there was always something morally dubious about the purchase and consumption of drugs like cocaine — and that was a crucial part of their appeal. But these days, we even want our drugs to be fair-trade. Here is one boast from a group of online dealers: 'We are a team of libertarian cocaine dealers. We never buy coke from cartels! We never buy coke from police! We help farmers from Peru, Bolivia and some chemistry students in Brazil, Paraguay and Argen-

*No longer are you some sleazy onanist objectifying women. You're actually 'empowering' them*

tina. We do fair trade!' Of course no one can verify claims like these, but they show that there is a demand.

Personally, I prefer the decadence of the past to the phoney moral posturing of the present. By all means, be a perv. Gorge yourself on guilty pleasures. But please don't dress your indulgences in ethical concerns. That's just too disgusting for words.

**SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST**

*Cosmo Landesman and Renee Denyer on the ethical sex trade.*

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# The steady ship

Happy 60th birthday, Blue Peter

DAMIAN THOMPSON

Every Monday and Thursday afternoon when I was growing up, a drum roll would sound throughout suburban Britain. ‘Damian? *Blue Peter!*’ my mother would call out, in a voice that made it clear that my presence was required in front of the television. *Blue Peter* — 60 years old this week — was top of the very short list of programmes of which my parents approved.

We lived in Woodmansterne Road, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey. You can’t beat that for a *Blue Peter*-ish address. Our house was mock Tudor; my father worked for the Prudential. My younger sister and I, pupils at modest private day schools, slotted perfectly into the middle-middle-class demographic at which the show seemed to be aimed, though its reach was far wider. And we were lucky enough to watch it during the era of Valerie Singleton, Peter Purves and the late John Noakes, whose death from Alzheimer’s last year distressed millions of people. They were, and remain, the holy trinity of *Blue Peter* presenters.

John was the happy-go-lucky daredevil Yorkshireman who climbed Nelson’s column without a safety harness. He was famous for telling his border collie to ‘Get down, Shep’ — but for me Shep was an intruder. I still missed his previous dog, Patch, mongrel offspring of Petra. When Patch and the rest of the litter were born in 1965, the *Daily Express* gave them a double-page spread. Patch’s sudden death in 1971 had to be handled very carefully by the show, so intimately did children identify with *Blue Peter*. The producers couldn’t get away with secretly substituting another dog, as they did when the original puppy Petra died, after just one enchanting performance.

Pete was a handsome smoothie whose hair grew longer and flares wider with every season. This can’t have pleased *Blue Peter*’s prim yet ferocious editor, Bidy Baxter. Previously he’d been William Hartnell’s assistant Steven Taylor in *Doctor Who*. (Weirdly, he is still playing the role of the Doctor, aged 79, in a spin-off podcast series.)

Val was an RAF wing commander’s daughter with a no-nonsense edge to her voice. She spoke BBC English, her accent becoming less cut-glass as the corporation

relaxed its guidelines. In an episode from 1962, she looks like Audrey Hepburn but sounds like the young Queen as she watches a cake-maker decorate a sponge. (‘How lovely!’) Ten years later the vowels are less clipped and she’s wearing an Afghan coat. My sister and I didn’t understand what a ‘swinger’ was, but we could see that Val was looking trendier. God knows how we’d have reacted if we’d known that, as she later revealed, she’d had a secret abortion and a fleeting affair with (married) Peter Purves. The poor woman then had to cope with years of rumours that she was the singer Joan Armatrading’s lesbian partner. Even now, in her eighties, she’s understandably cross that this urban myth won’t die.

*That sticky-backed plastic helped to glue Britain together*

It was Valerie Singleton who set the tone of *Blue Peter*. And that, rather than her later impressive career as a financial and current affairs journalist, makes her one of the most important broadcasters in British history. Why is she not Dame Valerie? The package may have been assembled by Baxter, and the beloved Noakes was the star turn, but Val spoke to children in a friendly yet authoritative manner that reassured parents as well as children.

This may sound like ‘media studies’ hyperbole, but the social impact of *Blue Peter* during the disorientating late 1960s and early 1970s was enormous. Its annual appeals introduced children to charitable giving just as small-scale philanthropy was going out



‘Unless one of them comes up and says hello to you in the street...’

of fashion. The hard left sneered at such ‘middle-class’ enterprises, ignoring the fact that the crowds attending a *Blue Peter* event were just as big on Tyneside as in Surrey.

From time to time the real world intruded: I remember the presenters sitting on bean bags in a studio without a set because someone had gone on strike. But that just demonstrated that Val, John and Pete were there for us when we needed them. The ‘sticky-backed plastic’ they used for DIY toys (did such a product really exist?) and the phrase ‘Here’s one I prepared earlier’ entered the language because we regarded the gigantic studio with its triangular shelving as an extension of our living rooms.

*Blue Peter* was smiled on by the royal family when Val went on safari with Princess Anne, and by the Pope. By a happy coincidence, Paul VI was made a saint in Rome this week. I haven’t seen any reference to the fact that, in January 1973, he met a mantilla-veiled Valerie Singleton in the Vatican and, in shaky English, gave his blessing to the children of *Blue Peter*. (Those were the happy days when popes almost never made off-the-cuff remarks in public. You could probably get Francis to endorse *Love Island* if you caught him at the right moment.)

That sticky-backed plastic helped glue Britain together. After Val left as a full-time presenter in 1972, something was lost — specifically, the authority. Perhaps it was inevitable. Children no longer wanted to be addressed by adults old enough to be their parents. In the following decades, *Blue Peter* struggled painfully to define itself: that’s audible in the grotesque remixes of the hornpipe theme tune it adopted in the 1990s. Richard Bacon was sacked for snorting cocaine, but far more disturbing, to my mind, was the sacking of sweet, obviously gay Michael Sundin, who later died of Aids.

Now, happily, the show has regained some of its old style. The current long-serving presenters, Lindsey Russell and Radzi Chinyanganya, do the ritual funky hand gestures at the beginning of the programme — no more chorus of ‘Hullo!’ — but then get down to conveying information with a passion that takes me back to Woodmansterne Road. Thanks to a recent episode, I now know lots of stuff about diamonds that had me shaking my head in wonderment. Happy birthday, *Blue Peter*. Make sure the BBC looks after you.

One last thing: the elephant in the room. In 1969, Lulu from Chessington Zoo went wild in the studio, defecating and dragging its keeper along the floor. This mishap has become the most famous blooper in 60 years of episodes. The scene in the studio is hilarious and disconcerting. But I bet you didn’t know, because they kept it quiet, that the footage was pre-recorded. Bidy Baxter saw the chaos and let it go out anyway. And John Noakes, that consummate actor, only pretended to step in the poo.



## LETTERS

## Ireland's day of reckoning

Sir: John Waters is more right than he knows when he talks about the Irish attitude to Brexit ('Paddy powerless', 13 October). We Irish and our media have developed a consensus gene across many issues — without exception, all comfortably on the left. There is no significant media outlet in Ireland that would challenge in any way the prevailing orthodoxy here, which is that Brexit is an act of national self-harm. There is a certain smugness too, which is getting in the way of the reality, which is that we of all people should want Brexit to work to the benefit of both the EU and the UK. Our day of reckoning is coming. We will see how Europhile we are when Emmanuel Macron gets his way and corporate tax rates across the EU are harmonised.

*Tommy MacDonnell*  
Dublin, Ireland

## Racing certainty

Sir: Robin Oakley's description of the likely difficulties in replicating, post-Brexit, the Tripartite Agreement between the UK, Ireland and France (The turf, 13 October) fails to make an obvious point.

It is patently absurd that an arrangement between three sovereign states, each with more or less identical interests, should be subject to the agreement of 25 others. The blame for any disruption resulting from a failure to continue the Agreement will lie not with those who are trying to implement Brexit, but with those who allowed, or required, the TPA to become part of EU law in the first place.

No doubt in the short term there will be annoyance and perhaps serious disruption, in this and many other areas. But in the long run we will all benefit from being free from this narrow-minded tyranny.

*Michael O'Shea*  
London N16

## The Archbishop's witness

Sir: Your correspondent Jane Moth throws doubt on the willingness or ability of the Archbishop of Canterbury to impart the joy of the Gospel (Letters, 13 October). At the launch of an evangelising initiative, I recall him telling us that his mantra before every media interview is 'How can I get the love of Jesus into this?' Whether that portion of the interview survives the editing process is, of course, beyond his control.

I spend some of my time at General Synod as a thorn in Archbishop Justin's side on the issue of safeguarding, arguing

that we need to relieve him of that burden and to outsource responsibility to independent specialists. Part of my reason for doing so is entirely sympathetic. Having heard the warmth and integrity of his witness, we need to liberate him and his fellow bishops to concentrate on those areas where their talents and enthusiasms undoubtedly lie.

*Martin Sewell, General Synod*  
Gravesend, Kent

## Meat not wheat

Sir: Keith O'Neill's proclamation from the moral high ground that his vegan diet 'tortures' no animals (Letters, 13 October) suggests he should spend some time on a mixed farm like mine, where I grow livestock and arable crops. I could show him a thing or two about having to kill animals — but unfortunately for the vegans, the carnage is in the production of wheat, not meat. Somehow, the multitude of animals that have to die to ensure bread production don't feature on the vegan care radar, possibly because they're not cuddly.

*Charlie Flindt*  
Hinton Ampner, Hampshire

## Light reading

Sir: Peter Osborne (Notebook, October 13) writes that for 'relaxation' on his recent visit to Syria he read Simon Heffer's *The Age of Decadence*, which weighs in at 900 pages. What does he turn to when he fancies something more serious?

*Michael Henderson*  
London W13

## Party bores

Sir: I fully empathised with Peter Osborne's wish to avoid the Labour party conference and the media's predictable attacks on Jeremy Corbyn. But his solution — to escape to Syria — seemed rather extreme.

*Andrew Williams*  
Wirral, Cheshire

## Poor penguins

Sir: I rather take exception, in his review of the Living With Buildings exhibition, to Stephen Bayley's reference to traditionalist 'rearguard architects' such as myself as being like Japanese soldiers still fighting the second world war in the jungle, because we favour things like classical orders ('Houses of ill repute', 13 October).

This is to imply that the battle for modernism has been roundly won, but I do not think it has, totally. I would note that, had such a puritan, proscriptive attitude prevailed in the 15th century, we would have been denied the Italian Renaissance. It has to be acknowledged that in the 1930s the brave, new, modernist agenda had to be inflicted mostly on the unempowered — predominantly the poor, but also the penguins — who were not in any position to resist the cool, white, unmodelled, cubist buildings which were patronisingly bestowed upon them. Neither has the style endeared itself much since to the British public at large. Those buildings look fine if maintained and bathed in the hot sun of the Côte d'Azur. They look less fine in a wet Finsbury.

*John Bennett RIBA*  
Southwold, Suffolk

## Norman's wisdom

Sir: Grizelda's cartoon (13 October) jests that a castaway on *Desert Island Discs* can't take the sound of their own voice as one of the tracks. Not so. That arch jester Sir Norman Wisdom chose five of his own recordings, including the one he saved from the waves, when he was cast away by Sue Lawley in 1990.

*Malcolm Watson*  
Ryde, Isle of Wight

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# DURBAN NOTEBOOK

*Mark Palmer*

No one likes uncertainty and in Britain we've got more than our fair share. But spare a thought for South Africa, where the uncertainty is in danger of morphing into national paralysis. 'What are your plans for the future?' I ask a friend who lives near Durban. 'We have no plans. We might be packing up next year and heading out.' A lot rests on next year. The general election appears to be set for May and with every day the pressure on President Cyril Ramaphosa increases. The 65-year-old millionaire is stuck between the rock of his more militant ANC supporters and the hard place of those impatient for root-and-branch change. Which means stamping out corruption, tackling unemployment (some commentators put it at 40 per cent), dealing with violent crime, resolving the redistribution of land issue and rehabilitating, variously, the tax collection agencies, police investigation teams, security firms and the prosecution service. That's for starters. No wonder Ramaphosa is lying low. 'I am going to vote for the ANC for the first time in my life and just hope Ramaphosa wins a thumping majority and then sets about rebuilding this country,' says my friend's husband. 'Right now it could go either way.'

The lying-low policy is not proving easy. I awake to headlines about how the president's finance minister, Nhlanhla Nene, has resigned over links to the notorious Gupta family, who allegedly controlled cabinet appointments and state contracts during Jacob Zuma's disastrous nine-year presidency. Within hours, the rand falls and the prospects of the appalling Julius Malema, leader of the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), seem brighter. Then comes news that the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini, is forming an alliance with a hard-line Afrikaner group to protect tribal territory and that 'anyone who wants to be elected by us



must come and kneel here and commit that [he] will never touch our land'. Never mind that former interim president Kgalema Motlanthe has described leaders such as King Goodwill as 'tinpot dictators'.

And yet South Africa is also joyful. We stop for petrol at a service station near Melmoth deep into KwaZulu-Natal. A smiling young man offers to clean our windscreen for ten pence, and a 'hot hero' sandwich costs 90 pence. An elderly, aristocratic white woman is speaking fluent Zulu to a woman behind the counter and soon every member of staff is listening intently before bending double in laughter. Apparently she's telling them she's had a furious row with her farmer husband and is looking for a 'hot hero' to cheer her up. The banter continues back and forth. No one gets served for the next five minutes, but customers leave with clean windscreens and happy hearts. Things are a little different at the Welcome Break service station on the M4 near Junction 15.

Roelof 'Pik' Botha, who died last week, was a government minister who served in both the white National Party and Nelson Mandela's ANC government. He said South Africa was like a zebra: 'If you put a bullet into the black stripe or the white stripe, the animal will die.'

There are hitch-hikers in this province. They tell you where they are going via sign language. An up and down motion of the hand means they are heading for the coast; palm facing down means they just

want to get to the next village; and a raised palm means they are happy to give a few rand in exchange for a lift.

For all the chaos, British Airways is about to start direct flights from London to Durban. Smart move. Safaris here tend to be cheaper than in hot spots closer to Johannesburg, and the Indian Ocean is gloriously warm, with designated swimming areas protected from the killer sharks. If you're partial to a curry, you'll like Durban, which has the highest concentration of Indians anywhere in the country. Direct flights also make it easy to stay at the iconic Oyster Box about 20 minutes up the coast in Umhlanga. Owned by the indefatigable Stanley and Bea Tollman (both well into their eighties) and part of the Red Carnation group, it was rebuilt in 2007 at a cost of more than £30 million but remains loyal to its colonial past. The Palm Court, where high tea is served, has chandeliers bought at auction from the Savoy Hotel in London.

My father-in-law was a district commissioner in Malawi leading up to when the country gained its independence in 1964. On official duties he sported a crisp white suit and pith helmet. I am forever under instructions from my wife to bring home a helmet similar to the one her father wore. It's never happened. But when I arrive at the Oyster Box, the doorman is wearing just the job. I ask him if he knows where I might find one. 'Talk to Mr Wayne,' he says. Wayne Coetzer is the genial general manager. I track him down and pop the question. 'I have a spare one in my office and it's all yours,' he says, adding that his mainly black staff love wearing their pith helmets and even chose to do so recently when asked to vote on the matter. Elections in South Africa can throw up surprising results.

*Mark Palmer is the Daily Mail's travel editor.*



ANY OTHER BUSINESS | MARTIN VANDER WEYER

# Why I'm boycotting 'Davos in the Desert'



The current stock-market correction has been steaming down the track since August and I claim no wisdom for having predicted it: the FTSE100 dipped below 7,000 at the start of the week, having shed all of the 10 per cent it had gained since it began to surge in April. Weaker UK growth forecasts from the EY Item Club, reflecting the impact of the Brexit impasse on business and consumer confidence, are just one factor in the autumnal mood.

But let's cheer ourselves up with a round of applause for our veteran investor Robin Andrews, whose 'Faangs to Banngs' trading idea I offered you on 1 September. His proposition was that soaring US tech stocks led by Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google (via listed parent Alphabet) were bound to run out of road, while a swing to pessimism would bring a revival in leading goldminers such as Barrick, Agnico Eagle, Newmont Mining, Newcrest Mining and Goldcorp, of which Agnico and Barrick were his favourites. He turns out to have been — how can I put it? — Banng-on.

Let's use big numbers. If you started September with a million dollars spread equally between the five Faang shares, your holding would have sunk to \$901,400 by Monday's close. But if you had sold them and reinvested equally in the five Banngs, you'd be worth \$1,081,000; and if you had followed Robin's tip and bought only Agnico and Barrick (the Canadian-based group whose shares were boosted in late September by news of a merger with an African miner, Randgold), you would be sitting on \$1,159,500 — more than a quarter of a million better off. 'The validity of the switch remains as trade wars and currency fears increase,' says our man, and I'm sure he's right.

## Luke's luck turns

Would it be wrong to sympathise with Patisserie Valerie chairman Luke Johnson after what he called 'the most harrowing week of my life', just because he happens to be a fellow columnist in his spare time? Or should

the fractious fraternity of hacks give him a drubbing for taking his eye off the till in one of his own businesses, having so often lectured us on the financial disciplines of entrepreneurship? The chain of 200 cake-and-coffee shops built by Johnson and his partners since 2006 turns out to have a huge hole in its accounts: far from having 'a strong balance sheet... with net cash of £28.8 million', as its March interim statement claimed, it is being pursued by HMRC for unpaid taxes and has been running 'secret overdrafts' of £9.7 million.

Finance director Chris Marsh was suspended and arrested on suspicion of fraud. Attention also focused on the performance of the auditors, Grant Thornton. Johnson himself, who owns 37 per cent of the Aim-listed company, has injected £20 million in emergency loans and is scrambling to muster other investors to help save a business with 2,800 employees.

His personal fortune, estimated at £250 million in the latest 'rich list', will be dented by the episode, but won't be wiped out. So should we feel sorry for him? Perhaps not, but I think we might give him the benefit of the doubt. In a long career as a risk-taker in the catering sector he has owned enjoyable eateries from Pizza Express to Le Caprice, made money for many investors beside himself, and given encouragement to a generation of younger would-be business builders. When I spoke to him about *The Spectator's* Economic Disruptor of the Year Awards, he talked of the key ability of entrepreneurs to 'pivot' swiftly when real-world circumstances change. He certainly needs to do that at Patisserie Valerie. I hope it survives.

## A message from BT

Readers who contributed tales of woe to the 'broadband dossier' I delivered to BT chairman Jan du Plessis last month must have wondered whether our 15,000-word document provoked any reaction at all, or had perhaps been referred to a call centre in Bangalore. Well, I'm pleased to report that

action is in hand. Gavin Patterson — the BT chief executive whose departure was announced in June and whose successor will be revealed any day now — writes to say he and his chairman have both read the dossier and taken it seriously: 'However uncomfortable it is for us to read of instances where we have not met the standards your readers rightly expect of us, their input is invaluable and we will treat it with the respect and response you would expect.'

Fine words butter no parsnips and make no better broadband speeds, I hear you say — but Patterson's letter also details, for example, how BT has reversed a six-year rise in faults on the Openreach network and slashed the proportion of missed appointments by engineers. I'm not suggesting we should be collectively ready to give BT the benefit of the doubt, but I'll try to ensure that this initial response translates into individual follow-up.

## My Riyadh boycott

Saudi Arabian shares (of which there are 186 listed, with a combined value of around \$450 billion) were also down by as much as 9 per cent at the beginning of the week, as investors worried about deteriorating international relations after the alleged killing of Jamal Khashoggi — but my man in the Riyadh camel market had no clever trading ideas to suggest, other than to buy faster camels. Meanwhile I'm shoulder to shoulder with Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase and other titans in refusing to attend Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Future Finance Initiative conference next week. Indeed I'm virtuously ahead of the pack on this one, having shunned last year's so-called 'Davos in the Desert' too. A formal invitation to this gathering of 'visionary, innovative and renowned leaders' from around the world arrived at 22 Old Queen Street from an official styling himself 'His Excellency' but I challenged it as bluntly as any veteran journalist should: 'Is this a freebie?' It wasn't, so I didn't go.



## BOOKS

# What does it mean to be an American?

America is often seen to represent the search for something – which Trump's populism is failing to provide. *Tim Stanley* tries to identify what that elusive thing might be

## Capitalism in America: A History

by *Adrian Wooldridge and Alan Greenspan*  
Allen Lane, £25, pp. 486

## These Truths: A History of the United States

by *Jill Lepore*  
Norton, £30, pp. 932

Donald J. Trump has sparked some soul-searching among US historians: has this happened before? Does it mean America has changed? Cue the self-laceration, cue the book deals. Two impressive volumes illustrate both agreement and disagreement, both concurring that America represents the search for something – but the jury's out as to precisely what.

*Capitalism in America: A History* is by an *Economist* writer (Adrian Wooldridge) and a former chair of the Federal Reserve (Alan Greenspan), so you can guess where they're coming from. The book celebrates the American thirst for self-improvement and argues that the country has long benefited from a 'creative destruction' driven by the market and entrepreneurs.

Here's the story. In the beginning, America was a frontier, rich in natural resources and conquered by businessmen: Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: 'I know of no country, indeed, where wealth has taken a stronger hold on the affections of men... the entire society is a factory.' At first it was dominated by farmers and craftsmen, rugged individualists; but as industry blossomed and agriculture shrank, so the *laissez-faire* dreams of the early republic became unrealistic. Corporations flourished; the government decided to help them. Time itself was nationalised. It used to be that local worthies set the town clock according to the position of the sun in the sky, but railroads needed national timetables and so, in 1883, 'America divided itself into two

standard time zones' in order that the trains could truly run on time.

America flourished, say Greenspan and Wooldridge, because it took plenty of cheap labour from abroad; it embraced new technology; it traded in global markets; and it was willing to let old industries go to the wall – freeing up workers and resources for start-ups.

Proof that all this worked was what happened when it stopped. In 1929, a speculative bubble popped and Wall Street crashed. A recession was maybe inevitable, but a worldwide depression perhaps not. The problem, argue Greenspan and Wool-

*The pioneer narrative has no relevance whatsoever to the Native Americans stripped of their land*

dridge, was that the federal government forgot what America was all about and did the wrong things: immigration had earlier been restricted, bigger tariffs were now slapped on imports, and Franklin D. Roosevelt prolonged the agony by expanding the state and fiddling with the market.

A second crash that occurred under Roosevelt's presidency, in 1937, was by some metrics worse than the first: stocks lost more than a third of their value and unemployment hit 20 per cent. From this we are invited to deduce that while some welfare goodies contribute to growth – education is one form of government spending that Greenspan and Wooldridge go gaga for – on the whole America has done best when the state lets the pioneers off the leash. The authors are therefore stumped by Trump: they like his deregulation and low corporate taxes, but his protectionism, the reader can infer, risks a return to the suicide of the 1930s.

From this blunt economic survey, we fol-

low Jill Lepore to a much more nuanced political history of the American experience. *These Truths: A History of the United States* has an apt title, for there is no one truth of what it means to be an American, and it's from the contest between identities that we get the unholy mess we're in today. The pioneer narrative is hopelessly subjective and has no relevance whatsoever to the Native Americans stripped of their land, the slaves ferried across the Atlantic to build the exciting city on a hill or the millions of working-class whites who never had time to invent anything. They just worked every hour God sent to make some rich genius even richer.

Lepore examines the political expressions of these experiences and notes that American populism, although often racist and conservative, has also sometimes been progressive. Creative destruction in the 1880s and 1890s, for instance, meant dying farms and appalling urban conditions; and the first great populist, William Jennings Bryan (a Democrat from Nebraska and my own personal hero), tried to ally these two constituencies in three radical presidential campaigns. His platforms now look economically illiterate; Bryan vacillated confusingly from easy money to proto-socialism and ended with a campaign against the teaching of Darwinism in the 1920s that has cast him as one of history's fools. But his point about Darwin was that if society rejects the Christian notion that weakness is a virtue and embraces the 'survival of the fittest' doctrine, it will inevitably throw the weak on to the funeral pyre. Time, I think, proved him right.

When Roosevelt came to power in the 1930s, it seemed as if liberals had conquered the US establishment, and so it was inevitable that there would be an equal and opposite reaction from the Right. The portrait Lepore paints of America in the 1950s





*Shining city on a hill: view of the Capitol from the White House by William Henry Bartlett, 1840*

ran as a far-Right conservative for president in 1964 and 1968. But Lepore doesn't note that in the 1972 Democratic primaries he presented himself as chiefly a law-and-order, anti-tax populist, and in 1973 he even crowned a black homecoming queen to prove he was no longer a racist (he didn't kiss her, as was tradition, insisting 'The people of Alabama aren't ready for that'.)

By 1982, his last run for governor, Wallace was shamelessly reaching out to blacks, women and unions. Populism is in part about responding to the needs of one's constituency, and as Alabama changed, so did a leader who was once famous for his inflexibility, and his story is far from an outlier. The history of the American South is one of change, power struggle, political bending from Left to Right, negotiating race, and all of this cannot be contained in one volume or by one narrative that at times feels too neat — even if Lepore is a truly gifted writer with profound insight into those she writes about. Do read her magnificent book, but just remember that it's not the whole story.

The definition of America is elusive, which makes explaining Trump both easy and difficult. We can say for sure that he is one constant part of America: the pioneer populist with a dose of xenophobia. But we'd be blinkered — as too many European commentators are — to suggest that he is all of America or even most of it. Trump is an unpopular populist whose approval ratings are dismally low. He's currently on a path to defeat in 2020 (although that can change). He got elected by clever strategy, by accident and because his opponent was another egghead who just enough people couldn't stand to hand victory to an absolute ape. The very sad thing is that Trump talks like William Jennings Bryan but thinks like Darwin. Hopefully, America's weak will survive his presidency.

is eerily familiar: Joe McCarthy's anti-communist crusade unleashed wild spirits. Conservative thinkers decried the establishment's obsession with facts and called for a return to pioneer-style truths. Leftists, homosexuals and intellectuals were dismissed as 'eggheads'; universities were 'godless'.

Big money bankrolled a grassroots movement against liberalism that was dominated by housewives so angry that they even irritated the Republican leadership. Richard Nixon said: 'I will not go and talk to those shitty ass ladies!' But he did, and he owed his rise and rise to them. 'Nixonland', said the presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson — a two-time Democrat loser — is a 'land of slander and scare; the land of sly innuendo, the poison pen, the anonymous phone call and hustling, pushing, shoving, the land of smash and grab and anything to win.' Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Politics in the 1950s was a morality play acted out in the most immoral way possible, and the career of Joe McCarthy, made

famous by fear, was just as comic and tragic as any of the men associated with Trump today. When he'd run out of men to accuse of spying for the Soviet Union, poor old Joe died a washed-up alcoholic in 1957. One sad, solitary figure at his funeral was Robert F. Kennedy. McCarthy was godfather to one of Bobby's children, a testament to the kind of close relationships that can develop between political opposites behind the scenes.

Lepore's vision of America is much closer to the patchwork reality than Greenspan and Wooldridge's, but even this is too black and white. She often casts the identity debate as Left v. Right, or liberal v. conservative, whereas the boundaries are more fluid than that. Take the Alabama governor George C. Wallace, who appears in the book as a symbol of populism's descent into naked racism. It's true that when inaugurated governor in 1963 he declared that he was for 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!', and he certainly



## Little women, big issues

Lucy Mangan

### Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy: The Story of Little Women and Why it Still Matters

by Anne Boyd Rioux  
Norton, £19.99, pp. 273

The great thing about Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women* is that it has something for everyone: stay-at-home types have the oldest of the March sisters, Meg, who struggles to reconcile her love of ease with both her responsibilities and the family's genteel poverty (and does at least manage to have one night of fun at the Moffatts' party, sipping their champagne with one hand and sporting her single good glove on the other, before settling down with a nice husband and even better linen cupboard); cool-slash-mean girls have Amy, who wrestles with vanity — not hugely successfully IMHO (Amy would be a demon with textspeak and indeed probably the first social media star from Massachusetts); romantics have Beth and her chronic timidity and pulmonary weakness; and tomboys, bookworms and would-be writers, of course, have Jo to teach them that they can earn a living in unfeminine ways, refuse to marry the boy next door and find a way to be free without cutting off all ties.

It is unusual even now to give young readers, and especially young female readers, so many options with which to identify in a single book — plus a beloved but imperfect Marmee — and to give them all their own specific energies, interests and flaws. In 1868 you could go so far as to say it was unheard of. Even in Alcott's native America, which had skipped more lightly over the moral and religious tales that had gradually developed into, and still highly influenced, the children's literary tradition in the old country, juvenile tales remained at least partly aimed at helping parents shape their offspring into good (traditionally masculine) men, and even better (traditionally feminine) women.

Anne Boyd Rioux's book, published to coincide with *Little Women*'s 150th anniversary, is a compact but rich account of Alcott's life, how she came to write her most famous and enduring work, and its effect on her and American literature, complete with a wide-ranging exploration and analysis of how its public, literary and critical reception has varied since its publication.

The life, especially if you have — as Alcott herself was keen that readers did — conflated the March family with Louisa's own over time, is striking. Unlike the cosily settled fictional family, the Alcotts moved 30 times in 22 years, generally in the wake of Louisa's father's latest misstep. Mr March



*Little Women, Chapter IX: 'Meg Goes to Vanity Fair'.  
Her sisters help her pack*

is a vision of paternal perfection in the background of the book. Bronson Alcott was quite the opposite, and his Transcendentalist spiritual convictions (or Messiah complex or manic depression, depending on how modern and/or medical your turn of mind) dominated the family, even as they militated against him earning enough money to support his often near-starving and ill-clad wife and four daughters.

Rioux's scholarly training — she is a professor at the University of New Orleans — gives her the strength to be scrupulously fair to Bronson, whom she notes was supportive of both Louisa and May's creative leanings (May, on whom Amy was fundamentally based, was an artist) in word if not, debt-and-chaos-fomenter that he was, deed. As someone who reads his proud proclamation 'I wait not upon the arithmetic of the matter!' as he abandoned the little school he set up to go full-time preaching instead as the cry of the simply incurably selfish everywhere, I prefer the hammering he gets in Martha Saxton's 1977 biography of Louisa. Second-wave feminist rage infuses the entire thing, and burns away a lot of the obfuscatory undergrowth that had grown up around the author and the book in the intervening decades.

not have been her whole truth, but almost everything in the book was drawn from Alcott and her sisters' lives) enough to let it qualify? Rioux also tracks its gradual disappearance from school syllabi and from literary and cultural history.

Though undoubtedly as groundbreaking, influential and demonstrably as popular as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* in their day, Alcott's tale is no longer held in the academic or social esteem it once was. It has taken on overtones of sappiness and gathered a reputation as a simple romance when it was and remains so much more. G.K. Chesterton, an admirer, said he felt like 'an interloper' reading it, and some subconscious similar feeling among the wider male-dominated world of academics may have led to its neglect. Rioux also posits a belief among educators that requiring boys to read something with the word 'women' in the title will put them off reading for life.

If that is so, *Little Women* has big problems. But let's hope that Rioux's satisfying, balanced but punchy tribute to Alcott's great work, especially coming at a time when women's experience is being foregrounded once more, is a sign of better things to come.

GETTY IMAGES



## Manic creations

Louis Amis

### Lost Empress: A Protest

by Sergio De La Pava

MacLehose Press, £20, pp. 640

American mass-incarceration is the most overt object of the 'protest' of this novel's subtitle. The author, Sergio De La Pava, works as a public defender in New York City, and calls on an intimate secondhand knowledge of the many different sorrows to be found in the ripples of a single criminal case. But *Lost Empress* is also about other kinds of losses and limitations to human freedom. One minor character, a Colombian immigrant striving on behalf of his children, endures labour that 'felt like a prison sentence' or an 'abyss', opened up by 'the desaturation of meaning'. He is killed in an accident early on; for his son, the grief is 'a form of imprisonment'. The 911 switchboard operator and paramedic who respond, and the doctor who tries to save the man, in turn discover the limits of empathy as well as mortality. Hospitals are another form of prison, and so, indeed, is the biological body: 'Just machines running out of battery power.'

The novel is perhaps more of a depressive meditation on the human condition than a protest. Most of the action takes place in the benighted town of Paterson, New Jersey, where 'the most basic social reassurances... had faded out of view'. Violence, accidental and deliberate, 'is what human beings do to each other. Not some human beings, not sometimes. This is what humans are,' concludes one character. Others come to feel that 'everything's already a mass grave with some of the corpses dreaming of life'; that 'the resting state of life is a kind of dull pain'; or that 'the main thing humans are meant to do is die'.

As consolation, the reader is invited to fall in love with the two main characters. 'Impossibly magnetic Nina Gill' — born wealthy; terrorisingly curvaceous in middle-age — is the world's foremost genius of American football management and, by implication, of everything else besides. 'That magnetic guy' Nuno DeAngeles, meanwhile, has the potential to be at least as brainy, and even more artistic — but he's also, somehow, the most feared inmate of the notorious Riker's Island jail complex in New York.

Both are contemptuous of others to the point of nihilism. They are most often seen either threatening people or lecturing them pedantically about the definition of 'highest art'. But their real aloofness comes from the fact that — unlike the other characters, the residents of Paterson mired in their inherent limitations and heading for grim outcomes — Nuno and Nina are not at all realistic.

Nina's chapters have the feel of a hip, lightly postmodern children's cartoon. Ousted from her role at the Dallas Cowboys, she breaks into 'celebratory dance' in a boardroom, and daydreams about leading an army of 'heavily armed half-monkey-half-robots' in a war against the United States. Instead, she takes control of a novelty team called the Paterson Pork, and leads them in a quixotic challenge to the NFL.

American football is, of course, a violent sport. In 'A Day's Sail', a short, charming essay available online, De La Pava used narratives of obscure boxing matches alongside a reading of Virginia Woolf to unfold a metaphor for perseverance in the face of despair. But here sport serves more as a kind of antic, distracted dance. Nuno's story, on the other hand, revolves around the notion that someone who thinks, let alone talks, about Descartes and Shake-

*Nina dreams about leading an army of heavily armed half-monkey-half-robots in a war against the US*

speare could indefinitely stare down the population of Riker's Island. Both characters are manic creations.

Meanwhile, the supporting cast members go about their mundane business in the shadow of inevitable trauma. Emulating David Foster Wallace, De La Pava dives into their interior states, the casual impulse jostling with the cerebral for the reader's attention: 'Ever wake up after misfortune and into momentary ignorance of or at least ontological doubt re: the misfortune?'; 'Problem is, everywhere Nelson looks he sees a transience he cannot build back into permanence.' Unfortunately, the book is also awash with tautology: 'vestigial remains'; 'linearly straightforward'; 'referential citations'; 'ephemerally trivial'. The 'Problem is' tic — sentences beginning 'Point is,' 'Truth is,' 'Fact is' — also becomes a bit of a problem itself.

There is one sustained passage of great writing, a discrete chapter in which the stoned-email prose style mysteriously drops away. It begins: 'On that block in Paterson there'd lived an amputee.' And proceeds from there, bleakly, but exquisitely observed and measured. Later on, its protagonist is killed by a random brain tumour, without his having made even an indirect connection to Nina or Nuno.

Those two have 'that presence thing that can make you question little concepts like reality and human limitations', in the words of one character. The mere juxtaposition — that presence thing — is the key. It isn't quite satisfying, but the world is 'a play written by an unmedicated schizophrenic', after all. And 'this playwright cares not the slightest fuck for our notions of appropriate storytelling'.

## Jay for Japan

Anne Margaret Daniel

### Killing Commendatore

by Haruki Murakami, translated

by Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen

Harvill Secker, £20, pp. 704

Haruki Murakami's *Killing Commendatore* was published in Japan in February last year. Early press releases for this English version hailed the book as 'a tour de force of love and loneliness, war and art — as well as a loving homage to *The Great Gatsby*'. Anyone familiar with Murakami's 17 preceding novels can vouch for love and loneliness as his great themes; and war, art and F. Scott Fitzgerald are not new to him, but in *Commendatore* all enrapture.

The narrator, a man with no name struggling with his own art — and, concurrently and inseparably, the women he sleeps with — recalls Murakami's earlier nameless narrators, all the way back to *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979). A damaged, constant observer, he is also something of a Nick Carraway, while his neighbour across a rural mountain valley, the mysterious, wealthy Mr Menshiki in his shining solitary mansion, recalls Jay Gatsby.

The name Menshiki means colourless-

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ness or the avoidance of colour, and from his house to his hair he is daisy-white. He has moved to this remote place because of a woman and a girl. Yet 'loving homage' in no way means a one-on-one correspondence. Neither longtime inspirations nor his own imagination fail Murakami here; *Commendatore* is a perfect balance of tradition and individual talent.

As well as Fitzgerald, William Faulkner is a guiding presence here, along with a host of other predecessors. The landscape in *Commendatore* is a Japanese Yoknapatawpha, where past and present, interior and exterior consciousness, and art and life in a recreational game with each other are the setting, the characters and the plot.

Murakami's narrator, a successful but disaffected portraitist, realises as his marriage falters that he wants his art to show not smiling public faces but the skull, and the soul, beneath the skin. The ancient rural cottage he is borrowing belongs to a celebrated painter, Tomohiko Amada, who studied European painting in Vienna in the 1930s, fell in love with a woman who was later killed by the Nazis and escaped just in time to Japan.

After the war, he re-emerged, adopting an ancient Japanese technique and style. Now 92 and fading into lifelessness, Amada has been moved to a posh Tokyo care home, but something of his spirit remains in his old house and studio, along with one hidden painting that tells a tremendous story. This painting, 'Killing Commendatore', shows that scene from *Don Giovanni*, and it also lets the narrator, and us, imagine what befell Amada and his loved ones during the second world war.

Murakami has always loved writing about other arts, and particularly music. *Killing Commendatore* has opera as its principal soundtrack, though increasingly Bruce Springsteen's *The River* album joins in. Other sounds — the natural music of a rustling, hooting night owl, the subterranean knell of a long-buried bell — help compose a novel that rings in one's ears as surely as does *Gatsby*, with its yellow cocktail music, Klipspringer's piano playing, and those 'muffled and suffocating chords' that fight their way up from the Plaza ballroom.

Amidst such sensory stimulation, it's no wonder Murakami's painter prefers to paint from photographs; it's easier than using a life model and far safer than using one's own clouded and fearful memories. When he relents, and begins to paint *Menshiki* from life, a rupture ensues between real and imagined. Which is the real world, anyway, in artistic terms? Murakami's artist relates the act of painting to the literal illumination of ideas. To 'discover this painting', as he puts it, is the task of beginning to create.

Nothing is painted there yet, but it's more than a simple blank space. Hidden on that

white canvas is what must eventually emerge. As I look more closely, I discover various possibilities, which congeal into a perfect clue as to how to proceed. That's the moment I really enjoy. The moment when existence and non-existence coalesce.

Murakami dancing along 'the inky blackness of the Path of Metaphor' is like Fred Astaire dancing across a floor, then up the walls and onto the ceiling. No other

*Murakami's narrator wants his art to show not smiling public faces but the skull, and the soul, beneath the skin*

writer so commands that manner of storytelling wrought from a stream of rich ideas, the thought-river, the word-ward long used and newly brought to life, flowing 'along the interstice between presence and absence'.

## Ravello

Luminous details!

Not my unsightliness

twice corrected — you loving-stern,  
when sick of the formless tee-shirt  
by the Trevi, and the broken hat,

you marched me to the camiceria...  
Absurd Inglese of the long neck,  
head-at-a-tilt to piano nobile  
to see the city whole in harmony.

We spiralled to Ravello  
and there was nothing to do —  
we stood helpless, in beachwear,  
among the soprintendenza in Armani

when you slipped away,  
and returned to me light  
of step in the piazza  
clothed in the petals of the iris,

and the orchestra glowed on the sea;  
Pogorelich, former firebrand  
gone plump and bald, played  
a comfortable Rach 2 — what matter?

With you beside me  
all the blues of all the Masters  
came down and blended  
and I did not see.

— Stephen Romer

## Kidnapped by Kett Andrew Taylor

**Tombland**

by C.J. Sansom

Macmillan, £20, pp.864

*Tombland* is not to be treated lightly. Its length hints at its ambitions. Here is a Tudor epic disguised as a historical crime novel.

C.J. Sansom's 'Shardlake' series, of which this is the seventh episode, deals with the activities of a hunchbacked lawyer in the 1530s and 1540s. The bloated old king is now dead, and his son, Edward VI, a minor, rules through the Lord Protector, his uncle Somerset. England is in a parlous state — verging on bankruptcy after a disastrous Scottish war, uneasy with the new regime's ultra-Protestant policies and on the brink of civil unrest.

Shardlake has somehow managed to cling to his integrity, despite having some dangerously high-profile clients. Among the latter is the Lady Elizabeth, the 15-year-old daughter of Henry VIII's disgraced queen Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth despatches Shardlake to Norwich, England's second wealthiest city, to monitor the trial for murder of a distant cousin of her mother's. John Boleyn has been charged with the brutal murder of his estranged wife.

Shardlake's investigation is the central thread of the novel, but its main purpose, in terms of the plot, is to give him a reason to be in Norwich in 1549. The city was the focus of Kett's rebellion, a large, well-organised insurrection that defeated a royal army and, for a few short weeks, controlled a large slice of Norfolk.

This is Sansom's real subject. Shardlake is captured by the rebels. He lives among them, effectively a prisoner on parole, in their vast camp on Mousehold Heath overlooking the city. Increasingly he comes to understand their grievances — the wool trade, source of the area's wealth, has made the rich much richer and the poor much poorer. Shardlake is also sucked into the topsy-turvy world of the camp, which he finds as dangerous as the murder mystery he continues to investigate.

Where Shardlake goes, so do we. Sansom has the trick of writing an enthralling narrative. Like Hilary Mantel, he produces densely textured historical novels that absorb their readers in another time. He has a PhD in history and it shows — in a good way. He is scrupulous about distinguishing between fact and fiction. (Typically, the last 60 pages of *Tombland* consist of a substantial historical note and a bibliography.) He also relishes the language of the time. It's difficult not to warm to a book in which typical insults are 'you dozzled spunk-stain' or 'you bezzled puttock'.

Is *Tombland* unnecessarily long? Probably, but I'm not complaining.





*A US Navy Seal, camouflaged with greasepaint, watches for enemy activity during a search and destroy operation in the Mekong Delta's swampy jungle (1968)*

to fight in an area and type of war singularly inappropriate for it. They relied on air power (4 million tons of bombs were dropped on South Vietnam, significantly more than on the North), artillery and chemicals laden with dioxin, all of which wreaked massive destruction on the country they were trying to save and alienated the people whose hearts and minds they sought to win. They thrust aside the Saigon government, for which many Americans had contempt, and its army, in which they had no confidence. They inundated South Vietnam with money, materiel and men, undermining an already fragile social and political fabric.

The book also poses a question Americans seldom ask: how did a backward, post-colonial nation like North Vietnam ultimately prevail in a war with the world's greatest power? Hastings singles out the iron will of Hanoi's leaders, especially Le Duan, who wrested leadership from Ho Chi Minh as early as 1960. Even after the massive end-the-war offensives of 1964, 1968 and 1972 failed miserably, with catastroph-

*How did a backward, post-colonial nation like North Vietnam prevail against the world's greatest power?*

ic costs in men and materiel, Le Duan's politburo managed to negotiate the United States out of Vietnam in 1973 and mount a final offensive in 1975. Hanoi, Hastings adds, had the singular advantage of controlling information so that its numerous ghastly mistakes were not exposed to public scrutiny or debate.

Among the military leaders discussed in the book, there are no heroes. General William Westmoreland was out of his depth; his successor Creighton Abrams was a 'competent, decent officer, well suited to conventional warfare in Europe'. The South Vietnamese are venal, corrupt and, worst of all, incompetent. Even the legendary Vo Nguyen Giap draws criticism for his imperviousness to the loss of human life.

The North Vietnamese gained sympathy among some antiwar protestors and leftists as victims. Hastings shows them as hard-bitten ideologues: nationalists, to be sure, but also firmly committed Stalinists, who brooked no dissent and imposed enormous hardships on their own people. They won, but at a staggering cost in human life.

Where the book excels is in telling the stories of countless people from numerous countries who got caught up in the 30-year struggle. We encounter those Viet Minh who hauled the heavy artillery into the mountains around Dien Bien Phu, and those frantic northerners, Catholics and otherwise, who left behind family and belongings to escape to the South after the 1954 Geneva Conference. We meet Colonel Nguyen

## In cold blood

### George C. Herring

#### **Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy 1945–1975**

by Max Hastings

William Collins, £30, pp. 784

The 50th anniversary of the Vietnam war has produced an outpouring of books, along with Ken Burns's 18-hour television spectacular, which sparked in the United States yet another round of heated debate on the war. The journalist and military historian Max Hastings's fast-paced and often compelling narrative will surely rank as one of the best products of this half-century reappraisal.

*Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy* is a monumental undertaking. Many books analyse major Vietnam war policy decisions. Others discuss military operations; still others recount personal experiences. Hastings does all three in a single volume, although he gives greatest attention to the on-the-ground activities of North and South Vietnamese, NLF and NVA, Americans, Australians and even New Zealanders.

Americans usually date their Vietnam war from 1961, when John F. Kennedy drastically escalated the US commitment, or from Lyndon Johnson's 1965 decisions to bomb North Vietnam and send combat

troops to the South. Hastings treats the first and second Indochina wars as a single entity. The conflict begins with Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence from France in September 1945 and ends with the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

Controversy raged worldwide during the war itself, continued long after it ended, and persists a half century later. Hastings tackles the key issues head on. Why did the United States spend 58,000 lives and an estimated \$150 billion on an area so remote and seemingly insignificant? He stresses Cold War exigencies and above all US domestic politics. There is no Reagan-like 'noble cause' here, no Ken Burns's good intentions gone awry. From Truman to Nixon, US leaders escalated the commitment rather than be 'seen to quit, fail, or lose... to the communists', while ignoring the needs and interests of the Vietnamese people.

Hastings is surely right in emphasising domestic politics. What he does not always provide is the unique context that helps explain each of the major decisions. There is no mention, for example, of the intense pressure on Washington from Paris and London in 1948 and 1949 to help stave off a French defeat in Vietnam, the last time Britain would urge US escalation.

Hastings is equally unsparing in assessing the reasons for US failure in Vietnam. Americans fought the way they knew how



An, a survivor of Dien Bien Phu and in 1964–1965 one of the first NVA regulars to trek down the then primitive Ho Chi Minh Trail; Lieutenant Don Snider, an American who served three tours as an adviser to South Vietnamese forces and like so many Americans never really bonded with them; Nguyen Van Uc, a South Vietnamese helicopter pilot who logged 6,000 flying hours; and even Russian and Chinese technicians who advised the North Vietnamese. These portraits and many, many others are appropriately nuanced and range over the human experience.

The courage and heroism not evident at the top are on full display in the lower ranks: the Viet Minh soldier who placed his body under a heavy gun to keep it from rolling off a hillside at Dien Bien Phu; the American civilian, Doug Ramsey, who miraculously survived seven years in a Viet Cong prison camp; the US Marine colonel John Ripley (a high school friend of this reviewer) who, with a fellow Marine, blew up the bridge at Dong Ha to slow the advance of North Vietnamese troops during the 1972 Easter Offensive.

At its best, Hastings's book deftly integrates decision-making with its impact on policy and people. When the South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu refused to sign a 1972 peace agreement negotiated by Washington and Hanoi, Nixon vented his wrath by bombing the 'bejeezus' out of North Vietnam, the infamous Christmas bombing. Hastings takes the reader from the bedlam of the Nixon White House to the tension-filled briefing room at the B-52 base on Guam; the arduous eight-hour flight to the living hell that was the sky above Hanoi and Haiphong; the terror of those Vietnamese being bombed and the lusty cheers of US POWs in the Hanoi Hilton; the return flight for those aircraft that got through unscathed; the near universally hostile reaction in the United States and abroad; the hasty return to the negotiating table in Paris; and the signing of a treaty not significantly different from that agreed upon months earlier. 'We bombed them into accepting our concessions,' one US official cynically observed.

Although remarkably comprehensive in its coverage, *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy* does not touch all bases. Little attention is paid to the civilian nation-building programmes that consumed vast sums of money and reveal much about US–South Vietnam failure. After the summer of 1967, the American home front became one of the most critical theatres of the war, a reality Hanoi recognised and at times played skillfully.

Immensely readable, sometimes quite acerbic in its conclusions, Hastings's book admirably captures the experiences of many different people at different times in a long and complex war.



## Albers the austere

### Alastair Smart

#### Josef Albers: Life and Work

by Charles Darwent

Thames & Hudson, £24.95, pp. 352

The German-born artist, Josef Albers, was a contrary so-and-so. Late in life, he was asked why — in the early 1960s — he had suddenly increased the size of works in his long-standing abstract series, 'Homage to the Square', from 16x16 inches to 48x48. Was it a response to the vastness of his adopted homeland, the United States? A reaction to the huge canvases used by the abstract expressionist painters in New York? 'No, no,' Albers replied. 'It was just when we got a station wagon.'

In Charles Darwent's new biography, Albers (1888–1976) comes across as a man as frill-free as the art for which he's famous. Apparently, he held — and all too often shared — strong views about matters such as how beer must be drunk (hitting the back of one's throat) and hot dogs be cooked (on a stick over a fire). Robert Rauschenberg, a pupil of Albers's at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, called him 'an impossible person'.

Not the most promising subject for a biography, perhaps. But that is to overlook two important factors. First, that Darwent (for many years critic on the *Independent on Sunday*) is a highly engaging writer on the visual arts. And second, that Albers lived through a remarkable period, mixing with some extraordinary people.

The first son of a painter-decorator, he was born in Bottrop, a country town in the

north-west German region of Westphalia. Tuberculosis kept him from fighting in the first world war, but not long after it, he took up a place at the Bauhaus — where by 1923 he was appointed to the teaching staff.

Giving 20 hours of classes a week (compared to László Moholy-Nagy's eight, Paul Klee's five and Wassily Kandinsky's three), he was the school's busiest teacher. He found time, too, to make art of his own and was regularly seen picking over the rubbish dumps of Weimar, hammer in hand: his breakthrough works, the '*Glasbilder*', were assemblages made from shards of broken glass.

Where Darwent really piques our interest is with the staff politics at the celebrated art and design school. Bitchiness and backstabbing abound, perhaps most memorably in 1930 (by which time the institution had moved to Dessau) when Albers and Kandinsky contacted the city mayor to denounce Bauhaus's then director, Hannes Meyer, as a communist. There was barely a shred of evidence, but Meyer was summarily dismissed all the same.

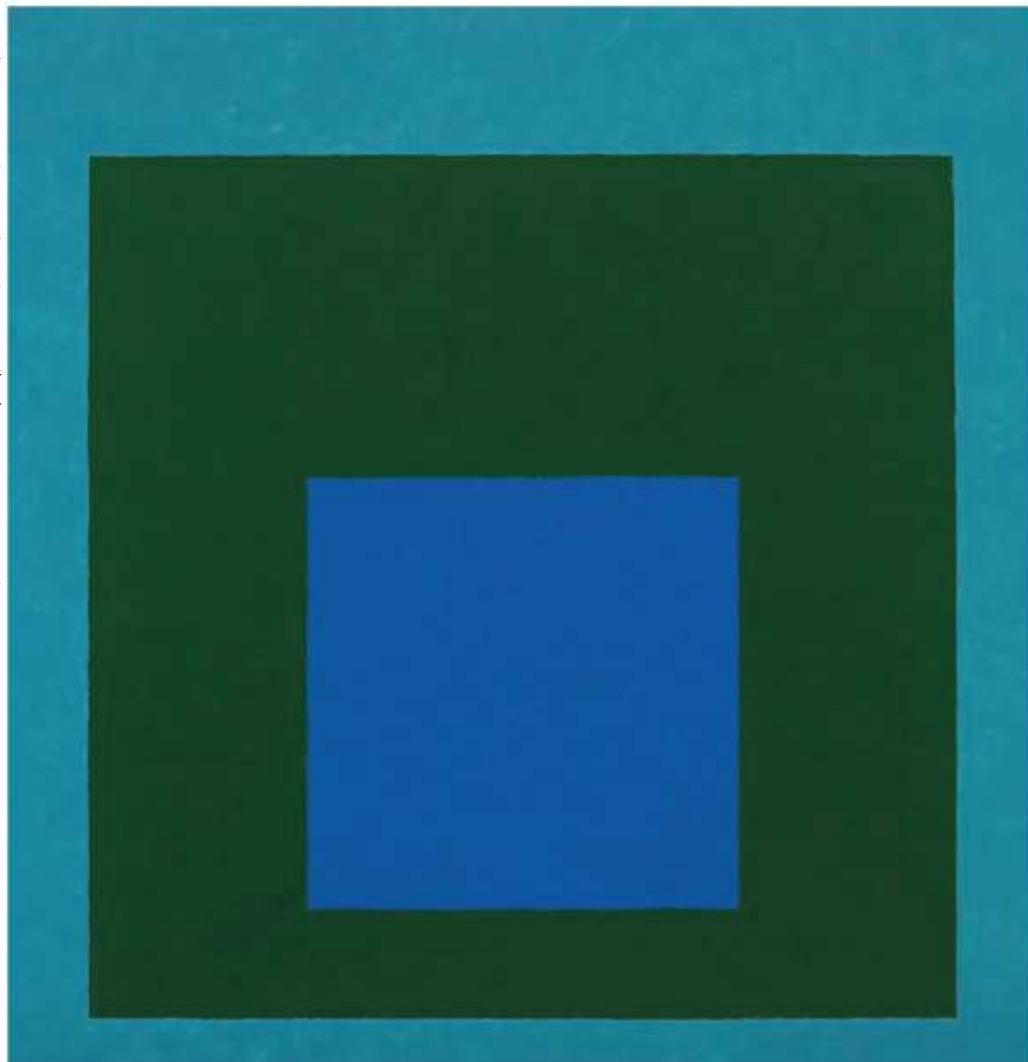
Three years later, the Bauhaus was forced by the Nazis to close, and Albers moved with his wife Anni across the Atlantic, both of them taking up an offer to teach at the experimental new arts college, Black Mountain. They'd spend the next 16 years there and miss most of the horrors that descended on their homeland — though, in an aside which Darwent frustratingly fails to expand upon, we learn that one of Albers's Bauhaus students, Fritz Ertl, went on to become an architect for the SS and design the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

He also fails to explore Albers's relationship with any of the avant-garde figures who taught alongside him at Black Mountain, from the composer John Cage and artist Willem de Kooning to the choreographer Merce Cunningham. The college is remembered today for its non-hierarchical approach to education, where there were no tests, no grades and everyone was considered equal. Not that that stopped Albers developing a dislike for its director, John Andrew Rice, and in 1940 demanding his resignation on the pretext of an affair with a female student.

This book is hard work, and not just to read — in his preface, Darwent admits it was a struggle to write too. How to deal with a subject who professed a 'dislike of groups, kept no diary and batted away questions about his emotions or past'?

But certain problems are of the author's own making. Anni Albers (currently the subject of a Tate Modern exhibition) was a textile artist of distinction and





Far left: 'Self-portrait,' 1916.  
Left: 'Homage to the Square: Renewed Hope', 1951  
by Josef Albers

a cottar to being a shoemaker in the local town is rather different from having your house burnt down and being forcibly deported to Nova Scotia. Conflating the two experiences seems to me to be rather ungenerous.

The sheer difference of the Lowlands and the Highlands is important. The clan structure, which was already fraying in the north, never took hold in the south, despite a similar degree of banditry and reiving. Scotland was not an integrated country even when England and Scotland were ruled by one crown. There is an important essay hidden in the book which contrasts the Irish experience in the 19th century with that of the Scots. The Irish took

*In a myth-busting moment we learn that the population of the Highlands actually increased after the Clearances*

up arms, faced with both famine and 'land reform'; while the Scots meekly took to the ships for shores a-yonder. Why should this be the case? Devine blames — or at least in part blames: as this is an academic book every contention is doubled with its opposite — Presbyterian deference and the clan ideal that the laird would look after his clan. There is a fascinating chapter on the rural unrest in the south-west of Scotland, which does link clearly to the 'Killing Times' of the 17th century and religious rebellion.

There are some notable myth-busting moments in this enquiry. For example, the population of the Highlands actually increased after the Clearances. The ruined stone cottages which accompany so many online sites about the period were a relatively late development, and it is likely, if you are into genealogy, that your Scottish ancestors came from Motherwell or Melrose rather than somewhere more romantic that has appeared in *Outlander*. In some cases the arguments have been made more eloquently and vociferously — in, for example, Neil Davidson's avowedly Marxist *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, which like Devine's latest work argues that raising 100 clansmen for a square go meant less than having 100 guineas to barter on the London gaming tables.

I did wonder at the cut-off date of 1900. Of course, by that date, Scotland had undergone the most rapid industrialisation in history, and farm workers were flocking to the cities. But not to continue the story into such issues as community land buy-outs or the creation of the New Towns — surely another form of nudged internal migration — leaves the story, such as it is, dangling. In short, I may pick this book up again to check a fact, but reading it from cover to cover is an unlikely proposition.

a major cultural figure, but here she is lamentably relegated to the sidelines. Also, for some strange reason, the book's first 30 pages are dedicated solely to Josef's 'Homage to the Square' paintings, consisting of three or four different coloured squares nested in one another. Yes, it was his signature series; yes, it's impressive (he made 2,400 variations over the final quarter-century of his life). But a discussion of such technical matters as their hardboard support surely isn't a way to grab readers' attention from the off.

Rightly or wrongly, Josef has gone down in history as Albers the austere, the exemplar of a rigorous Bauhaus modernism — and there's little in this biography to change that.

## Relocate or emigrate

### Stuart Kelly

#### **The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed, 1600–1900**

by T.M. Devine

Allen Lane, £25, pp. 464

There is a degree of irony in the opening chapter of T.M. Devine's history, lambasting popular previous depictions of the Clearances and citing ludicrous comparisons to Nazi genocide and the misty-eyed melancholy of John Prebble. Though it does not mention such iconography as Thomas Faed's painting 'Last of the Clans',

used for the paperback of Prebble's book, or Erskine Nicol's 'An Ejected Family' in all its schmaltzy Victorian glory, such depictions are clearly the target. Yet the book itself is called *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed* and not, which would actually be more accurate, 'Patterns of Land Ownership, Agricultural Change as well as Internal and External Migrations in Scotland, 1600–1900'. Not such a grabby title.

Devine, as a historian, is meticulous if not always enthralling. There is an air of the Harold Wilson era about this book. With white-hot research, lots of carefully calibrated tables and perhaps the occasional use of a slide rule and logarithm book, the Truth can be established. I may never need to know again that the average price for meal imported from the Clyde to the Outer Hebrides went from £2.2s per boll to 16s per boll between 1840 and 1880, or that the cattle herd in Sutherland, between 1790 and 1808, fell from 5,140 to 2,906 while sheep numbers rose from 7,840 to 21,000 (a suspiciously round number). Facts may be chieils that winna ding an downa be disputed, but interpretations of data certainly are. Yet buried under the statistical chest-puffing there is a lot to admire in this book.

For a start, there is closer attention paid to the south of Scotland as well as the Highlands. Whether the forms of expropriation of property are commensurate I will leave for the reader to decide: all I will say is that moving from a subsistence existence as



## ARTS SPECIAL

## Walpole's world

Michael Snodin celebrates the splendours of Strawberry Hill revived



KILIAN O'SULLIVAN

We can't know what Horace Walpole would make of the continuing popularity of serendipity, a word he coined in 1754 to describe the accidental happy discovery of a Renaissance portrait he had long been seeking. In 2001 it became the title of a romantic comedy and this year of a song by a South Korean boy band, which has had 74 million hits on YouTube. But we can imagine that he would be pleased that his lifelong effort to leave his mark on posterity has been so successful.

He was born (in 1717) with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, the youngest son of the all-powerful Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford and effectively Britain's first prime minister. At 21 he was given government sinecures producing some £2,000 a year, and at 24 a seat in Parliament, freeing him from the need to earn a living. Undistracted by the responsibilities of high government office, a great estate or of family (he never married), he was able to devote his life to politics, writing, scholarship, obsessive collecting and the creation of his pioneering Gothic villa, Strawberry Hill.

Walpole was a complex character, in public a man of taste at the centre of politics and fashion, but in private a hardwork-

ing scholar and historian. His vivid record of these different worlds in some 4,000 often brilliant letters, published in 48 volumes, has been a main resource for historians ever since. That is exactly what he would have wished, for he saw the present as history in the making, although he came to prefer what he regarded as the certainties of the past, writing in 1766: 'I almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams. Old Castles, old pictures, old histories, and

*Strawberry Hill was Gothic in and out, complex and irregular, suggesting organic development*

the babble of old people make one live back into centuries that cannot disappoint one.'

Strawberry Hill, his summer villa by the Thames in Twickenham, was the centre of his scholarly and creative endeavours and the setting for his huge collection of art and artefacts. Built between 1749 and 1790, it was very largely designed by Walpole and a group of his friends, as he said, 'to please my own taste, and in some degree to realise my own visions'. Twickenham, being close to London, had many summer villas, but nearly

all were in the classical style. Walpole's West End townhouse was also classical, but at Strawberry Hill he created 'the castle (I am building) of my ancestors', pinnacled and battlemented. Houghton Hall, his father's Palladian palace in Norfolk, was built as an expression of power and wealth; Strawberry Hill, filled with coats of arms, celebrated his family's illustrious ancestry. Although the Gothic style was occasionally used in other buildings at the time, Strawberry Hill pioneered ideas that led directly to the more serious Gothic revival of later years. It was Gothic both inside and out, it lifted 'quotations' of details from ancient buildings for its architectural features, and dramatically broke the classical rule of strict symmetry. The result was a building that was both complex and picturesquely irregular, suggesting an organic development over centuries.

Walpole's word for the effects of Gothic — 'gloomth' — did not mean the vision of dark and terrifying masses we associate with Gothic today, but rather an 'irregular lightness and solemnity'. But for Walpole, Gothic crucially had a unique ability to summon up ideas and emotions. In the interiors at Strawberry Hill he enhanced the effects by the use of old stained glass and an extremely sophis-





Gothic revival: Strawberry Hill House (left) and the library (above)

licated manipulation of planning, decoration and the handling of light to vary atmosphere and mood, writing that he had ‘observed the impressions made on spectators by these arts’. A succession of dark and light episodes started in the grey hall, passed through the more cheerful private rooms and back to darkness in the purple Holbein Chamber before finishing in the blaze of light and crimson in the Gallery and other rooms of the State Apartment. This was the setting that inspired him to write, in 1764, *The Castle of Otranto*, the earliest Gothic novel, following a dream ‘of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour’. The bannister was just outside his bedchamber.

Walpole’s collection, too, played a role, in the form of a portrait of Lord Falkland of about 1603, ‘all in white’, which inspired the episode in which the figure of Manfred’s grandfather steps out of the picture frame, one of the many Gothic horror

tropes established by the novel. By the time of Walpole’s death in 1797, Strawberry Hill contained at least 4,000 objects, not counting several thousand prints, drawings and coins, acquired over some 55 years. They included paintings and sculpture of all periods, classical antiquities, historical curiosities, and a wide range of decorative arts, embracing several different collecting traditions, most notably the high art of European connoisseurs and the historic portraits and objects of British antiquarians.

Walpole was also a keen connoisseur of painting and the first historian of British art, publishing his *Anecdotes of Painting* at his own press. But he valued even more the way in which objects had the power to reach back to people and events in the past. Strawberry Hill, a house full of portraits, became a house full of stories, presenting distinctive aspects of British and European history in a pioneering and museum-like way. But equally striking was the sheer range and variety of works of art and objects, from drawings by Clouet to paintings by Van Dyck and Reynolds, miniatures by Holbein, carving by

Grinling Gibbons, Sèvres porcelain, Boulle chests and historical relics like the hair of Mary Tudor and Cardinal Wolsey’s hat.

Almost from the start, Walpole had suspected that his house and collection would not long survive him. He accordingly recorded everything in detail in *A Description of Strawberry Hill*, printed at his own press in 1774 and 1784, in which he positioned himself as the successor to the great collectors of the past. In 1842 the collection was dispersed in a celebrated 24-day sale.

Now, 176 years later, many items are coming back to the restored interiors at Strawberry Hill and as far as possible are being returned to the places they were first shown. This exhibition presents a unique opportunity to assess Walpole’s achievement and experience his treasures, and Strawberry Hill, as he intended.

*Strawberry Hill House and Garden reopens on 20 October for the Lost Treasures of Strawberry Hill exhibition. Michael Snodin is the author of Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill.*





'Children's Games', 1560, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

## Exhibitions

### All together now

Martin Gayford

#### Bruegel

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,  
until 13 January 2019

'About suffering', W.H. Auden memorably argued in his poem 'Musée des Beaux Arts', the old masters 'were never wrong'. Great and terrible events — martyrdoms and nativities — took place amid everyday life, while other people were eating, opening a window or 'just walking dully along'. As an example, Auden took 'The Fall of Icarus' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. As it happens, Auden himself was wrong there, because the work he cited is no longer thought to be by the painter after all.

This picture is not, therefore, included in the exhibition *Bruegel* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. However, the fact that Icarus has now been consigned to the vague penumbra of 'after' and 'circle of' is a detail. On the essential point, Auden was absolutely correct. You see it time after time in this marvellous array of paintings. Time and again, Bruegel hides away the scene

that you might have imagined was the whole point of his picture.

Thus, in his 'Conversion of Saul' (1567) the future St Paul is not front and central, the hero of the story, as he is in, say, Raphael's or Michelangelo's version of the event. He has been thrown to the earth by a heavenly apparition — but in the middle distance. It takes a moment before you discover him: a little sprawling figure sur-

*The show is as close as we'll get to reassembling every remaining Bruegel and is unlikely ever to happen again*

rounded by a whole army column of horsemen and lancers marching over a high mountain pass with a steep drop down to the plains below.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum has 12 paintings by Bruegel in its own collection — out of a total of only about 40 — to which in the exhibition are added numerous loans including prints and drawings. The result does not quite reassemble every remaining work, but it is as close as we are ever going to get, and is most unlikely to happen again remotely soon, if ever.

The exhibition reunites four of the six panels of the 'Seasons' that Bruegel painted in 1565. 'Hunters in the Snow', the mid-

winter scene, is one of the best-known images in art history; 'Return of the Herd' and 'Gloomy Day', devoted to late autumn and the dismal period of February and March respectively, are not far behind in celebrity. These are currently joined by the 'Haymakers' from Prague. (The high summer scene, 'Harvesters', is unfortunately too fragile to travel from New York, while the sixth panel, dealing with spring, disappeared very early on.) Even so, to see these four great paintings lined up on a wall is reason enough to get on a plane to Austria. And there's a huge amount more.

Bruegel's career was relatively brief — his major paintings all date from the decade between the late 1550s and 1569, when he died, and his surviving oils are correspondingly few. The effect of showing most of his masterpieces together is overwhelmingly rich. That's because there's so much in each.

In 'Christ carrying the Cross' (1564) the Saviour is almost lost in the crowd packed with onlookers, travellers, soldiers, fights, children. The rolling, verdant landscape is punctuated with the sinister wheels, erected on poles, on which criminals were left to die, their limbs broken (there are many more of these in Bruegel's 'Triumph of Death' from Madrid, the most terrifying image, to my mind, in the history of art).



At the Kunsthistorisches Museum, 'Christ carrying the Cross' is displayed without its frame in a glass case, so you can get really close — and also see how thin it is: a film of paint on an oak panel only millimetres thick. On such wafers of wood Bruegel could conjure an entire world.

It would be easy to spend hours in front of such a picture: part nightmare of cruelty and death, part glorious panorama of rural life and countryside. Bruegel liked to pack together such ingredients — horror, beauty, comedy, mortality. His exact meaning in a picture, if there was one, is often elusive, but his art still gives a compelling impression of truth. It is perhaps no coincidence that Shakespeare was his (much younger) contemporary.

He is an artist about whom little is known for sure. We are not certain where he came from nor when he was born or even how his name was spelt (like Shakespeare's it varied). Probably he was only in his early forties when he died in 1569. Bruegel was mobile, living in Antwerp, then moving to Brussels; at one point he travelled to Italy over the Alps, which, to judge from his landscapes with their mountains and distant prospects, made a huge impres-

*To see these four great paintings lined up on a wall is reason enough to get on a plane to Austria*

sion. Later he painted a view of Naples which — only firmly attributed recently — is one of the surprises of the show.

Among Bruegel's friends was a renowned geographer, Abraham Ortelius, who still 'weeping' composed a eulogy to the painter. Ortelius had a keen appreciation of his dead friend's art. He owned Bruegel's beautiful monochrome 'Death of the Virgin', a virtuoso demonstration of how light, space and volume could be created with just varying shades of grey.

In Bruegel's work, Ortelius noted, 'there is always more matter for reflection than there is painting'. In other words, the pictures are packed with meaning — even if it is often hard to discern what that meaning is. Scholars are still debating the significance of such enigmatic images as his mysterious drawing of beekeepers, masked like Renaissance spacemen. But the uncertainty does not matter. Somehow just by looking you feel Bruegel's sense of how things are: funny, tragic, lovely, terrible.

Ortelius also claimed that Bruegel 'painted many things that cannot be painted'. You can see what he meant when you compare 'Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap' (1565) with the later reworking of the composition, perhaps by Bruegel's son, Pieter the Younger, one of the best of some 150 imitations of this especially popular scene.

The original, however, has a subtlety and nuance that isn't there in the copy

beside it. In Bruegel's own version, there is space between the bare branches of the wintry trees, and a chilly, slightly hazy air.

Bruegel's observation of the world around and the people in it must have been not only searching but also unceasing. In the excellent accompanying book, published in England by Thames & Hudson, it is suggested that he must have made many thousands of drawings, of which only a few dozen survive.

He saw things nobody had noticed, or at least painted, before. 'The Adoration of the Magi in the Snow' (1567) depicts a blizzard of fat flakes fluttering in the murky air and half obscuring a village filled with soldiers. 'The Holy Family' is hidden away — in a way Auden would have approved of — half-visible, in a dark corner. This is perhaps the first painting to represent a snowstorm; I can't think of another one until Turner's.

This wonderful retrospective has only one drawback: there is too much to take in. I spent about four hours in the galleries. But it wasn't nearly enough.

## Cinema

### Man bites man

Deborah Ross

#### Dogman

15, Key Cities

Matteo Garrone's *Dogman*, which is Italy's entry for the foreign language Oscar next year, is bleak, unflinching, oppressive, masculine (very), violent (shockingly) and basically everything you'd expect me to hate. Except I didn't. It is out of the ordinary. It has a magical central performance. It is tense, as you wait for the little man to face down the big man, if he does. Plus there are lots of lovely dogs, which always helps, and none are harmed. Aside, that is, from the yapping chihuahua thrown into a freezer to shut it up. So there is that, too.

Garrone, who is known for the terrific *Gomorra*, and also the highly odd *Tale of Tales*, has set the film in a poor Italian coastal town where the skies are grey, the buildings are crumbling and the playground equipment is derelict. Ken Loach territory, in other words, but with a better diet. (The people have little money but cook proper meals and don't eat rubbish, I couldn't help but note.) It's the story of Marcello (Marcello Fonte), who owns the dog-grooming establishment next door to the cash-for-gold shop. Marcello is child-like, eager to please, not macho in the slightest, and a simple man. He wants to be liked by his neighbours. He is most at home when lovingly tending his canine clientele. He calls them all 'sweetie' and there are some wonderful moments, particular-

ly involving a poodle and its quiff and the Great Dane who doesn't look happy with its pedicure. (I don't know if it asked for its money back.) He also has a young daughter, Alida, whom he adores. They live separately, as he has split from her mother, but they enjoy their scuba-diving trips, funded by his business on the side, which is cocaine dealing.

That said, he only seems to deal cocaine to one person, Simone (Edoardo Gero), and Simone rarely pays him. Simone is the local thug. Simone is the size of a fridge and a brute and half-crazed. Simone has terrorised the neighbourhood to such an extent that the other shop owners discuss having him killed. But Marcello is deeply attached to him, in a way that is never explicitly explained. What is this co-dependency? In this ultra-male community, is Marcello hungry for alpha-male attention and acceptance? Is he the abused dog who keeps running back to its owner nonetheless? Does he think Simone can be tamed, like the savage pit bull in the opening scene, which has to be soothed

*The only ones to come out well from this film are the dogs*

before it can be shampooed? Whatever the reason, Marcello allows Simone to lead him to darker and yet darker places. Will he ever break and say: 'Enough!'

As the violence escalates, this could have been cartoonish, and it should by rights be cartoonish, but Fonte's performance is just too wonderful. He won the award for best actor at Cannes and as Garrone has said: 'Marcello bought to the story his humanity, his sense of humour and, er... his face.' He has a sunken face and a big, crooked smile. It's a face that tells its own story. It's a face you could look at all day unlike, say, Ryan Gosling's in *First Man*, which said everything it had to say within two minutes flat. Marcello is not always innocent. Marcello is sometimes complicit. Marcello can be simpering and ingratiating. But it's crucial that he remains endearing and essentially good. It's crucial that we know he will try to rescue the chihuahua that's been locked in the freezer by Simone, even if it means breaking back into the house they've just burgled. And Fonte brings all this, and keeps you with him.

The film never spells anything out, but touches on many issues: poverty, drug addiction and the kind of power-mad masculinity that destroys everyone and everything. There are those brief glimpses of Alida, and a small role for Nunzia Schiano as Simone's old, despairing mother. But aside from that there are no women here whatsoever. The conclusion is shattering, and possibly not redemptive. The only ones to come out of this well, in fact, are the dogs, who nobly do their own thing, as man bites man.



## Theatre

### This is a man's world

Lloyd Evans

#### I'm Not Running

Lyttelton Theatre, in rep until  
31 January 2019

#### Measure for Measure

Donmar Warehouse, until 1 December

Sir David Hare's weird new play sets out to chronicle the history of the Labour movement from 1996 to the present day. But it makes no mention of Corbyn, Momentum, the anti-Semitism row or rumours of a breakaway party. The drama is located in the dead-safe Miliband era and it opens with talk of a leadership election. The two best candidates, Pauline and Jack, are old lovers from university. Pauline is a doctor who entered politics when budget cuts threatened the hospital where her mother was being treated for cancer. Jack is a colourless Blairite greaser, a sort of Andy Burnham without the mascara, who is still besotted with Pauline despite being newly married to Jessica.

The play kicks off with an announcement from Pauline, who sits as an independent MP, that she doesn't covet the Labour lead-

*Real women should boycott,  
if not picket, this slanderous  
assault on their sex*

ership. We then scoot back and watch the pair as student lovers. Jack, the doting puppy, remains faithful to Pauline even though she keeps a busy roster of alternative playmates on the go. Fast-forward, and we watch politician Pauline giving an interview in which she rashly declares: 'I've nothing to hide.' A real politician using that phrase on TV would be haunted by it for the rest of her career. Pauline is, of course, hiding two things. First, her ambition to stand as leader. Second, her Labour party membership while she was an independent standing against a Labour candidate, which she arranged without the knowledge of her constituents. Such inept mendacity would be swiftly uncovered during a leadership contest. When Jack discovers her secret manoeuvres, he fails to use this toxic information to ruin her pitch for the top job. Why? Any activist or A-level politics student could have helped Sir David to avoid these blunders.

In one of the play's dottiest scenes, Pauline visits Jack at his marital home and asks him to sign an important petition. She seduces him on his wife's sofa and when he declines to give his signature she accuses him of sexually exploiting her. Her character is impossible to scan. She's partly a male fantasy, a clever, beautiful, jealous minx who gobbles

up trusting chaps like Jack. And she's partly a door-slamming sourpuss who allows herself to be defined by injuries, many of them imaginary, inflicted on her by nasty men.

It's ironic that this study in progressive feminism is an all-male achievement. Sir David's script, commissioned by the NT boss, Rufus Norris, has been directed by Neil Armfield. A woman on the team might have helped them towards a more generous understanding of female psychology. Pauline isn't just sexually uninhibited, she's dangerous. In an early scene she hints that she might accuse Jack of sexual assault. He denies using force against her. 'Your feelings were violent,' she says, suddenly telepathic. 'I'm not sure your motives were pure.' This paranoid belief that all sexually active women are likely to cry 'rape' is a nervous male reaction to the #MeToo movement.

A final detail completes this nutty portrait of modern feminism: scullery duties. Pauline is an enthusiastic oven bunny who loves cooking lunch for visitors and baking sourdough bread. Invited to a burial service, she arrives with a tray of oven-fresh scones for the mourners. Scones? At a funeral? Real women should boycott, if not picket, this slanderous assault on their sex.

*Measure for Measure* is full of surprises. Josie Rourke's handsome period production sprints through a shortened version of the text in barely 90 minutes. This is prudent because the full-length script drags towards the end as the Duke explains his peculiar decision to act as Vienna's undercover ombudsman. Then Rourke delivers a stunning coup. The actors change into modern dress and the play begins afresh but with the genders of the main characters reversed. Hayley Atwell's Isabel becomes a hypocritical predator targeting her victim, Angelo, played by Jack Lowden. Everything is repeated in a fascinating contemporary setting with plenty of witty flourishes. The brothel scene shows a posse of dolled-up hookers, one with a Russian accent, lounging on benches swiping through their smartphones.

Some scenes are uncomfortable to watch. Isabel, as the predatory deputy, delivers the 'who will believe thee?' speech by parodying the forced tears of a deceitful rape victim. At times the script has to clear impossible hurdles. It's not credible that Jack Lowden, or any sentient male earthling, would decline an offer of no-strings sex with Hayley Atwell.

These minor snags aside, this is the cleverest application of gender-reversal to Shakespeare that I've ever seen. And it deals with a complaint often levelled against directors who tinker with the Bard: newcomers to the play deserve to see the original before they can appreciate the departures and indulgences of the alternative version. And since you get the text (or most of it) performed twice at a single sitting it's an excellent way to cram for an examination.

## Radio

### Shining circles and silver spools

Kate Chisholm

Flies buzzing, strange rustling, crunching sounds, and then the most chilling screech you'll have heard all week. Vultures were feeding off the carcass of a zebra in Kenya, recorded by Chris Watson. He had been up before dawn, on the look-out for a suitable carcass to attract the scavenging vultures. He was lucky to find one and clipped two microphones to the ribcage, running the cable to his recording vehicle 50 yards away. By break of day the vultures had appeared and were taking their breakfast.

Watson believes that recording sound at such close quarters 'really fires our imaginations in a unique way'. He was not the only contributor to *The Changing Sound of Radio* on Radio 4 Extra (produced by Jessica Treen) to talk about radio as if it is a visual medium. In this compilation of archive programmes, threaded together by Watson's memories of a life spent in the field and back in a studio creating sound art, it was as if we

*Haddock recorded out at sea, in  
hectic courtship, sound 'like a  
motorbike revving up'*

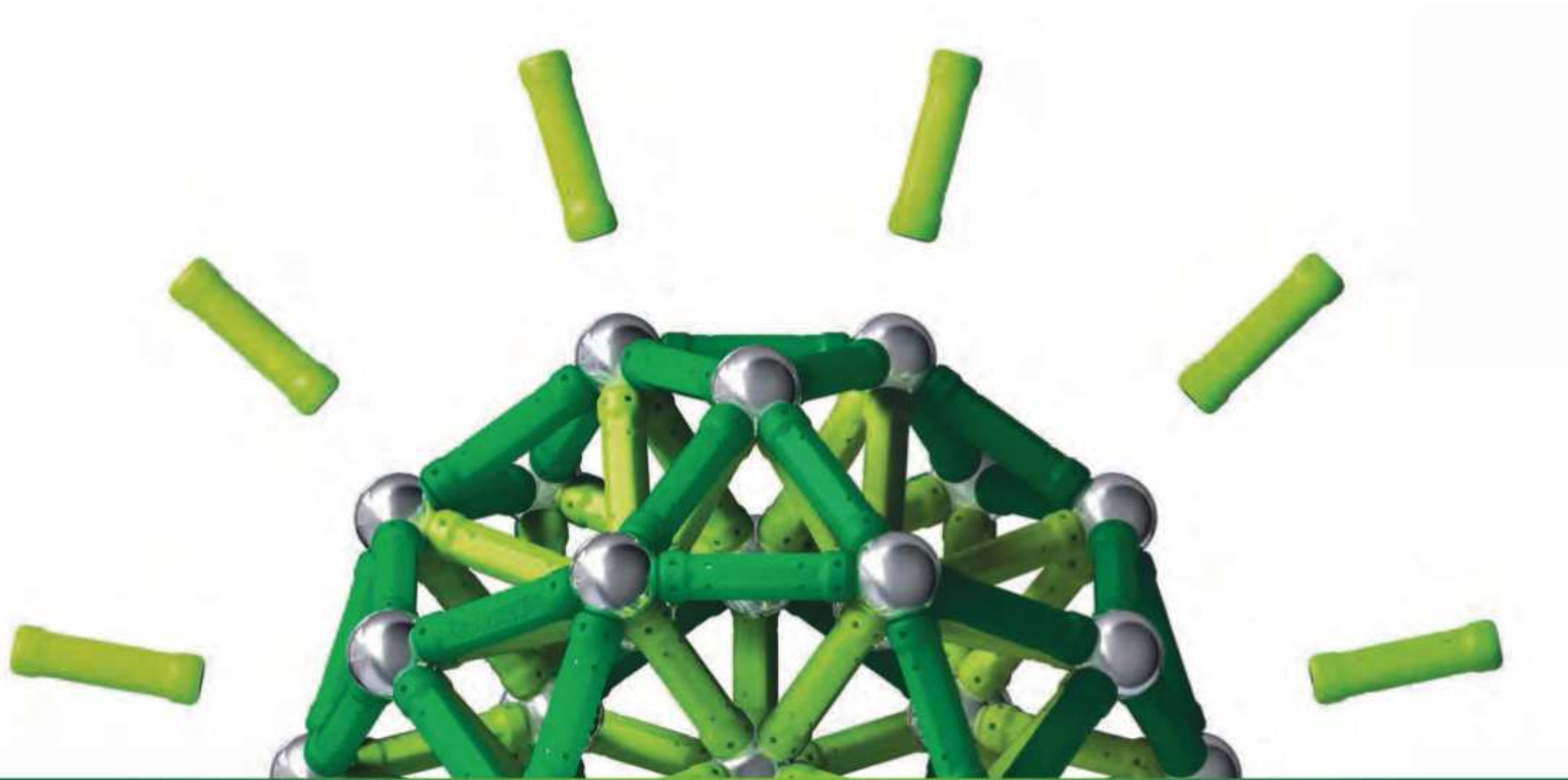
were given snapshots of the best audio since the 1960s when as a teenager Watson first began recording. The sound of a blackbird at full throttle in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. The 'snap, crackle and pop' of pistol shrimps, who use sound as a weapon, stunning their victims, recorded by Watson by attaching a microphone to a fishing line and dangling it off the pier at Blyth harbour in Northumberland. Haddock recorded out at sea, in hectic courtship, described as 'like a motorbike revving up'.

Who needs pictures? In *Fifteen Inches Per Second*, a 2004 documentary about quarter-inch magnetic tape that revolutionised radio (and was invented by the Germans during the second world war), the feature-maker Piers Plowright recalled his first experience of walking into a studio and seeing 'this place of shining circles, things revolving slowly on silver spools'. For him, the great delight of working with magnetic tape, as opposed to digital technology, was 'the visual aspect of it'. Watching the tape running through from reel to reel, those precious 15 inches captured in a second, was like going on a journey. Listening to Plowright and his programmes would be useful for budding podcasters who've never experienced the limitations and yet expansiveness of analogue recording.

*Heart and Soul* on the World Service this week was an exemplar of another kind of radio feature, using not sound pictures but



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the telling impact of voices talking straight to mike. Patricia Raybon and her daughter Alana were telling Mike Wooldridge how they have learnt to live with their profound religious differences after years of conflict. Patricia is a deeply committed Christian, who brought Alana up in Colorado to attend church, say grace before meals, believe in the salvation of Christ. 'It's the definition of who I am,' she said, 'and it defines everything I do.'

As a teenager, though, Alana found herself uncomfortable at church services and then came across verses in the Bible that said: 'Slaves should obey their master.' As the daughter of an African-American mother, she was horrified. At first she joined the Nation of Islam and began wearing the hijab. She said it made her feel 'safer' if she dressed modestly. For Patricia, though, it produced echoes of discrimination on the school bus, when no one would sit next to

*Alana joined the Nation of Islam and began wearing the hijab. She said it made her feel 'safer'*

her, or on family picnics, when the white families would leave as soon as the black families arrived at the site. She feared that if she went out with Alana in her hijab she would get the same glances. Then Alana met her future husband, also a Muslim convert, and Patricia realised there was no possibility of Alana giving up her Muslim faith. They could not talk without arguing.

Now, though, they've published a book, letters written to each other that put down in words the things that matter most to each of them. For the first time they have been able to talk to each other about what they believe without coming to an impasse, hitting that wall of incomprehension. 'We've been forced to confront each other's beliefs,' says Patricia. The process has been so cathartic that Alana has moved back to Colorado and is living with her parents. They continue to say grace before meals to God while their daughter, son-in-law and three grandchildren pray to Allah — at the same table. A family story told with insight, economy and purpose.

*Turbulence* on Radio 4 (produced by Justine Willett) is a series of 12 short stories by David Szalay, all set on plane journeys. Not much liking air travel, I was intrigued by the premise and the first story did not disappoint, capturing that altered state which being cooped up in a silver-lined capsule seems to invoke. Read by Sara Kestelman, it takes us on a short-haul flight from London to Madrid as a mother leaves behind her son, who's been ill with cancer. She begins to feel profoundly uneasy as the plane leaves the ground, 'the tightly packed fabric of the world seemed to loosen... Her thoughts started to seem like things that were actually happening.' We have to wait a whole week before we can fly on from Madrid to Dakar.



'Pit Brow Lasses', 2015, by David Venables

## Mining art Girls from the black stuff Laura Gascoigne

### Breaking Ground – Women of the Northern Coalfields

Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland, until 24 March 2019

'They did not look like women, or at least a stranger new to the district might easily have been misled by their appearance, as they stood together in a group, by the pit's mouth.' As opening sentences go this is a cracker, but few modern readers of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *That Lass O'Lowrie*'s get far beyond it because the novel's characters speak in a Lancashire dialect that makes Mark Twain's Huck Finn sound like a Harvard preppy. In real life, though, it wasn't the Lancashire pit girls' lingo that put contemporaries off so much as their costume. For these

'pit brow lasses', as they were known around Wigan, strutted about in the Victorian era wearing what the *Manchester Guardian* fastidiously described as 'the article of clothing which women ought only to wear in a figure of speech'. Trousers!

The last pit brow lass retired in the 1970s, but for more than a century before that the women of the northern coalfields had pulled their financial weight by working at the pit mouth emptying coal tubs, sorting coal and shifting it on to wagons. Until the passing of the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act, women had worked down the mines themselves as 'hurriers' hauling coal to the pit bottom, stripped to the waist like their menfolk when the heat was unbearable. Curiously, toplessness seems to have caused less offence to Victorian sensibilities than trousers which, as Lord Ashley reported during the parliamentary inquiry leading to the Act, were sometimes holed at the crotch 'by the chain passing high up between the legs... Any sight more disgustingly indecent



or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work,' he told a hushed parliament. 'No brothel can beat it.' The noble Lord was obviously an authority on brothels.

After that, women were banned from working underground, replaced with more expensive pit ponies and kicked upstairs. On the surface, of course, their masculine dress was more plainly visible and calls for them to get back in the kitchen continued. The lasses, though, were having none of it. In 1887, supported by the Mayoress of Wigan, a 22-strong deputation marched on parliament in their work clothes to meet the Home Secretary. Greeted by the press as an 'invasion of colliery Amazons', they successfully defended their right to work.

With the current clamour for more statues of women in public places, the pit brow lasses would seem ideal candidates for a bronze group à la 'Burghers of Calais' outside parliament. But for now these pioneers of female empowerment and unisex clothing are being recognised in a small exhibition at the Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland.

*The women's toplessness seems to have caused less offence to Victorian sensibilities than their trousers*

Opened last year in the turreted gothic premises of the former Backhouse Bank on Market Place, this enterprising little gallery is the first devoted to miners' art in the country. Its images of mining life above and below ground have a gritty authenticity conspicuously missing from professional artist Henry Perlee Parker's 'Pitman at Play' (1838) on show in the lobby. The first colliery painting exhibited at the Royal Academy, it portrays the black-faced miners as an exotic race of gypsies.

To a prurient public the pit brow lasses seemed equally exotic, sensationalised in tinted photographs sold as souvenir postcards, for which the lucky sitters were paid a shilling. One example shows them posing with sieves and shovels like so many pit-head Britannias against a woodland backdrop worthy of Reynolds. Few serious artists, though, regarded them as worthy subjects. An exception was Archie Rhys Griffiths, a South Wales collier who took up painting during a miners' strike and went on to the Royal College of Art. The heroic women shouldering sacks in his 'On the Coal Tips' (1928–32) anticipate Josef Herman paintings of Welsh miners by 40 years and make his 'Mother and Child' (c.1968–69) hanging opposite look sentimental. Griffiths died in obscurity; the public preferred sentiment.

It has been left to a living artist, David Venables, to immortalise these women for posterity. A descendant of Lancashire miners, Venables set off to Wigan in the 1960s in search of his roots and witnessed some of the last lasses at work. Three years ago he came across his sketches and painted the retro-

spective double portrait 'Pit Brow Lasses' (2015). Its subjects come across as far more human than the shovel-toting Amazons of the souvenir postcards. Like 'Letting Go' (2015), his painting of a colliery pigeon-fancier in the permanent collection, 'Pit Brow Lasses' is less a portrait of two women than an elegy for a lost way of life.

## Television Novel gazing James Walton

At the beginning of *Barneys, Books and Bust Ups: 50 Years of the Booker Prize* (BBC4), Kirsty Wark's voiceover promised us 'a tale of fierce rivalries, bruised egos and, most importantly of all, countless brilliant books'. In the event, though — as the title perhaps suggested — those countless brilliant books proved rather less important to the programme than Kirsty's edifying words had led us to believe. At one point, it noted in passing that *Midnight's Children* is a very good novel. At another, it lamented the melancholy fact that Booker 'voting intrigue and judges' fallings-out' have sometimes overshadowed 'the books themselves'. But once those duties were discharged, it soon got back to its main business of providing an enjoyably gossipy whisk through half a century of fierce rivalries, bruised egos, voting intrigue and judges' fallings-out.

When the prize started in 1969, it went largely unnoticed outside the publishing world. Luckily, it didn't have to wait long for its first controversy — or its second. In 1971, the chair of judges, Malcolm Muggeridge, denounced the novels he was obliged to read as 'pornography' and resigned. The following year, the Marxist writer John Berger used his winner's speech to attack the Booker company's exploitation of the Caribbean in its sugar business, and to announce that he'd share the prize money with the British Black Panthers. Before long, newspapers realised that they had a reliable, if unlikely new source of scandal — much of it supplied by the prize's administrator Martyn Goff, who, when not holding stern meetings to find out who was leaking all those behind-the-scenes stories to the press, was leaking all those behind-the-scenes stories to the press.

By the 1980s, the Booker had become what it remains: a rare chance for a literary writer to become both an instant celebrity and an instant millionaire. 'I felt like a rock star,' the 1991 winner Ben Okri told us on Monday with a mixture of bewilderment and glee (but mostly glee). 'You sell and sell and sell and sell — everywhere,' said 2007's victor Anne Enright in much the same tone.

Not surprisingly, then, the awards dinner itself is a pretty nervy experience for the shortlisted authors. 'I started drinking early,'

said John Banville who was shortlisted in 1989 — and by 'early' he meant at 8.30 a.m. More than 12 hours later, as the announcement approached, he slurringly inquired of his wife what he should say if he won. 'Can you manage "thank you"?' she asked. Unfortunately, Banville didn't think he could. Fortunately, he didn't win anyway.

But of course, what really made the Booker famous is what makes everything else famous too: being on television. 'TV added new excitement,' said Kirsty. 'It turned the Booker into a national event.' To prove it, Monday's programme then served up an entertaining anthology of Booker's top TV moments, including Selina Scott (the *Blue Peter* elephant of televised literary coverage) asking judge Angela Carter the searching question 'Who are you?' and chair of judges Fay Weldon how many of the books she'd read.

Which only made it all the more mysterious — and possibly a bit craven — that Monday's programme didn't so much as mention the fact that the Booker isn't televised any more, let alone wonder why. Instead, when this year's winner was being announced on

*Selina Scott asked judge Angela Carter the searching question 'Who are you?'*

Tuesday night, BBC4 was showing a repeat of a documentary on New Zealand geography.

Happily (contrived link alert), the documentary in question was immediately followed by what looks like being a terrific new drama series. *There She Goes* is written by Shaun Pye and based on his own experience of having a child with severe learning difficulties — which in this case partly take the form of having an uncanny ability to find new and imaginative ways of testing her parents' patience to breaking point.

In the opening episode, nine-year-old Rosie limbered up with some mild violence and a spot of lying in the middle of the road during a walk to the park. By bedtime, however, she was causing mum Emily to shout down to her husband, 'Simon, Rosie's hidden another poo' — and as her parents searched for it (it eventually showed up in her doll's house) running downstairs to pour food all over the floor and milk all over her head.

David Tennant and Jessica Hynes play the parents and, predictably enough, both are great. Tennant's Simon alternates wearily between despair and a determination not to despair, often consoling himself with the darkest of gallows humour. Hynes is particularly good in the flashback scenes to the months following Rosie's birth, when she knew something was badly wrong, but was made to feel she was just being a neurotic mother. Pye's writing, meanwhile, does a beautifully nuanced job of capturing all the conflicting emotions that you might imagine — and some that you might not.



## Exhibitions

## Poster boy

Claudia Massie

**Pin-Ups: Toulouse-Lautrec and the Art of Celebrity**

National Galleries of Scotland, until 20 January 2019

You don't need to be much of a psychologist to understand the trajectory of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Born to aristocratic first cousins, in a family never shy of consanguinity, he was blighted by congenital deformities and weaknesses. When his brittle legs broke in his teenage years, they stopped growing altogether, leaving the adult Lautrec tiny as well as weird-looking, with his heavy lips and thick-lidded eyes.

Fortunately, Montmartre was waiting for him, offering a boozy and bosomy refuge from his peculiar family and woeful self-regard. In the dance halls of the capital, Lautrec found his people, and in his art they found themselves. His paintings tell the

*In the dance halls of the capital, Lautrec found his people, and in his art they found themselves*

story best, all those fleshy whores lying in bed or lining up for medical examinations. Elsewhere, twisty-faced café patrons and performers are illuminated by a new, acidic, electric glare. But it is Lautrec's posters, and their famous subjects, that take centre-stage in this exhibition.

Fin-de-siècle Paris was a fine time to be a proto-celebrity. An expanding entertainment industry had allied itself with innovative printmaking techniques and visionary artists, plastering seductive posters across the streets and making a generation of performers fabulously famous. Into this mix stepped Lautrec, lord of the blank space and the bold line, to become the belle époque's most sought-after poster designer.

He wasn't the first, though. The daddy was Jules Chéret, the original master of poster lithography, who preceded Lautrec by decades and was receiving the Légion d'honneur in 1890 while his successor was getting whacked on absinthe and contracting syphilis down the brothel. Chéret's work kicked like a cancan dancer, his radical use of large-scale, colourful pictures and hand-drawn wording leaping out from the reams of letterpress posters that then bedecked the streets. His posters had an eye-catching vim that others, including the impeccable stylist Alexandre Steinlen, would embrace and run away with.

Where Lautrec exceeds these artists is in his characterisation. Chéret's posters were lively, effective adverts, but there was no individuality in his dancers, no back story, delight or despair evident at the edges. Lau-



Going to the wall: 'Jane Avril', 1899, by Henri Toulouse-Lautrec

trec, all too aware of the often seedy reality behind these images, made his poster boys and girls breathe and sneer.

Many of the works on display here are remarkably familiar. I have had copies of several on my walls; you probably have too. But it is still quite something to see them all together as original, full-size prints, supplemented by biographical expositions of the central characters.

It's easy, these days, to overlook the fame and significance of Jane Avril, Yvette Guilbert or Aristide Bruant, but they were the

celebrities of their age, Third Republic Lady Gagas, as influential as any YouTuber. Self-promotion, then as now, was essential, but while today's celebs have social media and *Strictly*, the icons of the dance halls had to be seen on street posters and in the collectable print editions issued by publishers with an eye for the financial benefits of celebrity endorsement.

Stars would collaborate with chosen artists to produce limited-edition folios, such as the one shown here featuring Yvette Guilbert, which would be pounced upon by a



public hungry for printmaking. When new runs of posters hit the streets, fans were known to slip out in the night to ease them off the walls. Posters were big news and big business — for performers, impresarios, publishers and artists alike.

Lautrec produced the most arresting designs of the era while frequently making the stars look appalling. The Yvette Guilbert of those print editions is a sort of goose-woman, with a too-long neck, a tight slit of a

*Lautrec produced the most arresting designs of the era while frequently making the stars look appalling*

mouth and empty eyes. It is testament to the celebrity status of Lautrec himself that the stars kept coming back for more.

The first poster Lautrec made for the Moulin Rouge, which dominates this show in all its two-metre-high glory, sets the tone for them all. He compresses the stage into three layers of silhouette, a nod to the stylistic simplicity of Japanese *ukiyo-e* printmaking. But, by making her the lightest element, he draws the eye to the dancer, La Goulue (the Glutton, so called because of her fondness for downing everyone else's drinks), who is in mostly cancan dress. Behind her lurch the shadow-play figures of a crowd and in the foreground a strange, etiolated man in

a top hat dances. This is Valentin le désossée (the boneless), a performer as famous as the Glutton but, as portrayed here, he might as well be an appraising bourgeois punter.

It's all a long way from Chéret's wholesome good cheer but, for a while anyway, it made Lautrec happier than usual, and it made others rich and famous. And, more than 100 years later, we're still sticking the posters on our walls and talking about Guilbert and La Goulue. Will Gaga last as long?

## Opera Top scorer *Richard Bratby*

### **Porgy and Bess**

Coliseum, in rep until 17 November

### **The Merry Widow**

Grand Theatre, Leeds, and touring until 17 November

Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* springs to life fully formed, and pulls you in before a word has been sung. A whirlwind flourish; the hectic bustle of violins and xylophone, and then a quick fade into an image of a woman cradling a child and 'Summertime',

the very first number we hear sung. The aria's fame actually serves the drama. The thrill of musical recognition as the curtain rises on an unfamiliar world is replaced by astonishment at the dramatic instinct that allows Gershwin to expend a melody like that before his story has even started, in the certain knowledge that what follows can, and absolutely will, live up to what for any composer other than Gershwin would be a once-in-a-lifetime inspiration.

English National Opera's new production is one of those occasions where everything goes right — or at least, it feels as though it does while you're in there, which is very nearly the same thing. Director James Robinson has grasped two essentials: firstly, that with an opera which is still far from being a repertoire piece, it doesn't pay to muck about with the setting and spirit. And secondly, that in a barn like the Coliseum, you'd better fill that stage and put on a show. Michael Yeargan's huge revolving set sketches in the balconies and tin roofs of Catfish Row while leaving its population clearly on display. Under Robinson's direction that community is vividly, affectionately observed.

But god, that score — can it ever have been realised better than this? The choral sound is what really slays you, woven into Gershwin's orchestral fabric, but rearing up at climactic moments to a massed cry

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Photo: Gabrieli, performing at 'Music in the Cotswolds' 2018, ©Bill Knight.

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TRISTAM KENTON

*Thrilling, heartbreaking music drama — you need to see it: Sarah-Jane Lewis as Annie with the chorus in ENO's Porgy and Bess*

whose depth and weight of emotion makes the air quiver. Against the chorus, and often emerging from it, is a uniformly excellent cast. Eric Greene plays Porgy with such ferocious optimism that it shades over into something close to madness. When, deprived of his crutches, he kills Crown (Nmon Ford, whose singing had the sheen of cold steel), it's not just the bad guy who dies. After Bess leaves, and Greene's handsome baritone — so gentle and proud in 'Bess, You Is My Woman Now' — disintegrates into jagged, rust-streaked pain, the defiance of the final chorus feels desperately upsetting.

Nicole Cabell's Bess, meanwhile, reveals her vulnerability only slowly. She wears her face, and her warm, even-toned voice, like a mask — numbed by what she's endured. Her last-ditch resistance to Crown's brutality makes her final relapse into the hands of Sporting Life (a sidling, obscenely grinning Frederick Ballentine) all the more tragic. And yet you come out on a high. Perhaps the sense of hope is located in the opera's evocations of Christian belief, channelled by Gershwin into that soul-shaking choral writing and the character of Serena, whose radiant

affirmations of faith, as delivered by Latonia Moore's searchlight soprano, would have had Richard Dawkins shouting Hallelujah.

Or perhaps it's just the generosity and compassion of Gershwin's score, and the alternating dazzle and tenderness of the ENO orchestra under John Wilson. All that energy, all that style and all that loving but unobtrusive care for the music's inner voices merely served what Wilson has always insisted is his overriding artistic goal: to find

*Serena's radiant affirmations of faith would have had Richard Dawkins shouting Hallelujah*

a sound that lets the music speak. I'm not sure that every aspect of this production will revive well (the squeaky-clean costumes are presumably a concession to the co-producers at the New York Met, where audiences like their poverty to look expensive), but for now, who cares? This is thrilling, heartbreaking music drama and you need to see it.

*The Merry Widow* inhabits a different universe, but Opera North's revival of Giles Havergal's 2010 production, complete with

sparky translation by Kit Hesketh-Harvey and an embassy ball's worth of tiaras, epaulettes and moustache wax, proved some of the same points in a very different way. Not because the cast is stellar (though they're all engaging and listenable), but because they seek and usually find the precise balance of sweet and sour that story and score demand. It's mostly marzipan, obviously, but in playing 'Vilja' as a sort of intimate flashback, Maire Flavin's Hanna and Quirijn de Lang's Danilo became just believable enough to stop the whole Ruritanian confection from floating off in a champagne bubble.

Martin André conducted the Opera North orchestra with such colour and *schwung* that it practically became a character in its own right. The only misfire was at the end, where Havergal brings down the curtain on the final waltz, rather than the altogether fizzier finale that Lehar wrote, which served here for the curtain call. You can see why Havergal thought it might work: every musical instinct tells you that it's wrong. As with Gershwin, so with Lehar. When you're dealing with a master, it makes sense to trust them.



## Music

### Conduct unbecoming *Norman Lebrecht*

The morning after the first night of Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides* in May 1995, I received a call from Otto Klemperer's daughter.

'Tell me,' said Lotte, 'is it true that, in Mr Harwood's play, the denazification attorney addressed Dr Furtwängler as "Wilhelm", or even "Willi"?'

I said something in reply about dramatic licence and the interrogator being, erm, an American.

'No one,' thundered Lotte Klemperer down the phone, 'ever called my father "Otto".'

Appearances meant everything to the generation of great conductors that survived the Nazi era, whether as anxious refugees or, in the case of the Berlin Philharmonic chief, as a cultural poster boy for a criminal regime. After the defeat of Hitler, Furtwängler argued that he had given selfless service to his fellow Germans, keeping alive the Geist of Bach and Beethoven. 'People never needed more, never yearned more to hear Beethoven and his message of freedom and human love than precisely these Germans, who had to live under Himmler's terror,' he told the tribunal. 'I do not regret having stayed with them.'

Furtwängler was not a member of the Nazi party and there is evidence that he helped a number of Jewish musicians to escape the Gestapo, and the country. His lofty self-exculpation was rubber-stamped by the western allies who did not want this central figure to go conducting for the Russians in East Berlin. It has since been swallowed by a slew of biographers all the way down to Harwood who, having raised a quizzical eyebrow in his script, let old Willi off with no more than a finger-wag.

Now, out of the blue, a letter has turned up that shows Furtwängler in a less noble light. The letter is written by the eminent pianist Artur Schnabel to his secret American lover (which may be why it took so long to turn up). Schnabel, who was forced to leave Germany, recounts a summer's evening he spent with Furtwängler in Italy shortly after he was cleared to resume conducting in 1947.

'Last night Furtwängler and wife came to see me,' Schnabel reports to Mary Virginia Foreman. 'It was partly pleasant, partly opposite. So far it seems to me that these Germans cannot be helped, nor can they help themselves. He demonstrated the same old blending of arrogance, cowardice, and self-pity.' Schnabel, the first to record the 32 Beethoven sonatas, was one of few living musicians whom Furtwängler acknowl-

edged as an intellectual equal and whose opinion he valued.

Schnabel continues: 'After the first "world war" the German leaders circulated as facts what obviously had been fake. For instance: that they had lost the war only because the home front had stabbed the army in the back. The Germans had no guilt whatsoever... Now Furtwängler went as far last night (he got terribly excited [sic], hysterical, shouted and roared), as to say that he has never known any Nazi. And that Germans and Nazis are not only absolutely different beings but hostile to each other.'

Imagine that. Furtwängler had been made vice-president of the Reichsmusikkammer in 1933 by Joseph Goebbels and had conducted often in Hitler's presence. I have a photograph of him extending a hand to be shaken as Hitler approaches him after a concert, and another of him standing with the Führer at Bayreuth. 'Never known any Nazi'? Take it from the top, Willi.

Schnabel hears his guest complain that 'millions of Germans are now murdered daily, and that the whole world shows its decadence by its total lack of charity'. Furtwängler goes on to admit 'without having

*The letter shatters the image of Furtwängler as a man who did his best for music in terrible times*

been asked, that he has had quite a good time during the "regime".'

This letter, from an impeccable source with no axe to grind, is a massive iconoclasm. It shatters the long-held image of Wilhelm Furtwängler as a man who did his best for music in terrible times, and replaces it with a man in denial of his central role in the Nazi cultural myth, a willing executioner of music for the greater glory of the regime.

He had a good time in the Reich, he admits. Any pity he feels is not for Hitler's victims but, first, for himself, and second for Germans now living under Allied occupation. Furtwängler, seen through Schnabel's eyes, is a shoddy hypocrite who, like Germans as a whole, is unwilling to admit a scintilla of guilt for his complicity with Hitler. He is not a saviour of great art. He's just a very slippery character.

The fall of the Furtwängler myth is no small crash. A conductor of spiritual mien who conjured an aura of religious solemnity in his concerts, he is a role model for the Abbado-Barenboim generation and a persona of undying fascination. More than anyone, he established the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra as the acme of interpretative legitimacy. Topple Furtwängler, and the German tradition loses its authority. The emperor concerto may need new clothes.

## THE LISTENER

### Cypress Hill: *Elephants on Acid*



*Grade: A+*

Easily album title of the year, maybe album of the year. A true bravura offering from these supposedly tired old men. Cypress Hill are now in comfortable middle age, almost as old as me, ffs. But they were ever ludicrously inventive and idiosyncratic, right back to that first album in 1991, which wrote the template for many lesser and even more profane hip hop gods.

This one is mired in psychedelia, as even Charles Moore might have guessed from the title. There are very knowing nods to, especially, early Jefferson Airplane — although the guitar sounds more like Barry Melton than Jorma Kaukonen — and Sly and the Dead and Moby Grape. So it's kinda like the Isley Bros great 1971 album *Givin' It Back*, in which a clever and undoubtedly woke soul band covered cool left-wing whitey rock of that rather loveable age, which is no bad thing. But in its clever reimagining of this dated stuff it reminds me even more of Beck's debut *Mellow Gold*, for its wit, its laudably perverse out-there-ness, its utter confidence in what it is doing.

It kicks off with sitars, synths and a gong. Segues into the fabulous muezzin wail of 'Band of Gypsies' (remember them, you Hendrix stoners?), with an acid guitar cutting through the mix. Then the electronic nastiness of 'Put Em In The Ground' before the exquisite 'Jesus Was A Stoner' lowers the tempo a little. There's even room for a little ur-Tom Waits on 'LSD Interval', before the magnificently inane and catchy 'Oh Na Na' kicks in, followed by another Airplane homage 'Thru The Rabbit Hole'. All wonderful. There's life in these gentlemen yet.

— Rod Liddle



# 'I should just shut up'

Dominic West talks to *Melissa Kite* about #MeToo and the perils of discussing politics

Lounging confidently on the sofa of a Soho hotel suite, Dominic West has been beaming at me, but now his handsome smile dissolves into a hurt look.

I have just asked him to explain why he, in common with so many actors, feels the need to voice his political views.

'I should just pipe down and carry on acting?' he asks, leaning forward to pour tea. I don't like to be rude, so I raise my eyebrows and shrug as the most polite way of saying, 'Well, it's an idea.'

West, who is giving interviews to promote his new film *Colette*, has also made a campaign video calling for a second EU referendum. In it, he warns people that Britain won't be able to make trade deals with America, Turkey or India on its own. 'You can't cut a deal with these strongmen and their giant economies. You do what they dictate,' he tells the camera, pulling a haggard face, rather like in those charity appeals.

I try to explain to him what it is like to be a member of the Brexit-voting unwashed masses, going to see a film and wishing you didn't have to sit there remembering that the actors on the screen in front of you in real life regard you as sadly mistaken, pathetically hoodwinked — because that's the Remain narrative, isn't it? I tell him that we Brexit oiks are more than half his audience. Does he not want us to enjoy his movies?

'What, you're not going to watch a film because Remainers are in it?' he laughs incredulously.

I tell him no, but actors give us escapism. We value that highly. So when an actor intervenes in politics, it takes away from our ability to suspend our disbelief. As I watched *Colette*, the first thing I had to do was battle out of my head invading images of West and his co-star Keira Knightley appearing in referendum propaganda.

Knightley is enchanting as the sexually adventurous French novelist who writes under her domineering husband's pen name. But I wish I didn't have the image of her in my head doing a conceited turn in that awful ad calling on young people to vote, entitled 'Don't Fuck My Future'.

'The sensible thing is to realise you exist in the public eye as an entertainer but not as anything political,' he back-pedals.

'The clever ones don't say anything, you don't know what they're thinking. I wish I

could do the same. I go against my instincts to be just an actor. I have views and...'

He looks wistfully into the middle distance before declaring: 'I should just shut up. I'm sure it's counterproductive to my career.'

West is proud of his collaboration with Knightley bringing to the screen the life of the writer Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, who ghost-wrote the semi-autobiographical *Claudine* novels for her husband Henry Gauthier-Villars, known as Willy. Together they became the toast of turn-of-the-century Paris as Willy enjoyed rave reviews for the books and engaged in outrageous promotional stunts.

PHOTO BY ROBBY KLEIN/GETTY IMAGES



'I go against my instincts to be just an actor'

West is fabulous as the rumbustious Willy, and the film has been named a possible Oscar contender. It is the dynamic between him and Knightley that makes it work. Their portrayal of the couple is touching because they do not lapse into an easy characterisation of Willy as exploiter and Colette as victim, but rather evoke a meeting of minds between a great showman and a quiet country girl who wrote beautifully nuanced erotic fiction but who might never have reached an audience had she not married a loveable conman. For me, the film

explores the timely idea of how the exploited might exploit the exploiter, and West does not disavow me of this.

'She used him for what she could get. I don't think she was ever a victim. She used him to get the hell out of Burgundy and as a passport to literary Paris. And when he ceased to be of use to her, she ditched him pretty sharpish. So the exploitation is certainly not on one side.'

I ask him whether there are parallels with women now making historical accusations of a sexual nature against powerful men. Like Colette, they might be said to have had the best out of the situation.

'It's certainly true of Colette,' he says tactfully, before adding 'and probably true of anyone who seeks fame and fortune. Anyone who is prepared to sell their personal life for public consumption is bound to end up exploiting somebody if only themselves.'

The obvious thing would be to promote the film as the latest great exposé of misogyny down the ages. But West says: 'I did feel a certain affection for the character of Willy, whether that is because he's familiar to us as the chauvinistic old uncle. There's a sense that we relish the political incorrectness, the defiance of what might be seen as quite rigid causes of outrage now.'

'It's what the French women were saying when they came out en masse against the #MeToo movement: we want men to fulfil their traditional roles.'

Well, there's plenty of that in *Colette*. When Willy locks his wife in her room and orders her to write it is presented as all rather raunchy. 'I think it's essential if we are going to talk about the story of a courageous woman to have her meet her match in a man and spar with a strong man, otherwise she's not as interesting as she could be. She loved, most women do, the difference between the sexes and the antagonism that goes on.'

I ask him if we have gone backwards with our modern moralising, if people were freer in belle époque Paris.

'It was much more permissive than we are today. The norm [now] is a sense of outrage and dogmatic moralistic confinement. I think social media is a huge catalyst and organ for that outrage.'

He blames the noise of the Twitter-sphere on 'a need for people to be noticed, to show off, for mediocrity to be given attention. It tends to come from a voice you wouldn't otherwise listen to. It's hard to ignore outrage. Outrage is the refuge of mediocrity. Outrage stifles the sort of freedom we are talking about.'

He is hitting his stride, and I think what a pity it is he doesn't make campaign films that try to change hearts and minds on this subject.

*Colette will be in cinemas in January 2019.*



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## NOTES ON...

## Davenports Magic

By Mark Mason

It's a very fitting place for a magic shop. Hidden away in the maze of pedestrian tunnels that lead from Covent Garden to Charing Cross station, Davenports certainly takes some finding. But that's to the good — a complete absence of passing trade means they no longer have to stock stink bombs and novelties, as they did in their old location opposite the British Museum. These days Davenports concentrate solely on the proper stuff. The shelves boast Sven-gali decks and thumb tips, gimmicks like the Raven (it's a beauty), and instructional DVDs and books by everyone from David Devant to Roy Walton.

If those names are familiar to you, you're probably a pro. The business has been supplying magicians with the tools of their trade since Lewis Davenport first set up shop in 1898. But if the names mean nothing, don't worry — you're still very welcome to come in and begin your journey of discovery. You can turn up, have a trick or two demonstrated to you by the staff, then purchase the props (and secrets) to take home. Remember the mantra: 'Practise and practise until you are sore — then you are ready to practise once more.'

Or you could attend one of the regular classes run for both adults and children. The latter, says Bill Davenport (Lewis's



Tricks of the trade...

great-grandson), are 'always the most difficult audience. You can show a trick to an engineer with several PhDs and they'll try to work it out logically, and almost certainly fail. But kids have that wonderful way of thinking that breaks all the rules. They're the ones who'll catch you out.'

Chatting to Bill, I nervously make a confession: I love telling people the secrets behind tricks. I know a dozen or so, using everyday objects and requiring no great sleight of hand. There's an absolutely baffling mindreading effect with a pair of books

— you can even do it at someone's house with their own books, so they know there's no cheating (or at least none they can spot). The joy comes in sharing the secret, rather than you want to share any great joke you hear. I've always disliked people who insist on showing you a trick but then won't reveal how they did it. That's when magic puts distance between people, rather than bringing them together.

But of course I'd never reveal any secrets in print. And I've no problem with people wanting to be mystified. Even Bill has that desire sometimes. 'I went to see David Copperfield, and he did his flying illusion. For a minute or two I sat there trying to spot the wires and couldn't. Then I realised I'd enjoy the experience much more if I simply relaxed and took it on its own terms. That's what magic should be about.'

I once watched a 'busking' magician in a London pub entertain the people at the table next to mine. One woman loved a particular card trick so much she gave him a fiver. After he'd left, and as they were still chatting about the trick, I asked: 'If I tell you how he did it will you give me a fiver too?' She went mental. 'Don't you dare ruin it for me!'

It's people like that who are going to keep Davenports in business for a very long time to come.

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*It is just us in Gazelle, us and the well-groomed Narnian and his multiple handsome assistants*  
— Tanya Gold, p62

# LIFE

## High life

Taki



*New York*

There is fear and loathing in this city, with men looking over their shoulders for the thought police and hard-eyed women roaming the television studios with lists of sexual predators. There is also dread over the latest exports from the city's youth detention centres, thanks to Kerry Kennedy, daughter of Robert Kennedy and ex-wife of Governor Cuomo, who is now busy bailing out criminals who cannot afford bail through the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights foundation, of which she is president.

This is one hell of a city. While the criminals are being released, the innocent (presumed) are losing their jobs, having been accused of sexual harassment. The 500lb gorilla in the room, of course, is the R-word. An accusation of racism in New York or California is a death sentence for one's career — even worse than being accused of grabbing someone's breasts. Shock horror.

Ron Darling was a famous major-league baseball pitcher for the New York Mets and is now a broadcaster. He looks western but is of Chinese descent. He used the term 'a chink in the armour' to describe a Yankee pitcher's wild performance. The player in question is Japanese. Shock horror all over again. Darling was threatened with career-ending penalties unless he grovelled, which he did. A commonly used metaphor almost cost him his career. See what I mean about fear and loathing? Imagine what would happen to you if you inadvertently brushed against a Chinese woman's breasts. Twenty-five to life most likely.

And it gets worse. Some time ago, Doug Adler, a broadcaster for ESPN, described Venus Williams's forays to the net during a tennis match as 'putting the guerilla effect on'. He was accused, by know-nothings on Twitter, of likening her to a gorilla, and fired. What he had actually done was compliment Williams for suddenly going

to the net. Adler was out of a job and now works on a different network after a hiatus of almost two years.

But the best is yet to come: a veteran TV commentator Brian Davis was recently suspended, then dumped for good, for complimenting a basketball player's moves by saying on the air: 'Westbrook's out of his cotton-pickin' mind.' And there is even more to fear if your name is Lee, as in Robert E. Lee, the greatest American that has ever lived as far as I'm concerned. ESPN removed an Asian-American announcer by the name of Robert Lee, on account of his name, because he was covering a football game at the University of Virginia (my alma mater), Charlottesville. This makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Big Brother look like an Abbott and Costello movie. What will they come up with next against the hated white man?

In the meantime, rappers with strange names that make no sense use the N-word and women-denigrating lyrics to their heart's content, and no one dares say a word. Insiders now use the name *Ebony Fair* because of the magazine's extensive use of black models and of black entertainers. (Meanwhile, the circulation has dramatically dropped, and advertisers are next.)

So where will all this lead? I for one no longer go to nightclubs because there are no clubs left for normal people. The Boom Boom Room is still OK, but anywhere else is a bad joke. Freaks, drag queens, street hustlers, parasites and pretty boys for sale are the norm. The last time a lady went to a nightclub was during the late 1960s.

Last Saturday night, Michael Mailer gave a dinner for me at his place in Brooklyn Heights overlooking the Statue of Liberty and the waters that Washington crossed when he escaped General Howe's encirclement back in 1777. All the men were friends: a screenwriter, an artist, a fund manager, Michael and little ol' me. The girls were

beautiful and young. Two of them in particular were to die for. We played a game where everyone said who they would love to have had dinner with, and who was the person they most admired who they actually have dined with. It was a lot of fun and the men were a bit more interesting than the women. One beauty said she'd love to have dined with her grandmother.

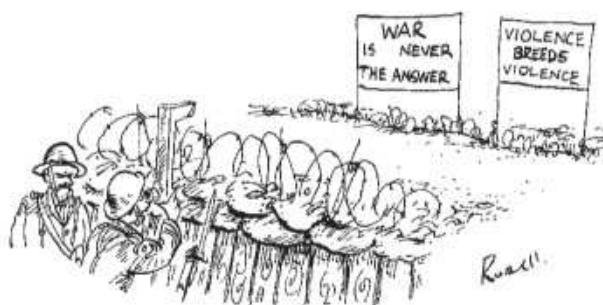
Afterwards a couple of the ladies left. We were surprised but the booze kept us jolly and the conversation flowed. Then the prettiest of them all, who had stayed behind, told us why: 'You boys are all good friends, make jokes with each other and enjoy each other's company. You not once addressed us and our needs.' Gee whizz, I never actually thought they had any needs, but then I'm a selfish son-of-a-bitch. The one who stayed behind was sitting next to me so I addressed her: 'The truth is that throughout the evening all I did was think of you, and how much I wanted to bed you. But of course I would never dare say anything of the kind. This is the truth and nothing but.' She gave me a wan smile, but the men did not look best pleased. Truth will get you nowhere nowadays.

## Low life

Jeremy Clarke



East of London the Thames broadens dramatically to a surreal waste of mud and sewage-coloured water lined with shipping-container dumps. Here, a row of expensive apartment blocks commands the view as if it were the Loire valley. At 11.30 on the morning of the Friday before last, anyone looking idly out of a window of one of these might have raised an astonished eyebrow. For in the water below, manoeuvring strenuously against an ebb tide and a Pentecostal wind to position her stern against a shipping buoy, was a beautiful, red-sailed, century-old Thames sailing barge. Crowding her deck, moreover, and enterprisingly clad in tweed and waxed cotton, some wearing ties, was a curious assembly of passengers. It



*'The enemy are virtue-signalling to us, sir.'*



would have taken a very wild guess to identify them as the *Spectator* Wine Club, but if told the guess was correct, our observer mightn't have been too surprised.

If our observer made up in emotional intelligence for what he or she lacked in aesthetic sensibility, he or she might have perceived that although it was almost noon, none of them had yet had a drink. Nothing you could quite put your finger on — an anxious rub of the chin here, a furtive glance at the watch there, and perhaps proportionately more of them given over to silent, pensive contemplation than would be seen, say, among an equivalent boatload of Chinese tourists.

And if our observer had kept looking, he would have seen a rope finally secure the barge to the buoy and the *Spectator* Wine Club break out guns and ammunition, including over and under shotguns, a pump-action shotgun and a blunderbuss. Was this England's Fort Sumter moment, he or she might have wondered? Certainly, if the first shots of the second English civil war were shortly to be loosed off by the *Spectator* Wine Club, there was a poignant yet apt poetry in their choice of transport, weapons, target and date — Demosthenes' birthday. And as the *Spectator* Wine Club stood to arms, then presented, and the old Thames barge's stern fairly bristled

*The lunch, I now learned, was in  
my honour, and everyone present  
had paid £250 to be there*

with enormous-calibre gun barrels, these thoughts might have caused our observer to feel anxious for his person and hideous property.

But if our observer had courageously stayed to witness the first volley, he would have laughed. It was clay pigeons and yellow balloons we were firing at, and we couldn't have hit Diane Abbott's backside at five paces, not even with the blunderbuss. I would say in mitigation, however, that some of us were gagging for a drink so badly that we couldn't concentrate.

At last a head appeared through a hatch in the deck and called us down into the hold for lunch. The lunch, I now learned, was in my honour, and everyone present had paid £250 to be there. Incredible. Now I really needed a drink. Happily, the moment our feet touched the planking in the wood-pannelled dining room, the boar was released. Gin and tonics and French 75s were rapidly handed out and downed in two, three at the most, as we took our places at two long dining tables. And from that point on, glasses of wine came at me from all directions. The glasses were numbered. The numbers could be matched to a wine list next to my plate and there was a pencil and a sheet of paper for tasting notes. At Greenwich, just before boarding, I had lost my mind on the tele-

phone and had metaphorically slammed it down, as I thought, on the last three years of my life. After a glass or two, a piss-up on an old Thames sailing barge, with a brand new pencil and a blank sheet of paper in front of me, and this sudden undreamed-of popularity, seemed a marvellous start to the rest of it.

'I like this number four.' 'Has anyone not got a number five yet?' 'What do you think of number three?' 'Not bad but I prefer number six. Excuse me, can we have another number six?'

Of course after number six the tables were in uproar and I didn't much care what flaming number it was I had in my hand.

Nor did I ever fully grasp whether it was the north bank of the Thames or the left that was passing by through the porthole, not even when we passed beneath Tower Bridge, which, I was told, had opened especially for us. And this feeling of privilege, popularity and marvellousness expanded, and kept on expanding, throughout the afternoon and later ashore in the city cellar wine bar, where the wine was awful but at least it was pretentious. And in the bright party pub after that, where I lost my wallet, and in the darkness of the Laylow club after that, and even at the house party after that, which, I think, was in Notting Hill, the feeling of marvellousness was expanding still.

### Auto-Analysis

Spurs shirt, slouching up to White Hart Lane,  
Gunnars scarf around the throat,  
You do not fit easily into the world.  
It is an English thing, this fitting in —  
Being a Royal Academician,  
Faber poet, party politician.

Your portrait looks uneasy in its frame.  
Your verses favour enjambment.  
Sentences outlast their stanzas.  
Keeping a foot in both camps  
Disqualifies affiliation when it comes  
To either. A fox-hunting socialist

Proves impossible to identify with.  
Happy to adapt, you want to be both  
Vampire and stake-holder at the same time.  
You cannot be a Sunni and a Shia  
Or a Zionophobic Jew. That's not going  
To get you into the enclosure.

Such quick-change artistry  
Constitutes a crime against conformity  
That is enormous, Anthony.  
Hop from track to track  
And the guardians will inform you that  
A shift in shape defeats the aim of packagery.

— Anthony Howell



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## Real life

### Melissa Kite



After months of trying not to try the exciting new version of Gmail, the exciting new version of Gmail tried me.

I hadn't realised it had happened until I opened my laptop and didn't recognise my own inbox. With the horror that creeps up in me like acid reflux to greet all technological advances, I realised that forces unknown had shut down my laptop in the night and upgraded me to the new Gmail while I was asleep.

'Dear God, no!' I screamed, as I tapped away furiously trying to change my email back to the format I could understand. But the option in settings for 'Go back to classic Gmail' had disappeared.

'No! Please no! Please! Christ, no!' I wailed like Edward Woodward in *The Wickerman* as the pagans are lighting the fire beneath him and the sacrificial chickens.

Turns out you can only resist new versions for so long by clicking the opt-out button.

They won't let you resist for ever. I don't know who They is exactly, but it's not the whizz kids in Silicon Valley getting their millennial kicks out of tormenting the over-45s with new versions of things succeeding new versions of things succeeding new versions of things. Faster than the speed of menopause these new versions of things succeed themselves. Faster than the speed of deteriorating eyesight, faster even than the expansion of bunions.

So who is They? 'They' is the people the whizz kids work for. I have thought long and hard about this and the only motive I can think of for all this new stuff is to make our attention spans so short that we are sitting ducks for whatever is coming, ultimately.

The fact that your own computer can be shut down in the night, remotely, and that something you didn't want can be downloaded on to it by a faceless entity is proof enough of something really scary.

If you don't believe me, consider this: the worst thing about the new Gmail is a series of boxes that pop up unbidden and which appear to be in no way controllable by you or me, the ironically entitled user.

The main box is very big and when it first pops up it asks you if you want the other boxes to pop up. These boxes are not called boxes by Them, they are called 'alerts'. This word alerts is used throughout the internet and is designed to show that all this is essential. One is alerted to things one needs to be alerted to.

However, if you have Facebook alerts switched on — and you will unless you have mined deep into your settings to find the underground online caves where Facebook hides the option to turn its alerts off — then you will be getting alerts popping up on your screen telling you that a person you do not know who you accepted as a Friend because you didn't want to be rude has just posted a comment about her wedding anniversary.

This is of no consequence to you at all, but you are being told about it because you have alerts.

On Gmail, I presume these alerts are designed to alert you to the fact that someone has sent you an email or replied to one you've sent them, quite as though it had not occurred to you to check your own inbox every now and then, so there is a legitimate need for your inbox to flash in front of you and interrupt what you are doing so you can react immediately to the earth-shattering occurrence of an email being sent to you, just in case death or destitution, presumably, results if you do not respond with lightning speed.

That is the ostensible purpose of these alerts. But if we assume that to date there is no known incidence anywhere in the world in which disaster has resulted from a person not being instantly made aware of a posting on Facebook about a stranger's wedding anniversary, or not receiving an email from Barclaycard about their money transfer rates for that month, let us consider what the actual purpose is.

The purpose of these alerts is to shatter your attention span, to decimate your ability to think coherently, to be absorbed in a task, to have concentration, to be present.

The new Gmail has been flashing the box about whether I want the boxes every 15 seconds for three days now. In order to resist, I have to click 'no' every time.

The only way to stop the box about whether I want the boxes is to say yes to the boxes.

I may have to accept the boxes, just to get rid of the box about the boxes. Once they have made me have the boxes, who knows what they can achieve?



Alice in Cineworld

## Bridge

### Susanna Gross

I've just come back from ten days in Orlando, but don't ask me what it's like — I haven't a clue: I never made it out of the World Center Marriott, where the Bridge World Series was taking place. Such is the bridge life: you travel the world, and see none of it.

I played in the Mixed Teams through a fog of jet lag (that's my excuse, anyway); we eventually got knocked in the Round of 64. In the Mixed Pairs, my partner Tom Paske and I failed to qualify for the A-final, but there was still a lifeline: the top three pairs (out of 112) in the B-final got a pass back to the A. We finished 4th — 0.07% behind 3rd. Ah well, I shouldn't complain — we had bad luck, but good luck too. Here, for instance:

Dealer North

All vulnerable

♠ K J 6 4 3  
♥ A Q 2  
♦ K 5  
♣ J 8 3

♠ —  
♥ J 10 8 7 3  
♦ A Q 10 9 8 6  
2  
♣ K

N	♠ 10 9 8 7 5
E	♥ 9 5
S	♦ 7
W	♣ 10 9 7 6 4

♠ A Q 2  
♥ K 6 4  
♦ J 4 3  
♣ A Q 5 2

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♣
2♦	pass	pass	2♠
3♦	pass	pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
pass	pass	dbld	pass
pass	6NT	pass	pass
dbld	pass	pass	pass

Sitting South, I bid too much. My 2♣ was game-forcing. When Tom cue-bid diamonds, I propelled us to slam. East doubled, and Tom, realising a diamond ruff was coming, cleverly removed to 6NT.

West led ♦A and a second diamond, East discarding a heart. I cashed my four top spades and three hearts, ending in dummy. East, feeling the squeeze, discarded two clubs. I now knew West's shape: 0-5-7-1. In the four-card ending, I held ♣AQ52 opposite ♠6 ♣J83. East held ♠10 ♣1097. There was no point finessing the ♣Q — even if East held the ♣K, I'd still lose a club and a spade. So I crossed my fingers and played a club to the ♣A — bingo! When West's singleton ♣K fell, the rest were mine.



## SPECTATOR WINE | JONATHAN RAY



We're with Yapp Bros this week and so popular with readers is the Domaine Gaujal, Picpoul de Pinet (1) that we've offered three previous vintages of it before, selling out every time. I'm delighted, then, to waft the 2017 under your beaks, for it's another cracker. As you know, Picpoul is the grape (known locally as 'lip-stinger') and Pinet is the place, one of just six communes on the shores of Languedoc-Roussillon's Bassin de Thau that makes this deliciously invigorating wine. Ludovic Gaujal is an 11th-generation vigneron and has conjured up a wine full of citrus freshness, herbs and nuts and with a long, satisfying, slightly savoury finish. £10.75 down from £11.75.

If, for whatever bonkers reason, I was told I could only ever drink the white wines of one part of France, I would unhesitatingly plump for those of glorious Alsace. The 2016 Léon Beyer 'Réserve Personelle' Pinot Blanc (2) comes from one of the oldest producers in the region (there since 1580 for heaven's sake) and is of textbook quality. With plenty of fresh apple'n'pear-like fruit, hints of honey, spice and an elegant creaminess, its finish is agreeably bone-dry. £12.95 down from £13.95.

The wines of Menetou-Salon in the Loire Valley might not be the well-kept secret they once were but they are still decent value when compared to Sancerre and the 2017 Domaine Jean Teiller, Menetou-Salon (3) is as good as any you will find. Patricia Teiller was a huge hit at her *Spectator* Winemaker Lunch a couple of years back and it was hard to tell whether readers were more smitten by her or her wines. Made from 100 per cent Sauvignon Blanc (certified organic), the wine is deliciously crisp and dry but with buckets of ripe, juicy fruit too. PT spent a year making wine in New Zealand and there's definitely a slight touch of Marlborough here. I simply love it. £14.95 down from £15.95.

Jason Yapp never tires of playing the 'I'm just a poor wine merchant' card and insisting that fancy vino is way beyond him as he struggles to find the wherewithal to put enough gruel on the table for his starving family. When he finds enough loose change down the back of the sofa, Jason insists he drinks wines such as the 2016 Yapp Rhône (4). If so, my heart doesn't bleed quite so much as

it might. Although a vin de table price, it's a pukka Côtes du Rhône AOC, produced expressly for Yapps to their own Grenache/Syrah blend by a forward-thinking cave cooperative in the Ardèche. It's soft, smooth,

*This is a wine that is full of citrus freshness, herbs and nuts, with a long, satisfying, slightly savoury finish*

supple and pretty much the perfect fireside red. Assuming Jason can afford the logs. £7.95 down from £8.95.

The 2016 Domaine Les Filles de Septembre 'Tradition' (5) from the Côtes de Thongues in the Languedoc-Roussillon is one of Yapps' bestsellers. A blend of Merlot, Grenache and Carignan, it has surprising complexity for so modestly priced a wine and boasts a disarming freshness along with plenty of delectably ripe and spicy fruit. It's

an ideal party wine and will do nicely when you are besieged by festively thirsty friends and neighbours. £9.90 down from £10.90.

Finally, the 2016 Domaine Girard (6) from the up-and-coming AOC region of Malepère in the west reaches of Languedoc-Roussillon. There are only 16 independent winemakers here, and Domaine Girard is up with the very best. A blend of Cabernet Franc and Merlot, it has the elegance of Bordeaux and the spice of the south. And if you consider what you might pay for a so-called Petit Chateau claret, it's an unmitigated bargain. £10.95 down from £11.95

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	2 2016 Léon Beyer Pinot Blanc, 12.5%	£167.40	£155.40	
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<b>Red</b>	4 2016 Yapp Côtes du Rhône, 13.5%	£107.40	£95.40	
	5 2016 Dme Les Filles de Septembre 'Tradition', 13.5%	£130.80	£118.80	
	6 2016 Dme Girard, Malepère, 14%vol	£143.40	£131.40	
<b>Mixed</b>	7 Sample case, two each of the above		£134.90	

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## Chess

### Ship ahoy

Raymond Keene

The Evans Gambit was invented by a British naval officer of the early part of the 19th century, Captain W.D. Evans, who invented a form of ship's lighting which was given an award by the Tsar of Russia. Captain Evans's gambit is highly suitable at club and county level and in the 19th century it captured the scalps of many great masters, including Johannes Zukertort and Adolf Anderssen. For the latter, see this week's game. In modern chess it has been employed by Garry Kasparov, and even Viswanathan Anand and world champion Magnus Carlsen have fallen victim to its intricacies.

The Evans has recently received a boost from MEGA, the Make the Evans Great Again campaign, introduced by the erudite and witty author of the @HowardStaunton Twitter feed. I highly recommend this feed for its extraordinary knowledge of chess history and tradition, and for its stunningly convincing recreation of the authentic voice and style of that Victorian chess champion and polymath Howard Staunton.

**Kolisch-Anderssen**; London 1861;  
Evans Gambit

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 dxc3 8 Qb3 Qf6 9 e5 Qg6 10 Nxc3 b5** This is in Anderssen's counterattacking style but 10 ... Nge7 is safer. **11 Nxb5 Rb8 12 Qe3 Nge7 13 Qe2 Qh5 14 Ba3 Bb7 15 Rad1 Nf5** This overlooks the following combination (see diagram 1). **16 Rxd7! Kxd7 17 e6+ Kc8** After 17 ... fxe6 18 Qxe6+ Kd8 19 Rd1+ wins. **18 exf7 Ba8 19 Nxa7+** In keeping with the swashbuckling style of the play so far but 19 Qe6+ Kb7 20 Rb1 was immediately terminal. **19 ... Nxa7 20 Qe6+ Kd8 21 Rd1+ Nd6 22 Rxd6+** Further exuberance but 22 Bxd6 actually mates far more quickly. **22 ... cxd6 23 Qxd6+ Kc8 24 Be6+ Kb7 25 Bd5+** (see diagram 2) **25 ... Qxd5** The black king is chased to its doom after 25 ...

Diagram 1

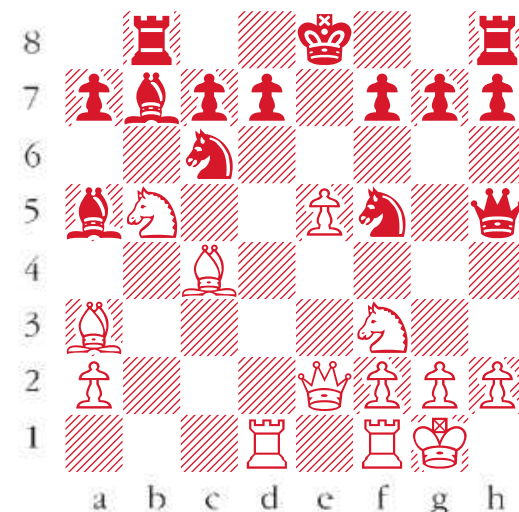
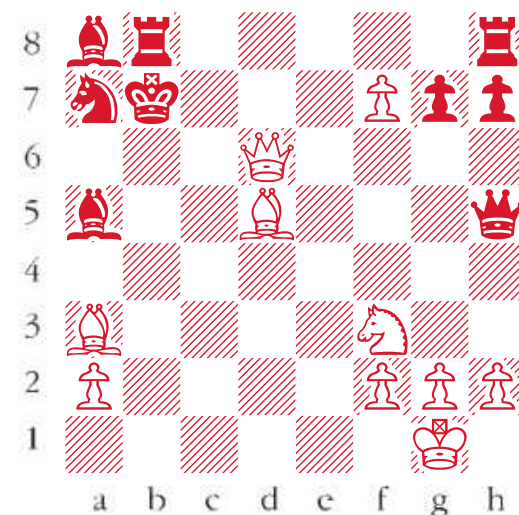


Diagram 2



**Kc8 26 Qe6+ Kc7 27 Qe7+ Kb6 28 Bc5+ Kb5 29 Nd4+ Ka4 30 Bb3+ Rxb3 31 axb3 mate. 26 Qxd5+ Ka6 27 Qc4+ Kb7 28 Qe4+ Nc6 29 Ne5 Ka6 30 Qc4+ Ka7 31 Bc5+ Rb6 32 Bxb6+ Bxb6 33 Nxc6+ Bxc6 34 Qxc6**  
**Black resigns**

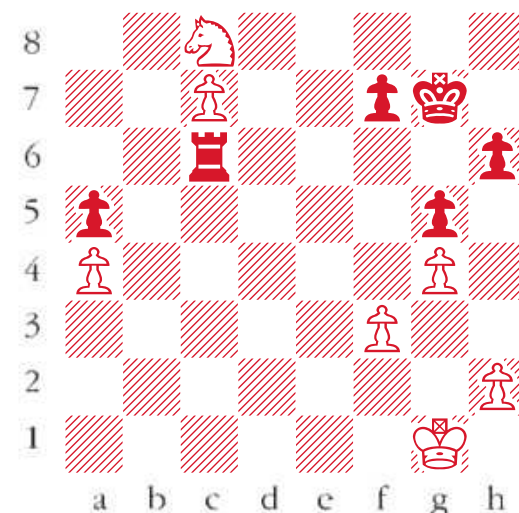
This Saturday the powerful Isle of Man tournament commences with a line-up that includes Lev Aronian, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Anish Giri, Wesley So and the two ex-world champions Vladimir Kramnik and Viswanathan Anand. This week's puzzle is taken from last year's event.

## PUZZLE NO. 528

White to play. This position is from Khmelniker-Harari, Isle of Man 2017. How did White make the most of his passed c-pawn? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 23 October 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 Qxe8+

**Last week's winner** Antony Heal, London SE23



## Competition

### Mary, Mary...

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3070 you were invited to provide a poem with the title 'When I Grow Up I Want to Be [insert name here]'.

Performance poet Megan Beech was so incensed by the abuse heaped by Twitter trolls on her idol Mary Beard that she wrote a poem called 'When I Grow Up I Want to Be Mary Beard' ('an academic and a classy lady to boot'). Which is what gave me the idea for this challenge.

Another classicist, the esteemed Peter Jones, was the object of W.J. Webster's affection. Otherwise it was an eclectic entry that ranged from the Dalai Lama to Donald Trump. Commendations to Alan Millard, Douglas G. Brown and Paul Carpenter, who wants to be Rod Liddle when he grows up. The winners earn £25 each.

I think I'd like to be the Dalai Lama —  
Someone whose purpose is to make life calmer  
Beyond the Twitter-world's fake news and drama,  
Conspiracy-mad theories of Big Pharma  
And social media's role as an alarmer;  
Like one whose peaceful habits are as armour,  
As tuned into the seasons as a farmer,  
Who sees the earth as one large diorama  
To be respected (therefore, not a harmer)  
Taking life's journey quiet as a palmer  
And focused on creation of good karma,  
Gentler and less exotic than a llama,  
As careful of all things as an embalmer,  
With courtesy and kindness a disarmer —  
Yes, there's a model, truly grown-up, charmer.  
*D.A. Prince*

When I grow up I want to be  
Beelzebub incarnate,  
the fires of Hell would set me free  
from a semi-detached in Barnet.

I'd lead all innocents astray  
and fan the flames of lust;  
depravity's the devil's way;  
it's healthy and robust.

I'd violate humanity,  
corruption would be rife,  
inciting the inanity  
of conflict and of strife.

Then strip the planet — ha! too late,  
there goes my fiendish fun,  
the world turned to a hellish state?  
The job's already done.  
*Sylvia Fairley*

I want to be an expert in some field,  
To take a sphere of thought and make it mine:  
*That's* the kind of power I'd like to wield,  
Where sage and teacher seamlessly combine.  
Not science, since the numbers numb my brain,  
But some past time when great ideas were bred  
In ghostly tongues whose meanings I'd make plain,  
And show that what's still read is never dead.  
I would not take a modish, lofty view,  
Awarding ancient cultures beta plus  
For incorrectly thinking that they knew



The things they really should have learned from us.  
 Instead I'd be the man whose Greece and Rome  
 Are places living now inside his head,  
 With lessons for us he brings sharply home —  
 Yes, I'd go on where Peter Jones has led.  
*W.J. Webster*

When I grow up I wanna be Abe Lincoln.  
 Or just stay me, 'cause, really, what's the gain?  
 I'm just like Abe. We're both real good at thinkin'.  
 That China guy has seen my large, large brain.

My face would look real perfect on a penny,  
 Though that's a silly kinda place to be.  
 Much better some big bill. That's if there's any  
 Big bill they make that's big enough for me.

But Lincoln, he gave speeches. To this day  
 There's lots of people who remember those,  
 'Cause they were rated, some would maybe say,  
 As big as this one. Who knows? No one knows?

And Lincoln was no wimp. Boy, would he rage!  
 You got in his way, you would get a thump.  
 They'll call me 'Lincoln of the Modern Age'.  
 No! They'll call him the Gettysburg Trump.  
*Max Gutmann*

When I grow up I want to be John Wesley,  
 A man of moral force and firm belief.  
 Not sensual and profane like Elvis Presley,  
 Or like my Uncle Bob, a drunken thief.

I'd love to do the fire-and-brimstone preaching  
 That sandbagged listeners until they wept,  
 To wear out horses travelling, beseeching.  
 In Wesley the evangel never slept.

He had no time for harsh preordination,  
 The dogma that put iron in Calvin's soul.  
 Like him, I'd be an agent of salvation,  
 Playing a selfless, liberating role.

Yet though he is the nonesuch, the ideal,  
 Unless I can suppress my urge to rob  
 And get shitfaced on plonk at every meal  
 It's likely I'll take after Uncle Bob.  
*Basil Ransome-Davies*

When I grow up I want to be Mad Annie.  
 I see her in the mirror every day.  
 She might look like an inoffensive granny  
 But she's a troublemaker in her way.

I'll trail my shopping trolley on the crossing  
 To demonstrate the slowness of Zen.  
 Say 'bugger off' to other people's bossing  
 And speak my truth to power, now and then.

I won't install a meshy-dish receiver  
 And when the nosy neighbours ask me why  
 I'll tell them I'm a born-again believer  
 With other, better ways of seeing sky.

I'll buy a bit of bargain booze in Aldi,  
 Drink in the kitchen till I'm off my tits  
 Then turn the wireless up and give it laldy  
 Singing along to Webern's greatest hits.  
*Ann Drysdale*

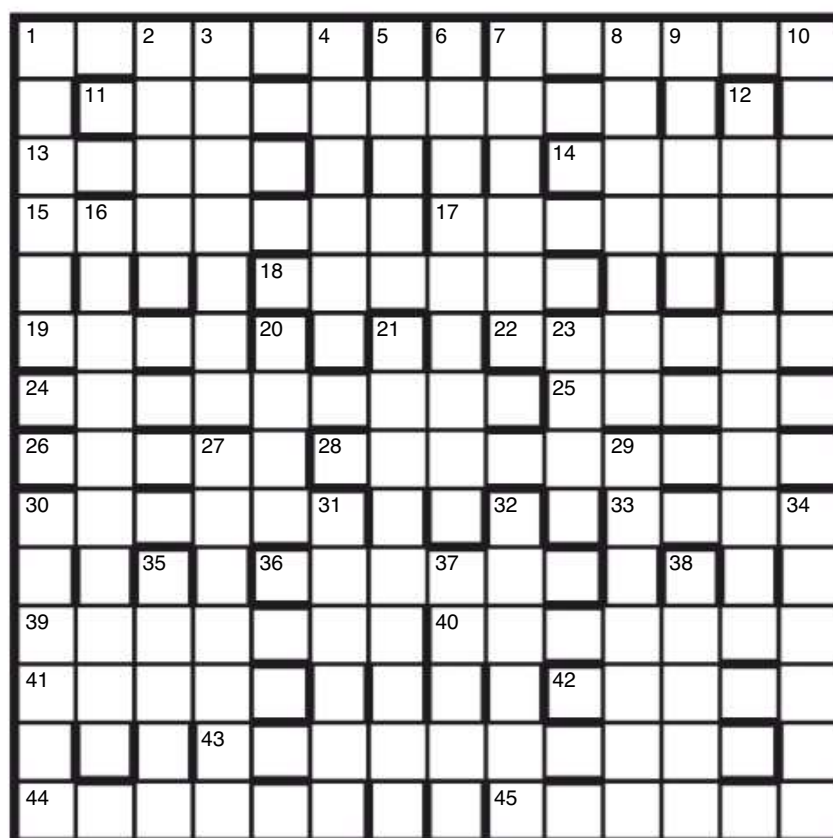
**NO. 3073: NEO-GOTHIC**

You are invited to submit a short story in the Gothic style with a topical twist. Please email entries of up to 150 words to [lucy@spectator.co.uk](mailto:lucy@spectator.co.uk) by midday on 31 October.

**Crossword**  
**2381:**  
**Step changes**  
*by Mr Magoo*

1 Across and 45 Across form a phrase, and the other unclued entries form a word ladder linking them, by changing one letter at a time, always forming real words. Elsewhere, ignore an accent.

- Across**
- 11 Weary junkie's eaten mollusc (10)
  - 13 Everything taken into account, at last, endlessly (5, two words)
  - 14 Holiday son's taken from country in empty spaces (5)
  - 15 Everybody in work makes useful by-product (7, two words)
  - 17 Cheat I rumbled beginning to look honest (7)
  - 19 Colonnade to put in square area (4)
  - 22 Stones swapping vocal parts – they make records fast (6)
  - 24 Shrinking, like clothes after dry-cleaning? (9)
  - 25 Take us to the stars, including Queen (5)
  - 26 Sopranos entertaining Morse, say – they sang (5)
  - 28 Boycott to run short, in old measure (9)
  - 33 Cow used by Spenser one day a week (4)
  - 36 English judge, presumably, having a thing for climbing in the Alps (6)
  - 39 Bread and butter, in a flutter (7)
  - 40 Almost painful noise one mutes (7)
  - 41 Start to play, foul, dirty trick (5)
  - 42 Skilled lecturer's broken china (5)
  - 43 Shocks chaplain fallen woman is tempting (10)
  - 44 Do extremely heavy boys regularly wrestle here? (6)



- Down**
- 2 Section of Galatians read up herein? (5)
  - 3 Ring pub where travellers get charged (7, two words)
  - 4 Want to act as regicide? (6)
  - 5 Some do believe in daggers (5)
  - 6 Cutting growths out of the tree (9)
  - 8 Gets up earlier when securing salary increase (7)
  - 9 What may power motor cycle, possibly (5)
  - 12 Queen acting to rule South Africa in verse (10)
  - 16 Parts of church supply chain store (10)
  - 20 Keynote European speech's beginning to bore me (4)
  - 21 Frank strives to work in A&E (9)
  - 23 Barrel concealing a lord (4)
  - 27 Place I like lacks fine flexibility (7)
  - 29 Hole in volcano sent up a colourful dye source (7)
  - 30 Struck with a soft lump of soil (6)
  - 32 Peasants caught noblemen once (6)
  - 35 Shaving facial hair without having hidden stuff (5)
  - 37 Piece of isolated land has tenant (5)
  - 38 Undercut the 20th dossier? (5)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 5 November. 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 2381, *The Spectator*, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

Address .....

Email .....



**SOLUTION TO 2378: BOUNDARY**

LIMES (22), a term for a boundary of the ROMAN EMPIRE (7 30), is a DEFINITION (19) of five items reading clockwise in the perimeter.

**First prize** Geoff Telfer, Shipley, W. Yorks  
**Runners-up** R.B. Briercliffe, Onchan, Isle of Man;  
 John Light, Applestone, Surrey



## No sacred cows

### Why are faceless accusations allowed to end men's careers?

Toby Young

On 11 October 2017 an anonymous Google spreadsheet began doing the rounds of American newspapers and magazines — a document that would have far-reaching consequences for Stephen Elliott, a Los Angeles-based writer and editor. Called 'Shitty Media Men', the spreadsheet had been created by Moira Donegan, a former assistant editor at the *New Republic*, and named various men rumoured to be guilty of sexual misconduct. Donegan closed it down a few days later, but by that time it had been widely circulated and many names had been added, alongside a summary of their alleged crimes. The entry for Elliott read: 'Rape accusations, sexual harassment, coercion, unsolicited invitations to his apartment, a dude who snuck into Binders???' (Binders is a Facebook group for women writers.)

The spreadsheet contained a disclaimer: 'This document is only a collection of allegations and rumours. Take everything with a grain of salt.' Needless to say, that was largely ignored. Numerous articles appeared celebrating the list as a much-needed 'reckoning', with not many people pausing to consider whether the men on the list were guilty. Elliott had a collection of essays to promote, but interviews were pulled, readings cancelled and his book tour fizzled out. His tel-



*When a woman accuses a man of rape, the default position should not be to believe her*

evision agent stopped returning his calls and some friends began to distance themselves. He found himself at the centre of a Kafkaesque nightmare.

Initially, Elliott decided it was pointless to fight back. For one thing, he's a lifelong liberal and is generally sympathetic to the #MeToo movement — or he was at the time. If he spoke out and said he'd been falsely accused it might cast doubt on all the other #MeToo allegations, including those against Harvey Weinstein. In addition, he hoped that if he didn't respond it would soon be forgotten — 'least said, soonest mended'. Then, when it became clear that his career had been seriously damaged, he became depressed and started abusing various substances. His thoughts turned to suicide, which is a common reaction to a public shaming. Last year the Hollywood producer Jill Messick committed suicide after she was accused of being one of Weinstein's 'enablers' — an allegation she denied.

But after a few months Elliott got sober and decided he could no longer ignore the rape charge. If he didn't confront it, it would dog him for the rest of his life — and, according to him, he's innocent. He wrote an essay for *New York* magazine, setting out the case for his defence, but after initially being accepted it was rejected. He passed it on to the *Guardian* and it was the same story: an enthusiastic reception followed by a change of heart. Eventually, a version of that essay found a home in *Quillette*, an Australian online magazine where I'm an associate editor. After it was published, two women came forward to accuse Elliott of having behaved badly towards them, but the charges didn't amount to anything

more serious than 'unsolicited invitations to his apartment' and, as he pointed out in his essay, it isn't a rule that you have to wait for a woman to 'solicit' an invitation before you can ask her back to your apartment. No one has ever made an attempt to substantiate the rape allegation.

Last week the story exploded when Elliott filed a \$1.5 million law suit in New York against Moira Donegan and some of the other women who contributed to the 'Shitty Media Men' list. The reaction was predictable, particularly as the news followed on the heels of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation as a Supreme Court Justice. One of Elliott's former colleagues described the suit as 'an outrageous act of violence against Moira first and foremost, as well as everyone who contributed to the list or found any measure of solidarity or hope or comfort or usefulness in it'.

It's hard not to sympathise with Elliott if you give him the benefit of the doubt. When a woman accuses a man of rape, the default position should not be to believe her, particularly if there's no corroborating evidence. That's tantamount to a presumption of guilt, a fundamentally illiberal principle. In this case, we don't know if the accuser is a woman and you would hope even #MeToo activists would stop short of insisting we should believe anonymous allegations. Above all, no one accused of a serious crime who protests their innocence should lose their livelihoods without due process being followed. I'm glad Elliott will have his day in court.

*Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.*

## MICHAEL HEATH





## Spectator Sport

### Injury time

Roger Alton

Eddie Jones's sorrows as England's rugby coach certainly keep coming in big battalions. Now the giant battered No 8 Billy Vunipola is out of the autumn internationals, and maybe longer. His brother Mako is hurt too, along with Sam Simmonds, Jamie George, former skipper Chris Robshaw, Joe Marler (retired) as well as Uncle Tom Cobley, the noted back row forager. They won't go away, though, these injuries.

How do you get people to want to excel at a game not where you 'might' get injured but 'will' get injured, probably badly? Rugby at school level is an excellent game. The best players representing 1st XVs in the Schools Cup are likely to turn pro and earn a good living. The game they currently play is contested by physical specimens you or I would recognise, the likes of which played top-level rugby a few decades back — men like Mike Slemen, David Duckham, JPR, Jean-Pierre Rives, etc. And no one will get punched or stamped or gouged, because these activities have pretty much disappeared from all levels of



*Rugby pundits relish the 'hits', the 'smashes', the tackles that 'body bag' an opponent*

the game. Anyway, now you can hurt people without them.

The pro game is played by behemoths who can spend all week in the gym and have their diets monitored and their supplements graded and tailored to their needs. They are bigger, stronger, faster than ever before. They have more time to train and improve, and the best are expected to play 35 to 40 high-intensity, high-impact and, yes, downright dangerous games a year. The best NFL players play no more than 20 games. I love the game, but rugby can't survive like this. Can it? Pundits relish the 'hits', the 'smashes', the tackles that 'body bag' an opponent: think of the ground-shuddering collision when Jerome Kaino stopped Jamie Roberts in Toulouse's tight win over Bath. Nobody died, for sure, but are you certain that will never happen?

Talking of legalised violence, I can't imagine that readers of this journal have much knowledge of the octagon, the arena for cage fighting — sorry, mixed martial arts, as it likes to call itself. It is hard to convey the sheer ghastly brutality of this 'sport' — not to mention its followers. Now — surprise, surprise — Vladimir Putin, who likes to get himself front and centre of any passing sporting event, has met the Russian cage fighter Khabib Nurmagomedov after he beat Conor McGregor in a hideous brawl in Las Vegas. After the bout, mayhem broke

out, with the Russian jumping out of the cage to belt all comers. Supporters of each fighter joined in and went berserk. Horribly unedifying.

Not for Putin, however, who said he had heard that McGregor's camp had insulted Khabib's father and his country. 'Not just you, but all of us can jump out like that if assaulted,' he said. Worth bearing in mind at the next confrontation with Russia in Estonia, or some such hellhole.

There are mistakes — like Bath's Freddie Burns carrying on as if he were taking a bow at the Palladium before failing to touch down — and there are strange errors of judgment, like England deciding to play a series of one-day cricket internationals in Sri Lanka during the monsoon season. A quirky, even Trumpian, attitude to climate. Still, it gave us the chance to see Olly Stone bowl a few overs (very fast they were, too) and get an international wicket.

One correspondent to ESPN said that seeing the letters 'RF' next to an England bowler's name brought a tear to the eye. Those of a certain vintage won't need reminding that 'RF' is the shorthand used by publications such as the *Playfair Cricket Annual* to describe what bowlers do. 'RF' means right-arm fast: very rare for an English bowler. Usually it's 'RMF' — medium fast. Welcome, Olly, and please don't slow up.

#### DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My fiancé and I spend many great weekends with another couple. I am a vegetarian and quite particular about certain food textures and I cannot stand slimy foods like overcooked mushrooms or undercooked eggs. The husband of our good friends prides himself on the brunches he rustles up on the Sunday of these weekends, presenting the others with full English breakfasts and me with scrambled eggs on toast. I don't quite know what he does to these eggs but they appear in front of me in a semi-liquid

form, soaking into the toasted bread. I really need to figure out a way to stop this without offending our hosts. We've got to the point where I am presented with a mountain of this gloopy mess without being asked. I cannot request just toast the night before. How do I overcome this predicament?

— Name and address withheld

A. No one over 35 would hesitate to make the straightforward request: 'May I just have toast today?' In your generation, however, hypersensitivity about giving offence has become something of a new religion. The solution of claiming a late-onset egg allergy was rejected by you in our private correspondence as 'too detrimental to the many meals out and indulgences we enjoy with the couple in question'.

Fortunately, food neuroses are now mainstream, so you can claim to be on the 5:2 egg avoidance diet. Never mind that such a diet doesn't exist yet — just say you have set aside Sundays as one of the two days per week on which you don't eat eggs.

Q. I am still at university but have just taken a job as caretaker in a building only yards away from campus. The job comes with a small one-bed flat. I am anxious about what to do when student friends start to drop in saying that they are desperate to use the loo. What if I don't want them to because I know there's a disgusting smell in there because I've just made it?

— Name and address withheld

A. Remain calm as you shudder: 'You're welcome to use it but

I wouldn't recommend it. The builder upstairs has just been in.'

Q. A friend's niece who got her first job last year and still lives with her parents is coming from Belgium to stay with him in his London flat. She has asked him to book a table for three (herself, my friend and his partner) at one of the most expensive restaurants in the capital. How can he make sure that she intends to treat them, as there is no way that they can afford a massive restaurant bill at the moment?

R. T., Shropshire

A. He should act daft and email or ring to say, 'It's a very generous thought but are you sure? We would be just as happy going somewhere less expensive and we are equally happy to cook dinner for you in the flat.'



## Food

## Breakfast for idiots

Tanya Gold



I couldn't find Gazelle. I walked up and down Albermarle Street, in which Oscar Wilde once plotted his own doom in the Albermarle Club, and I couldn't find it. I had to go to Caffè Nero opposite the Ritz Hotel and email my dining companion — where are you? Are you there? Does Gazelle exist? Or is it a modern European restaurant and cocktail bar so exclusive that it exists only in the imaginings of the International Private Jet Set who have turned Mayfair into something so ugly it could only be purchased at Harrods? Is it an *imago* that serves breakfast?

It's not an *imago* that serves breakfast, he replied, via Caffè Nero's free wifi, which is always useful when you wonder if restaurants are semi-mythical. It's next door to John Murray, publishers of Lord Byron; his memoirs were burnt there, either because they were so scandalous they couldn't be printed or — and this is a hack's theory — they just weren't that good. And so it is. I find it via minuscule gold signage. I am of an age to need proper signage. I just bought one

There is a charming waiter with a beard so fiercely groomed I thought he might be Narnian

of those huge Panasonic telephones for old people which block everyone automatically, which is why old people are lonely. It's not because their children don't love them, they blocked their own children by mistake. And they would not find Gazelle either.

I have been here before and I have not been here before. These gaudy, shrivelling Mayfair hubris mansions all seem the same to me now — Sexyfish, Novikov, Rivea at the Bulgari Hotel, which I thought looked like tinfoil. This is because they are designed to please the same people, who cannot, despite the current vogue for prosperity theology within wealth-enabling circles, be in multiple places at once. And even if they can't, they do not like to be surprised.

The dining room is velvet — red, like sitting on a cardinal's knee, with yellow too — and there is a charming waiter with a beard so fiercely groomed I thought he might be Narnian. Are Narnians going to be deported, and if not, why not?

There is exposed brickwork and a purple spiral staircase so polished it could become an accident destination

for women with big shoes. At the top is more velvet, this time in green and blue, and an enormous photograph of what looks like a woman, all curled up, with no head. Who needs a head these days anyway? In any case, it behaves like a restaurant waiting for customers, and for night.

Again, it is just us in Gazelle, us and the well-groomed Narnian and his multiple handsome assistants. I am beginning to think I do this deliberately, so I do not have to meet the other diners. Also, I do not take class A drugs. I wish I did.

It is breakfast time, so we cannot have the dish called 'Oyster, Yeast Emulsion', which I thought was paint (3.5, or £3.50 if you like pound signs, which apparently they don't here, which is quite droll) or the dish called 'Scallop, Yeast, Imperial Caviar' (£19, because I do like pound signs). Instead we eat fennel and spelt toast, a charcuterie plate and a poached duck egg. It's an English Breakfast for idiots, then, and Piggy's greasy spoon in Air Street — it's next to Cordings, which sells corduroy trousers for maniacs off a rack that looks like a rainbow — does a much better English Breakfast, although it does not have a purple staircase for women to fall off. Perhaps they could not fit one in? It is a slight improvement on Sketch's English Breakfast Stew. I give it that.

That done, there isn't much to do but look out of the window, lament the end of Mayfair, and admire what is, apparently, Britain's original one-way street.

Gazelle, 48 Albermarle St, Mayfair, London W1S 4DH, tel: 020 7629 0236.



'Well at least we always left a tip.'

## MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

## Womxn

When I say that it has given comfort to my husband, you can judge how foolish the Wellcome Institute was in using the word *womxn* and then apologising for it. It had wanted to be more inclusive with a workshop on 'how *womxn* can challenge existing archives'. There, *womxn* serves as a plural, but it can be a singular too. Wellcome did not invent the word. The BBC quoted Dr Clara Bradbury-Rance, of King's College London, saying that it 'stems from a longstanding objection to the word *woman* as it comes from *man*'. Dr Bradbury-Rance is not a philologist, preferring the 'intersectional



study of sexuality and gender in film and popular culture'.

Some people assume that *woman* is derived from *womb-man*. This is not the case. It comes from *wife-man*, where *wife* means 'woman' and *man* means 'human being' (like *homo* in Latin, to which a modern theory relates *man* etymologically). The *wife*-element accounts for the strange pronunciation in the plural: 'wimmin'. I observed not so long ago (June 2013)

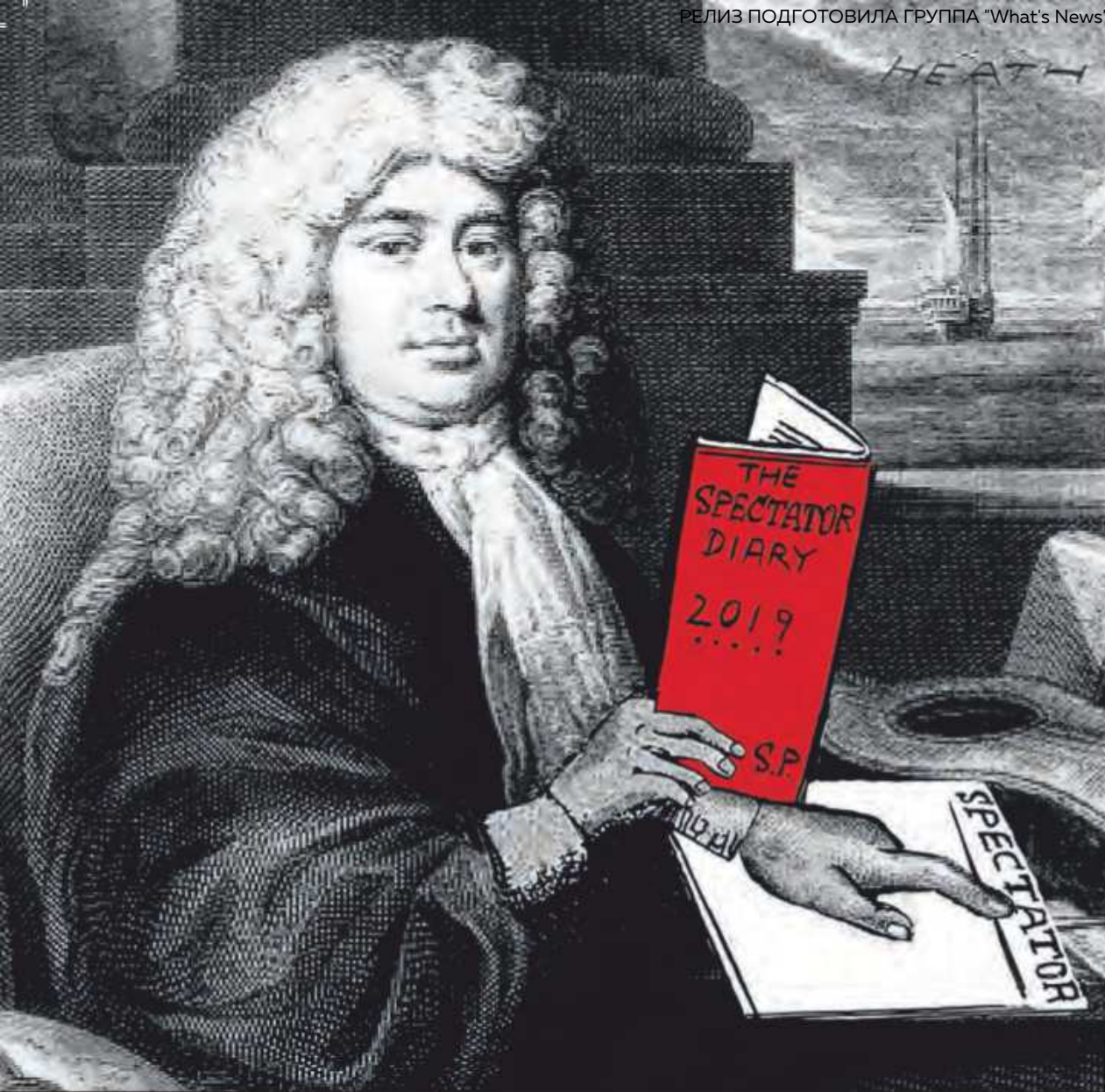
that some people say 'wom-en' for the plural now, as a sort of spelling-pronunciation. It had been a tribute to the tenacity of spoken English that the oral form 'wimmin' and the written form *women* had existed in parallel for hundreds of years. The spelling *wimmin* (mocked by *Private Eye*) had avoided the hated element *-men*, and was first spotted in the magazine *Lesbian Tide* in 1975. An alternative feminist form *womyn* emerged in the same year, in another magazine, *Lesbian Connection*.

The elements *-man*, *-men* are straw men of course. Unlike other Germanic languages, which

adopted a separate new form to mean 'human being' (such as *mensch* in German), English continued with *man* in both senses. There had been sex-linked terms: *wer* (as in werewolf) and *wif*. A male equivalent of *wif-man* was *wæp-man*, in which the *wæp*-element, related to *weapon*, has, so the *OED* insists, the sense 'membrum virile'.

As for *womxn*, it has been kicking about for a couple of years and now has few friends. I'm afraid we have lost *man* as a non-sexual denominator, but there seems no need to lose *woman*, *women* as the name for people like me. — Dot Wordsworth





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