

# THE SPECTATOR

Gotcha politics  
Chris Mullin

My first 100 days  
John McDonnell

Rise of the glamocracy  
Harry Mount

## Carry on Brexit

The long haul is just beginning, says *James Forsyth*

THE QUEEN  
ON SCREEN  
TANYA GOLD



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## Bring jihadis to justice

At first sight, the evidence presented in David Anderson's report into the four terror attacks committed between March and June sounds damning. The security service, MI5, had had three of the six attackers on its radar. The Manchester bomber Salman Abedi, who murdered 22 people, had come to the attention of MI5 in 2014. As recently as the beginning of this year, he had been implicated in criminal activity, which MI5 officers now admit might have led to his attack being thwarted had it been investigated. Khuram Butt, one of the attackers at London Bridge, had been under investigation for two years, yet still he and his two accomplices were allowed the space to plot and carry out their attack, in which they murdered eight people. Khalid Masood, who struck on Westminster Bridge in March, had also been under investigation by MI5.

Yet these failures have to be set in context. While extremism, for political reasons, is frequently attributed to a tiny minority of people, that is not how it must seem to an MI5 officer trying to assess and prioritise risks. According to the Anderson report, the organisation currently has 3,000 'subjects of interest' in its sights, with a further 20,000 people on the books, who have been under investigation at some stage. It can take a dozen intelligence officers to track one suspect around the clock: there are simply not the resources to track them all. Intelligence can never be foolproof.

Andrew Parker, the head of MI5, says the service has helped foil nine serious plots in the past year, not all of which have come to light. The current trial about an alleged attempt on the Prime Minister's life is an example of what the intelligence services manage to intercept: their success is remarkable when there are such large numbers of people in Britain who are psychologically capable of contemplating attacks. Accurate-

ly predicting which ones will actually carry them out in every case is an impossible task.

The public is not party to the information, for example, which led MI5 once to add Khalid Masood to its list of subjects of interest, but it seems clear that although he was a violent criminal who had served two prison sentences for knife attacks, his conversion to Islamic extremism happened largely alone. How could he have shown up on the security services' radar other than via some dystopian technology capable of the mass reading of minds?

To give an idea of the difficulties faced by the intelligence agencies, according to Peter Neumann, Professor of Security Studies at King's College, London, MI5 has sufficient resources to monitor full-time between 50

*Every one of these people, simply by travelling to Isis territory, has committed a criminal offence*

and 60 suspects — just one in every 50 of those it considers to be currently worthy of investigation. Add to that the challenge of pre-empting lone wolves who have never been in contact with any kind of extremist organisation, and it becomes clear just how large the problem has become. It's not looking for a needle in a haystack as much as trying to find a specific piece of hay.

The biggest faults with our anti-terror campaign lie not with the intelligence agencies but with the criminal justice system. We could do more about the estimated 400 Britons who travelled willingly to join Isis in Syria and Iraq and who have since returned to Britain. There is no issue of civil liberties involved in this as there was, for example, with suspects who were subject to the now-defunct control orders. Every one of these people, simply by travelling to Isis territory, has committed a criminal offence — yet just

14 of them are known to have been jailed.

A dangerous conceit has developed to the effect that former Isis fighters are merely misguided and that with a bit of counselling and deradicalisation they can be introduced back into British society. Max Hill QC, who is David Anderson's successor as the government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, said of British Isis fighters who have returned and not been jailed that 'we should be looking towards reintegration and moving away from any notion that we're going to lose a generation due to this travel'. Reintegration makes sense for the cases where it is possible. But when it's not, we end up relying on MI5 to track known jihadis who are adept at covering their tracks.

Isis is now in its dying days, having been forced out of Raqqa and Mosul. But its fighters were escorted out in buses laid on by the Syrian forces and dropped off into a safe space where they are free to relocate. As the bombing of al Qaeda in the Pakistani tribal areas demonstrates, committed jihadis tend to relocate rather than retire. So the threat of returnees, radicalised by what they have witnessed and complete with a network of other terrorists, might be about to become greater than ever.

There is a bizarre disjuncture between how we treat Isis fighters in Syria or Iraq — where we are happy to eliminate them via drone strike — and how we treat them if they manage to make it back to Britain, where we hope they will find gainful employment and tend not to go after them.

There are justified objections to the detention or control of people whom we merely suspect might be capable of carrying out terrorist acts. But if the government decrees that fighting for Isis is a crime, then it ought to go after the offenders. That would help the intelligence agencies thwart the next terror attack.



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Once you realise that Katie Hopkins's opinion-editorials are the faulty instrument of her unfulfilled sexual longings, it is easy not to mind her politics so much  
**Tanya Gold, p34**

We're doing something that we've been working for and planning for, for 30 or 40 years of our lives  
**John McDonnell, p20**

Ceta is one of those everyday acronyms that make Brexitry incomprehensible and therefore dull for the millions who voted for it  
**Dot Wordsworth, p12**

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Max Hastings** (Diary, p7) is a journalist and historian whose most recent book is *The Secret War*, on the espionage and intelligence stories of the second world war.

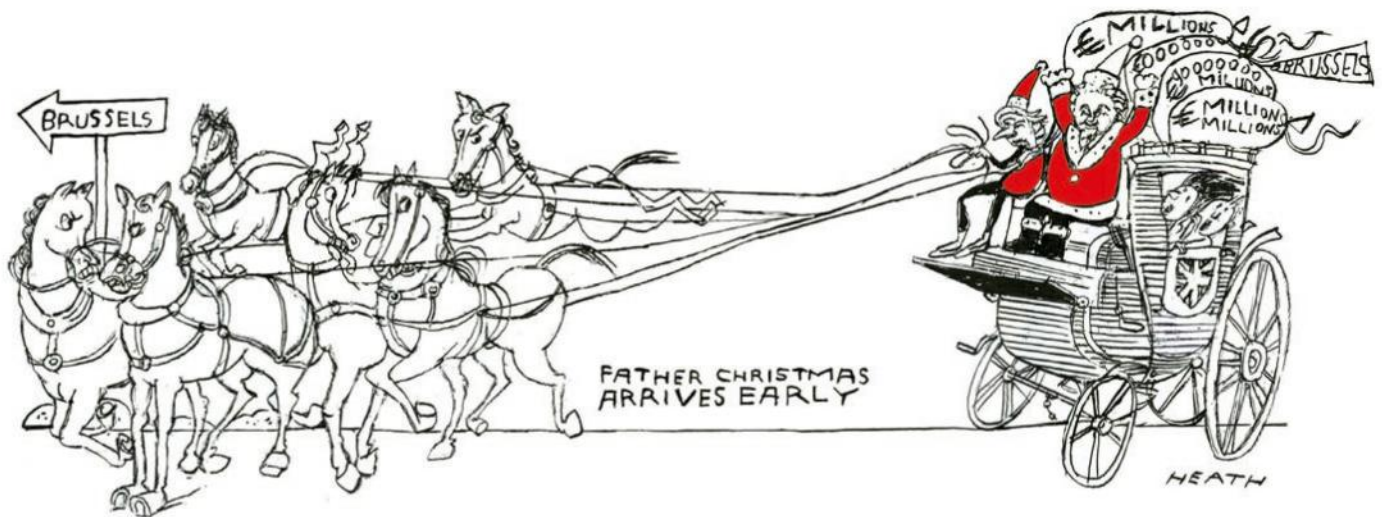
**Nicholas Farrell**, who interviews Matteo Salvini on p24, is a journalist based in Forli, Italy, and the author of *Mussolini: A New Life*.

**Anne Margaret Daniel** has been teaching Irish and American literature at the New School University in New York since 2001. She writes about Bob Dylan on p35.

**Tanya Gold** recently moved from Camden to Cornwall. She reviews Katie Hopkins on p34, the Queen on p40 and Henrietta's restaurant on p62.

**Jeff Noon** is a novelist, short story writer and playwright who won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1993 for his first novel, *Vurt*. He reviews the latest crime fiction on p33.

# PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



## Home

Theresa May, the Prime Minister, was thrown into a political crisis, along with the negotiations for Brexit, during a protracted lunch in Brussels with Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission. At first, smiles and Mr Juncker's special cheerful tie had suggested that Britain had paid enough and said enough to be allowed at an EU summit on 14 December to enter into trade talks. But the Democratic Unionist Party, which lends the Conservatives a parliamentary majority, had got wind of a phrase in a text already agreed between Dublin and the EU proposing 'continued regulatory alignment' on both sides of the Irish border. Arlene Foster, the leader of the DUP, held a press conference in Belfast declaring that the party would accept no Brexit deal that 'separates' Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. Mrs May interrupted lunch, leaving the cinnamon ice cream to melt on the tarte tatin, to speak to Mrs Foster on the telephone.

Afterwards she and Mr Juncker made short, thin statements. She said: 'On a couple of issues some differences do remain.' Leo Varadkar, the Taoiseach of Ireland, looking close to tears, said he was 'surprised and disappointed'. Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish National Party leader, called for the whole of the United Kingdom to stay in the European single market. The London Mayor wanted a deal of his own and even Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales, demanded that the UK should stay in the EU customs union.

Responding to an allegation by Neil Lewis, a retired Metropolitan Police detective, that 'thousands' of thumbnail images of legal pornography had been found on a computer in the parliamentary office of Damian Green in 2008, and to an earlier allegation by Bob Quick, a former Met assistant commissioner, Cressida Dick, the present Met Commissioner said: 'All police officers know very well that they have a duty of confidentiality, a duty to protect personal information. That duty in my view clearly endures after you leave the service.' Mr Green, the First Secretary of State, denied watching or downloading pornography on his computer. Nine terrorist attacks had been foiled in the past 12 months, Andrew Parker, the head of MI5, told the Cabinet. A man appeared in court charged with an alleged plot to blow up the gates of Downing Street and kill Theresa May. Christine Keeler, renowned for her part in the Profumo affair in the early 1960s, died aged 75. England lost the second Ashes Test by 120 runs. More than one in four NHS nurses were found to be obese.

## Abroad

President Donald Trump of the United States said he wanted to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Ali Abdullah Saleh, aged 75, the President of Yemen for 33 years until ousted by an uprising in 2011, was shot dead by Houthis after he switched his support to the side backed by Saudi Arabia in the civil war. Saad Hariri withdrew his resignation as

Prime Minister of Lebanon, which he had tendered on 4 November while in Riyadh as a guest of Saudi Arabia. An Israeli air strike was reported on an Iranian base west of Damascus. Syrian warplanes struck residential areas in Eastern Ghouta, a besieged suburb of Damascus.

United States senators passed a bill to make sweeping tax cuts, a legislative achievement for Mr Trump. The US Supreme Court allowed Mr Trump's ban on travellers from six mainly Muslim countries to take effect. Michael Flynn, Mr Trump's former national security adviser, pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI and agreed to co-operate with an inquiry into alleged collusion with Russia. More than 25,000 people fled their homes in the middle of the night as wildfires spread rapidly near Ventura and Santa Paula in California. Johnny Hallyday, the strange French pop star, died aged 74.

A Spanish judge withdrew European arrest warrants for Carles Puigdemont, the deposed President of the Catalan parliament, and four other ex-ministers who had also fled to Belgium, though charges of sedition remained. Pro- and anti-independence parties were neck and neck as Catalan elections on 21 December neared. Switzerland said it would return to Nigeria \$320 million of the money stolen by the late ruler Sani Abacha. King Michael of Romania, who reigned from 1927 to 1930 and from 1940 to 1947, died aged 96. Sajida Begum, 65, a leper in Bangalore, lost her pension because she had no fingers to supply a print on an identity card. CSH

# DIARY

Max Hastings



Lunch with the great Sir Michael Howard, 95 last week. During a conversation about BBC1's *Howards End*, he said: 'I met Forster once, at a lunch party in London in 1943, given by Arthur Koestler, just before I went to Italy. We spoke much about Richard Hillary, then just beginning to be canonised. Forster suddenly turned to me and asked: "What do you think about sardines?"' I was confounded, and have often since wished that I had produced some appropriately witty riposte.' Michael expresses ironic gratitude for the state of the world, saying that without its horrors, at his age he might be frightfully bored: 'The distinction between war — a word that signifies the use of force — and warfare — clashes between states using every other means — has seldom seemed so significant.'

To the Berkshire Macmillan carol concert at St Nicolas Church in Newbury, an enchanting affair of which the star turn was the soloist, a teenager named Isabel Irvine, with the face and voice of an angel. I talked to Richard Benyon, whom locals applaud as a model constituency MP. It is Richard's misfortune to be teased by foes as the richest member of the Commons. Of course the country should not be run by toffs — think Rees-Mogg — but it was one of David Cameron's many sillinesses to sack Benyon as a junior minister. The government needs him back.

At Stratford for a preview of *Imperium*, the RSC's six-play dramatisation of Robert Harris's Cicero novels. We were enthralled, not least by the depiction of Pompey as Donald Trump. Like all Robert's readers, we never stop being amazed by the originality and intelligence of his work. Greg Doran, who directs both *Imperium Part I: Conspirator* and *Part II: Dictator*, chatted during an interval. When he moved on, another member of the audience said: 'Excuse me, if you know Robert Harris, please tell him how thrilled we are that the RSC has done right by the books. We were so afraid they would muck them up.'

On Monday, we held a dinner party in the Cavendish Room at

Brooks's, one of the most beautiful spaces in London. Our guest list started with Matthew Parris, whom my wife was panting to meet, observing that she agrees with him about absolutely everything except that she is reluctant to become gay. After that, it was merely a matter of ensuring that we included nobody who might profess enthusiasm for Trump, Brexit or — following their treatment of Dwin Bramall, Edward Heath and now Damian Green — policemen. We discussed the problem that

scarcely anyone active in British politics dares to tell voters important truths, foremost among these that Brexit will make them poorer. Moderate Tory MPs remain imprisoned by the party's right, masquerading as tribunes of the plebs, while their Labour counterparts are chained to the left. Within, say, five years, there is likely to be an unpredictable and even frightening reckoning at the polls, when voters behold the cost of the deceptions they have been fed by both. Meanwhile, many of us feel victims of political differences so profound that they sustain an inescapable social divide. As Michael Heseltine said at parting on Monday night: 'The fight goes on!'

We recently paid an out-of-season visit to Puglia, where we booked into the Convento di Santa Maria Costantinopoli. In darkness, we had a hard time finding the place, but eventually reached a silent, sealed, fortress-like roadside building that locals claimed was our hostelry. I was put in mind of Jeeves's observation, on approaching Totleigh Towers: 'Childe Roland to the dark tower came, Sir', a sensation that intensified when repeated hammering on doors failed to secure admission. 'It must have closed down,' my wife said apologetically to our two companions. We retreated to the nearby town, where a kindly Italian telephoned the place, and reported no response. Increasingly desperate, we returned to the dark tower and banged anew. At long last, and without apology, a Lurch-like minion admitted us. Then I discovered that this had been the home of the late Lord McAlpine, with whom I sparred during his stint as Lady Thatcher's ATM. Most guests find it Convento charming, judging by the effusive comments in the visitors' book. We thought it deeply sinister.

In a car at a shoot, mention was made of Hackett, the tailor, prompting me to enthuse about its tweeds. Belatedly, it emerged that the others were discussing a business intelligence firm named Hakluyt. A friend, so hard of hearing that he is oblivious of governments falling, observes ruefully that while blindness is recognised as a tragedy, deafness is treated as comedy. I find myself unwillingly joining the comedians.

Tagliatelle: Diamond, gold and silver rings  
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An aerial photograph of a military helicopter, possibly a Chinook, hovering over a stone circle on a grassy field. The helicopter is positioned in the upper left quadrant, with its rotors blurred from motion. The stone circle is in the center, and the surrounding field is a mix of green and brown grass. The lighting suggests a low sun, creating long shadows.

# ENGINEERING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

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# THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

I'm afraid I have a deep faith in the Democratic Unionist Party's capacity to cede an issue of principle in return for more gold, baubles, Renewable Heat Incentives etc. It may well give in, after receiving some bung, in a few days. But its resistance, at the time of writing, to the idea of 'regulatory alignment' with the Republic, seems wholly justified. This is not a pernicky matter solely for the province — it should apply just as much to the entire United Kingdom. If we agree to align trade rules with EU ones (as opposed to each recognising the other's rules), we are sacrificing the economic point of Brexit, which is competitive advantage. When it insisted on settling the Irish question before going on to trade talks, the European Commission presumably understood this very well. As David Davis in effect admits, if we accept alignment for the North, we are accepting the thin end of a great big EU wedge.

The Irish Constitution is composed, says its Preamble, 'In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority, and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and states must be referred', but I still feel that Leo Varadkar is missing a trick in the matter of Brexit and the issue of the Irish border. The new Taoiseach, aged only 38, is a gay, secular half-Hindu. He came in as a moderniser, disinclined, it would seem, to refer his own state actions to the arbitrament of the shamrock. The modern thing to do would be to say that Brexit shows Ireland a clear path for competitive divergence from the EU, opening up the country to the world and rejoining the Commonwealth. He could announce lower tax rates which would put an independent Britain (including Northern Ireland) under pressure to follow suit. He could point out that the problem of the 'hard border' occurs through no wish of either Britain or Ireland, but because of the European Union's dogmatic and rigid interpretation of its 'four freedoms' for all its member states. Instead, he has reverted to dreary old Nationalist noises, bashing both Britain and the Unionists, dragging his country back to the 1970s.



Because there is a hue and cry against Damian Green, the media underreported the remarks of Cressida Dick, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, on Monday. They were notable, though, for their jargon-free English and their clarity. This is what she said about the ex-policemen reviving allegations of having found (legal) pornography on Mr Green's computer nine years ago: 'Police officers have a duty of confidentiality. We come into contact with personal information very regularly, sometimes extremely sensitive... We all know that we have a duty to protect that information and to keep it confidential. In my view, that duty endures... after you leave the service, so I believe that what this officer and, indeed, other retired officers, appear to have done, is wrong.' 'Wrong' is the obvious word, but it is brave of a police chief to say it about her own tribe, because, as we learnt from the 'Plebgate' case, the *omertà* of many officers claims the right to bring down prominent people who annoy them. Ms Dick will now avoid the fate of her predecessor, Bernard Hogan-Howe, who defended the indefensible during the Plebgate affair. On the other hand, surly coppers may now try to undermine her for having spoken out. She, after all, was involved in authorising the police raid on Mr Green's offices in 2008. The raid itself was controversial enough, because it looked like police interference in politics. The porn claims, dragged up by Bob Quick and others yet again, make it look shamefully unprofessional as well.

The slow-moving attempt to reduce the number of MPs trundles forward. When David Cameron announced the idea, it sounded a reasonable saving. But it has two flaws. The first is that our

system of smallish constituencies with one Member is essentially good, and is recognised as such by voters, who usually have a higher opinion of their own MP than of MPs in general. The other is that, if you cut the number of MPs but keep the number of ministers the same, you make the 'pay-roll vote' even more significant than it is now. After Brexit, Parliament should grow stronger. Government should not get proportionally bigger.

Last month, my dear sister-in-law Lizzie died, sadly young, after many years of multiple sclerosis. Her family decided that she should be buried, not cremated. This is not easy in London, where Lizzie lived. A firm called Poppy's Funerals recommended a place called GreenAcres Epping Forest. It was the right thing, beyond my expectation. Lizzie was not religious, and so this neutral ground, where faith is neither privileged nor shunned, was appropriate. The burial plots are in about 50 acres of mainly deciduous woodland, looking out over bright fields, so the place does not feel hemmed in. GreenAcres is blessedly free of signage, tarmac, kitsch and fuss. The monuments on the tombs all seem to be wooden, so there is no staring marble. It strikes me as odd that there are still so few such places of burial. As we ceased to be dominated, as a society, by the church, we tended to substitute rather municipal, dreary settings and ceremonies for those who wanted a secular context for marriage or death. Registry offices have now got slightly better, because there is free competition for weddings these days. What remains dismal, as I know from attending too often, is the average crematorium. These places are almost as dispiriting as the NHS, though I have never yet heard of any of them cancelling a cremation on the day, as hospitals now routinely do with operations. Why can't there be a charity or commercial firm — perhaps called Crem de la Crem — which sets out to make the crematorium more worthy of its serious and therapeutic purpose? We all remember the funerals of someone we love. Why should they receive less care than weddings?

# Get a grip, Prime Minister

The Brexit deal is mired in dispute and denial

JAMES FORSYTH

Theresa May's Brexit challenge is truly Herculean. Every time she believes she has done enough to finally move the Brexit process on, she is told that there is something else she must do. And each time, her tasks become more difficult.

The problem is compounded by the fact that May is weakening her own hand. The Monday misstep has harmed the UK's position. As one Tory insider laments, 'Things with the EU are bad. It shows Theresa can't really deliver.' Even a senior figure at the Department for Exiting the European Union admits that the 'handling was poor'.

The UK is also coming up against hardball negotiating tactics. There have been moments when the Irish have refused to speak to May, saying that they'd rather the diplomats sort things out.

The Prime Minister had hoped to spend this weekend celebrating a victory; instead, for the second time this year, she is left trying to work out how things went so wrong. A deal with Dublin and Brussels seemed to have been agreed on a solution to the Northern Irish border problem but she was unable to deliver it because the DUP, a Northern Irish party with just ten MPs, decided to veto it. How on earth was this allowed to happen?

The answer starts in No. 10. Veteran Tories lament that it is hopelessly understaffed (at a time when the demands on it have never been greater) and that there is a general lack of direction and grip. This problem has been made worse by the government's recent personnel troubles. Political party problems (i.e., dealing with the DUP) are supposed to be solved by the chief whip, but Julian Smith is just a few weeks into his job. On such important issues Mrs May's deputy ought to pull things together but, I am told, 'Damian Green is effectively not operating. He's one of the people who should be squaring off the DUP.'

Green's role in government is vital. He is one of the handful of people trusted by May, and it's part of his job to keep the devolved

parts of the UK up to speed with the Brexit talks. But Green is fighting for his political life as he awaits the results of the Cabinet Office's investigation into his personal conduct. The scandal has effectively put him out of action.

The situation is all made worse by the fact that the final deal on Brexit is a topic so explosive that Mrs May has, even now, still not dared hold a conversation about it with her cabinet — which cabinet members find extraordinary. It's not just the DUP: everyone feels left in the dark. This lack of trust will make the debate even more contentious.



'Hugging the EU close is more difficult now. Everyone is hypersensitive,' says one of those who has been conveying No. 10's message to Tory Brexiteers. One well-placed Conservative warns that 'everyone is more suspicious than before'. In a sign of how bad the mood is among some Brexiteers, one of the leading figures in Vote Leave tells me there is a 'week to fight back' against what they view as an attempt to bounce the cabinet into accepting a soft Brexit, which would see the UK follow EU rules and regulations.

A deal with the EU soon on the first phase of the negotiations is not just possible, but likely. Neither side wants the talks to collapse, but if the UK isn't deemed to have made 'sufficient progress' at next week's

Brussels summit, then May will come under huge pressure to walk away.

If the talks do move on at the summit, the really hard work will only just be starting for May. As one of those who has worked on the Brexit negotiations laments, 'If she can't get something basic like this right, how will she get the bigger deal done? It's far more complex and involves far more players.'

In crude terms, the Brexit talks so far have been about the divorce settlement. When the talks move on, they will be about what kind of country the United Kingdom wants to be, and where it wants to stand in the world. The debate will expose deep divisions, not just in the country at large, but in the Tory party too.

When the new Brexit inner cabinet met for the first time last month, Boris Johnson pushed for a conversation on what kind of final relationship the UK is seeking. He didn't get it. But he did get a commitment from the Prime Minister, recorded in the official minutes of the meeting, that this would be discussed before Christmas.

May's much-mocked 'Brexit means Brexit' is her way of saying that we'd leave the single market (thereby restoring control of borders) and the customs union (thus retrieving the power to negotiate trade deals). The first point is not up for debate; immigration was one of the driving forces behind the Brexit vote. But the customs union is a less politically charged issue. Remaining in it would mean Britain couldn't sign a comprehensive trade deal with anybody other than the EU. This would nullify the whole point of Brexit for many in the cabinet and leave this country as a rule-taker, not a rule-maker. How could Liam Fox, Boris Johnson or Michael Gove stay in government in these circumstances? It would also be a poor outcome for Britain, considering that Norway is in the single market but not the customs union.

Another option would see the UK leave both the single market and the customs union but continue to follow EU regula-

tions from the outside. The idea is that this so-called ‘EEA minus’ approach would help the UK maintain the best access possible to the EU’s internal market.

Interestingly, cabinet opinion does seem to have moved slightly against this option. The Sunday before the Budget, Philip Hammond — seen as the leading advocate of a soft Brexit — said he looked forward to taking a different regulatory approach to the EU in fast-moving, technology-driven industries. One cabinet colleague reports that Hammond has said this in private conversations, too. Intriguingly, Amber Rudd, who campaigned more prominently for Remain than any other minister, echoed this point when the cabinet met before the Budget.

I am told that the basis for the cabinet’s discussion on the future trade deal will be a paper from the Brexit department. One influential figure there tells me that ‘The chances of a high-alignment, status-quo recommendation to cabinet is extremely low.’

The UK debate on all of these points too often forgets that the cabinet is not just negotiating with itself. Michel Barnier and his team have repeatedly stated that Britain has two choices: to be like Norway — in the single market — or Canada — with a trade

*A leading figure in Vote Leave says there is a ‘week to fight back’ against the acceptance of a soft Brexit*

deal that covers goods far more than it does services. Given the desire to show that the four freedoms of the single market are indivisible, it is hard to imagine the EU allowing Britain to avail itself of the first ones (free movement of goods, services and capital) while refusing to allow the fourth (free movement of people).

To reach a deal on the Northern Ireland border, May appears to have conceded that Britain might align itself with (i.e., adapt) EU regulations on agriculture and energy, but to protect harmony with Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom (which is the DUP’s priority), all of the UK would have to make similar promises. The Vote Leave champions in cabinet — Boris Johnson and Michael Gove — might accept this, at a push. But they would not accept any more.

The Boris/Gove alliance, which collapsed so spectacularly in the immediate aftermath of the referendum, has been repaired to some extent. They are pushing together on the importance of the UK being able to do things differently after Brexit. But temperamentally they are in different places. Boris is, as always, fearful that the whole point of Brexit is being lost. He is keener than Gove to try to win assurances from May on what Brexit actually means. Gove is less eager to have this fight. As one person who knows both men well tells me, ‘She isn’t forcing this argument, so Michael doesn’t want to

## Not Gone Yet

On taking a short break, just before dawn,  
Thinking myself alone on my own lawn,  
With thoughts on myself, I look up high.  
Then a dark shape moves across semi-dark sky.

A bat, now half alone, circles and strives.  
My mood with it moves, it flits down and dives.  
I’m sure his scene, like a thought, will be brief,  
A single show, but it lengthens like grief.

I make to move away, he keeps my sight,  
As comes common bird sound and usual light,  
He is in dark dance despite dawning day.  
I wonder why he stays with me this way?

Another! Echoing moves newly taught.  
Not gone yet, this lasts longer than my thought.  
Life stays, it is stronger than something felt.  
We do not take, just have that which is dealt.

— Ed Young

establish red lines.’ Gove is also less bothered about the money and the terms of the transition than Boris. One Vote Leave ally of the pair says that ‘Boris has a strong populist nose on the money’, which Gove lacks.

This debate can’t be delayed much longer. Those who want to stay in the EU’s regulatory orbit have been adept at using the Irish question to advance their agenda. Gove, who thinks that it vital that the UK can diverge from the EU, is expected to wade into this debate soon. One of his allies says No. 10 is repeating David Cameron’s pre-referendum mistake of assuming that Gove will ultimately go along with whatever is decided, even if he hasn’t been consulted on it.

Those who want to stay close to the EU for fear of something worse have another argument up their sleeve too: Jeremy Corbyn. As the prospect of Corbyn becoming Prime Minister becomes ever more real, the

idea of signing a deal that restricts the UK’s freedom of action becomes more appealing to those on the centre-right. The early Thatcher-era argument that Europe is a bulwark against Bennism (which led many Conservatives to oppose Brexit in the 1975 referendum) is making a comeback.

Then there are those in government who criticise Boris and Gove for wanting, in the words of one source, ‘to diverge for the sake of it’. They argue that pragmatism means the UK should be willing to accept EU rules in a slew of areas. One minister summed up this argument after the cabinet meeting on the Florence speech, when he opined that ‘Boris and Michael might be intellectually right, but they are practically wrong.’

The Brexit debate is difficult because the referendum revealed a country that was evenly divided on the question. But splitting the difference would be the worst of all worlds. Being in the single market but not in the EU for anything other than a temporary period would bring the drawbacks of membership without the benefits. As Theresa May tries to navigate her way into the next round of the Brexit talks, she must remember that if Britain is not going to do anything differently, then all of this agony really will have been for nothing.



*‘One by one, the doors all close.’*

## SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCASTS

James Forsyth talks to the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis.

# Lost for words

Brexit and the English language

## DOT WORDSWORTH

Emma Bridgewater has, since 1985, produced pottery acceptable in tasteful middle-class kitchens. Some jars had *Coffee* on and some *Biscuits*. *Coffee* meant 'coffee' and *Biscuits* meant 'biscuits'.

In a similar attempt to achieve popularity, Theresa May told us that *Brexit* meant 'Brexit'. It said so on the jar.

But as the Emma Bridgewater range grew, it included a plate bearing the words 'Bacon & Egg. Bubble & Squeak'. The ampersands were attractive, but it was unlikely that the plate would really accommodate the items suggested.

Now Brexit, once an admirably plain portmanteau of *Britain* and *exit*, became a mug's game. Its meaning is supposed to vary according to what adjective appears on the pottery mug: *vanilla*, *hard*, *soft*, *open*, *blue* or, as the Bank of England imagined last week, *disorderly*, like a drunk at 1 a.m. on Saturday in some market town.

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservatives' leader, chirped up during this week's crisis, saying that, if the Democratic Unionist Party in Belfast had fussily left *regulatory alignment* on the side of their plate, she wouldn't mind getting her teeth into it. She called those who rejected this delicious sweetmeat 'hard Brexiters'. What could be nastier? They are like hard sums, hard-centred chocolates, sulphurous hard-boiled eggs. Handily, any principled Brexiteer can be called *hard*. That, though is not the worst language crime associated with negotiating Brexit.

This week's collapse of talks came after a shuffle of words by the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste — the Irish head of government and his deputy. (Their titles were plucked from the Celtic Twilight, the *Taoiseach* being literally 'the chief' and the *Tánaiste* 'the successor apparent to a Celtic chief, usually the most vigorous adult of his kin', as the *Oxford English Dictionary* avers.) Anyway, last week the Tánaiste insisted there should be *no regulatory divergence* between Northern Ireland ('the North of Ireland' in his lexicon) and the Republic of Ireland. Yet David Davis, the British Brexit Secretary, had breezily said a few weeks earlier: 'Of course we will diverge.' If Britain will, why shouldn't Northern Ireland, fully part of the UK?

Then this week a text agreed by Ireland

and the EU grabbed at a correlative phrase, *continued regulatory alignment*. Neither phrase pleased Arlene Foster, the leader of the DUP, which happens to lend Mrs May a majority. 'We will not stand for that,' she said plainly. She might as well have said, 'Never, never, never, never,' as the Revd Ian Paisley said in 1985, and King Lear said in Shakespeare with a rather different intonation.

The whole point of talking of *alignment* was obfuscation. Mrs Foster knew that, since such wiles are meat and drink to Northern Irish politics. Her anger implied that *alignment* meant much the same as leaving Northern Ireland as a member of the EU. Perhaps it did. Or perhaps it meant that Northern Ireland would not be plugged into the EU single market circuitry as the Republic is, but would, like an electric toothbrush, gain the same charge by induction. That is a neat analogy, I think, even though it was suggested by my husband in one of his narrow plateau moments between six o'clock drinks and somnolence.

However, he did not, tellingly, know what *Ceta* was when I asked him. It is an acronym from the initials of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the EU and Canada. Some people said that if Britain could not have a *bespoke* agreement, it could have one like *Ceta*. *Ceta* has been in negotiation since 2009 and just needed ratification by all 28 EU members. Then something shocking happened. During Angela Merkel's attempts to form a coalition after the German elections in September, she assured the Greens that she would drop ratification of *Ceta*, if only they'd side with her. As it turned out, the coalition attempt failed for other reasons. But Mrs Merkel's cynical tactic makes Mrs May's helicoptering of money on to the DUP look like a Christmas game.

All in all, the three types of ambiguity embodied in the words *Brexit*, *alignment* and *Ceta* explain why most people are baffled by the Brexit talks. Mrs May deliberately made Brexit a platitude, emptied of meaning. The negotiators deliberately spoke with forked tongues by using *continued regulatory alignment*. And *Ceta*, most revealingly of all, is one of those everyday acronyms that make Brexit incomprehensible and therefore dull for the millions who voted for it.

## BAROMETER

### Border skirmishes

What did the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic used to look like? — In **1923** a Common Travel Area between the UK and what was then the Irish Free State established free movement. Passport checks began in the second world war and ended in **1952**, though some customs checks continued. The first attempt to control the border came in **1970**, when 51 back roads were closed with spikes. But people kept stealing the spikes. Thereafter, there was no official barrier on most of the 200 cross-border roads but patrols were in place and people were expected to cross at 20 crossing points. These were removed after the Good Friday agreement in **1998**.

### Leftovers

The East of England Co-op is to trial selling some food past its sell-by date more cheaply. Where does most food get thrown away in Britain (once past the farm gate)?

Quantity of waste per year

Household waste .....	<b>7.3m</b> tonnes
Processing factories .....	<b>1.7m</b> tonnes
Catering trade .....	<b>0.9m</b> tonnes
Retailers .....	<b>0.25m</b> tonnes
Street litter .....	<b>0.1m</b> tonnes
Wholesalers .....	<b>0.04m</b> tonnes

Source: WRAP

### Cash flow

A dispute over fees threatens ATM machines. How many are there in Britain? — As of 2015 there were **70,270**: 27 per cent attached to bank branches, 46 per cent retail outlets, 10 per cent leisure centres and 8 per cent garages or service stations.

— Of these, **52,717** (75 per cent) are free to use. These are more heavily used, so only 2 per cent of withdrawals incur a fee.

— The average machine dispenses **£7,576** per day. Individual withdrawals average out at **£69**.

Source: PaymentsUK

### Perilous pets

An Oldham family were reported to have adopted a three-stone African wildcat as a pet. How many dangerous wild animals are licensed to be kept on private property in the UK (excluding zoos open to the public)? Figures are from Freedom of Information requests and not all councils responded:

Poisonous snakes .....	<b>300</b>
Tigers.....	<b>13</b>
Alligators.....	<b>10</b>
Pumas .....	<b>9</b>
Crocodiles.....	<b>9</b>
Leopards.....	<b>8</b>
Cheetahs.....	<b>7</b>
Lions.....	<b>2</b>

Source: Press Association

# If Damian Green lied I don't blame him



I first viewed pornography at the age of 12, when a school friend showed me a magazine called, I think, *Razzle*. The centrefold was a naked lady with what appeared to be a large and potentially ferocious rodent between her legs — a coypu, perhaps, or a capybara. I had never seen anything like that before. ‘Look at that flunge!’ my friend enthused. ‘I had never heard the word before, either — I think it was a kind of portmanteau of ‘clunge’ and ‘flange’, both words with which I was familiar. ‘I bet your gimmer hasn’t got one like that,’ he added, spitefully. Gimmer is rural Teesside slang for a girlfriend — derived, I think, from the Scottish word for a young female sheep.

I had a sort of girlfriend at the time and I fervently hoped she didn’t have a snarling coypu up her skirt, or, if she did, then would be minded to keep it to herself. The pornography left me a bit cold, and thus worried me briefly that maybe I was gay, as my friend would not have put it. I thought the photograph hideous and rather menacing. I feel the same about porn today — the stuff I’ve seen, out of curiosity or by chance — a roommate had a stash of what he called ‘tug mags’ which he left lying around the house — seems to me every bit as vile and degrading as the feminists insist. There is malice and subjugation in it, a coarseness and a cheapness, and you get the feeling, too, that it is more about power and violence than sex. Given the vices I do have, it is rather gratifying to take, on this occasion, the moral high ground. But each to their own, I suppose.

The roommate I mentioned earlier would sometimes lock his door and when I tried to come in would shout: ‘Go away. I’m having a mastodon. I’ll be done in three minutes.’ He always called it ‘a mastodon’. He was otherwise a delightful companion. And so I do wonder if the moral high ground I occupy hasn’t been gained by principle and volition, but through a quirk of nature: I am one of the very few men who doesn’t enjoy porn, a weirdo. Because everyone else is up to it — porn is easily the most widely accessed material on the internet. It wouldn’t surprise me if most of the General Synod were regularly accessing sites called Haitian Dog Witch and vigorously bashing the bishop.

I don’t know what sites Damian Green accessed, although some sneaky ex-rozzer has suggested it was ‘extreme’ porn — perhaps Diane Abbott in chain mail brandishing a tub of lube. Green denies having visited any porno sites on his computer (nearly ten years ago!) and I suppose he could be telling the truth — but I don’t believe him. I think the berserk climate in which we live leaves anyone in public office facing this sort of charge no option but to obfuscate, prevaricate — in short, to lie. I don’t blame him one bit. There is not the slightest suggestion that he did anything illegal. It is none of the police’s business and none of the business of the whips’ office or, indeed, ours. If we are

*If we remove from office everyone who's looked at porn we'll be left with Baroness Ashton and Tim Farron*

going to remove from public office everyone who has looked at pornography in their lives, we’ll be left under the sole charge of Baroness Ashton and Tim Farron (oh, and maybe me, ha ha).

What is happening to Green is a disgrace. He was under investigation for having been pleasant to a young Tory woman, Kate Maltby, whom he might — and might not, she can’t be clear — have touched fleetingly on the knee. Get out of here, Maltby, with your pathetic #metoo whining: learn what sexual harassment is really about by

talking to some women who have actually experienced it. And have some spine, you Tories. The coppers who released this information about Green should be prosecuted under the data protection act immediately. It is an outrageous invasion of privacy and deeply, needlessly cruel to both Damian Green and his family.

How did the Conservative party get itself into the position that it could sacrifice one of its more able politicians on the say-so of some toff airhead princess and the self-important (and to my mind illegal) accusations of some retired copper? What happened to innocent until proven guilty? Have we, in this moronic inferno, dispensed with that notion altogether?

Even worse is the case of the former whip and Conservative MP for Dover, Charlie Elphicke. Suspended from his party more than a month ago, he has yet to be told — by the police, or indeed by his own former whips’ office — exactly why he has been cast out. Five, six, weeks have passed and the coppers still won’t tell him the nature of the allegations made against him, the stuff which has destroyed his career.

Some Tory MPs have said that there is an air of ‘Salem’ about this latest raft of allegations. Salem? Hell, at least the women of Salem knew what they were being done for: being witches. Elphicke doesn’t even have that consolation. Just knows that there are allegations and the police are handling them. And so he has to rouse his kids one night and inform his wife that the ten o’clock news will be telling the world that he is being booted out for ectoplasmic reasons nobody has the remotest clue about. Just that thing: something to do with sex. A smear, then. A besmirchment. And the Conservative party goes along with it all? This isn’t Salem, this is Kafka’s *The Trial*. What happened to the old-fashioned idea of ‘evidence’?

I know neither man, by the way. And I’m not a Tory. In fact I’m less a Tory now, because of this idiocy (and the continuing existence of Justine Greening), than I’ve ever been. And less likely to trust the police, too.



**SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE**

*The argument continues online.*

# Rise of the glamocracy

Prince Harry's bride reflects a shift in British society

HARRY MOUNT

The world may be dazzled by Prince Harry marrying a divorced, mixed-race American TV star. But his grand friends and royal cousins will hardly bat an eyelid. Because they've been marrying celebs (and Americans) for the past decade or so. In a subtle, gradual change in the British upper classes, the aristocracy has given way to the glamocracy.

Gone is the blue-blood obsession; gone the marrying off of smart cousin to smart cousin which has continued since Agincourt; gone the Mrs Bennets frantically flicking through *Burke's Peerage*, desperate to marry off their boot-faced daughter to the local squire. These days, young royalty and aristocracy are increasingly mixing with, and marrying, international money, beauty and fame.

Harry's wingman Guy Pelly married Lizzy Wilson, an American Holiday Inn heiress; Ben Elliot; Camilla Parker Bowles's entrepreneur nephew, married Mary-Clare Winwood, daughter of rock star Stevie. Zara Phillips married England rugby player Mike Tindall. Harry's second cousin, Lord Freddie Windsor, married Sophie Winkleman, a TV star and sister of Claudia, the queen of Saturday night TV. Peter Phillips married Autumn Kelly, a Canadian; his father, Mark Phillips, married an American equestrian, Sandy Pflueger.

The pattern trickles down through the aristocracy. Viscountess Weymouth, the future Marchioness of Bath, is a mixed-race model. The Countess of Devon is an American ex-*Baywatch* actress; Viscountess Hinchinbrooke, the future Countess of Sandwich, is the American star of *Ladies of London*, an American reality show. Kate Moss is going out with a German aristocrat, Count Nikolai von Bismarck. Lady Mary Charteris, daughter of the Earl of Wemyss, is married to rock star Robbie Furze, and joined his band The Big Pink as a singer.

Young royalty and aristocracy are now just another arm of the international, rich, celeb glamocracy. They *are* rich celebs. In an age of soaring land and art values, any peer who's managed to cling on to a few thousand acres and the family Rembrandt is as rich as Croesus; as is Prince Harry, thought to be worth around £30 million. Throw in the column inches that he and his circle attract,

and they have become de facto celebs. Gone are the 19th-century days when the Duke of Marlborough had to contract a miserable, desperately ill-matched marriage to American heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt to keep the roof on Blenheim Palace. Today's aristocrats are just as rich as their international spouses and share the same worldview, the same clean-eating habits, the same Netflix binges and the same taste in Grey Goose vodka martinis.

Snobbery will never disappear entirely. But it has certainly declined as the royal-aristocratic life increasingly melds with the life of the glamocracy. The young Lord Emsworth invented by P.G. Wodehouse studied classics at Eton and Oxford (with a spell in

*Bertie Wooster would be working for a Wall Street hedge fund in the same suits as his fellow bankers*

the Bullingdon), then devoted himself to White's Club in town and pig-rearing in the country, before marrying a fellow aristocrat. Today's young Emsworth studies economics at an American university, works for a hedge fund and is a member of 5 Hertford Street, the glamocratic Mayfair club. If he did go to Eton, Oxford or similar, he found them packed with fellow glamocrats.

Like Prince Harry, young Emsworth shares his American girlfriend's therapy-speak. His relationship troubles on the Fulham Road are much the same as those suffered by the future Lady Emsworth in Hollywood or Greenwich Village. They'll visit the same shrinks and do the same military fitness sessions with the same personal trainers.

The old aristocratic world — unintelligible school slang, unintelligible consonants, dog hair on the bedspread, a bottle of claret

with the grouse, red trousers — is as dead as Nineveh and Tyre to young Emsworth. He won't have heard of Nineveh or Tyre, either. The classical and Biblical education that even Bertie Wooster, winner of a Scripture Knowledge prize, excelled in, has largely gone for good. As for the Bullingdon, the last time the club tried to have their annual photograph taken at Christ Church, they were laughed out of Canterbury Quad as fellow undergraduates played the Benny Hill theme tune 'Yakety Sax' on loudspeakers.

Incidentally, I'm writing this on a plane. On the luggage locker above seat ten in front of me is a red sign saying 'Prohibited area for class divider' — that impenetrable curtain between Club Europe and Euro Traveler class. Well, among the glamocracy, class dividers are prohibited too. The linguistic, educational, and geographical signals that would once have marked out the aristocracy have gone for good. Take the traditional English season: from Henley to Wimbledon, from Cowes to Glyndeboune, it is a glamocratic season, rather than an aristocratic one.

Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh, who made comic hay by placing clueless, fey, artistic, ironic, upper-class Englishmen among blunt, money-obsessed Americans, would get no more comedy out of the situation. Today's Charles Ryder has much the same outlook as Rex Mottram. Bertie Wooster would be working for a Wall Street hedge fund in the same suits as his fellow bankers. The outfit Harry wore for his engagement interview — slimfit suit, white shirt, sober, dark, thin tie — is the same uniform worn by fellow trustafarian and constitutional princeling Jared Kushner for his global, diplomatic shuttling on behalf of his father-in-law.

It is undeniably, objectively marvellous that racial and class-related barriers to the British elite have fallen. They have been replaced by the admittedly less insidious (but still deeply unfair) barriers of beauty and money. Intellectual assortative mating, whereby fellow Oxbridge graduates and fellow megabrainers from America marry, has been producing planet-brained couples and offspring ever since women were admitted to the universities and the professions.

Now glamocratic mating is producing a group of lovely-looking children with bottomless pockets. Step forward the Beckham clan and the offspring of Jude Law and Sadie Frost, already taking up their inherited place on the catwalks and fashion and gossip pages.

The meritocracy was always a pipe dream. The deserving rarely got a look-in during the centuries when aristocrats ruled the roost. Now cash, good looks and celebrity are king. The poor, the plain and the unknown will never make it to the king's court, however deserving they may be.



'They've gone on to better things.'

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

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# Feeding the frenzy

Tabloid-style hysteria has infected political news coverage

CHRIS MULLIN

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Tony Blair once remarked, during one of the periodic feeding frenzies that engulf British politics, that public life was becoming a game of 'gotcha'. These days feeding frenzies, like Atlantic hurricanes, seem to strike with increasing frequency. No week passes without someone, somewhere calling for this or that minister to quit. When a minister does resign the focus quickly switches to whomever is next in line. No sooner has the defence secretary gone than Damian Green enters the frame, until Priti Patel obligingly puts her head on the block, only to be followed by Boris Johnson, and so on.

Now, three weeks on, Damian Green is again back in the spotlight. At the time of writing his prospects do not look good. The danger is that his fall — if that is the outcome — will trigger demands for a search of all the computers in the Palace of Westminster to determine who has been watching pornography in office hours. Given that about 5,000 people work in parliament there is a huge potential treasure trove. A vast feeding frenzy beckons.

It's easy journalism, of course. In recent years, emboldened perhaps by the Great Parliamentary Expenses Meltdown, tabloid culture has spread into the mainstream. The BBC, I am sorry to say, is one of the worst offenders. Incredibly, they even used a helicopter to track Priti Patel's movements from the moment her plane touched down at Heathrow. If that isn't skewed priorities, I don't know what is.

There is a PhD thesis to be written on 'Great Feeding Frenzies I Have Known'. One of my favourites was when, in the spring of 2002, it was alleged that Tony Blair had tried to manipulate himself a more prominent seat at the Queen Mother's funeral. The story blazed for days and then suddenly died, as though someone had flicked a switch — which I suspect they had. Word came from the Palace that the Queen was not happy with this misuse of her mother's funeral and the nonsense stopped instantly.

'Obama snubs Gordon Brown' was another favourite. In the wake of the near-global banking collapse, when Brown was trying to persuade world leaders (in retro-

spect, his finest hour) to pump liquidity into their economies to avoid recession, the British media became obsessed with such snub stories. The line seems to have been decided before Brown had left London and was pursued by lobby correspondents all the way across the Atlantic and even into the Oval Office. Obama was astonished. He rang Brown afterwards to commiserate. 'They were like hounds,' he said.

The overall effect of this constant demand for sensation is that it feeds the anti-politics sentiment which is deeply embedded in our culture. There are occasions when

*A casual survey of our media might leave you with the impression that we live in the Congo*

a casual survey of our media might leave you with the impression that we live in the west European equivalent of the Congo.

Occasionally, the game can be dangerous. It was wholly irresponsible of Andrew Marr to ambush Michael Gove with a question about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British-Iranian woman imprisoned in Tehran.

## FROM THE ARCHIVE

### Biding one's time

*From 'Quietness and confidence', The Spectator, 8 December 1917: When a tug-of-war is going on between two nearly matched teams, the lighter, and therefore weaker, team will often beat the team distinctly heavier and stronger because they have a few ounces more determination in them... We speak in no metaphorical or fantastic sense when we say that the future of the world turns upon this diamond pin-point of psychology. All depends upon the side which can hold out for ten minutes (or even ten seconds) longer than the other. That being so, it behoves every man and woman here to clench their teeth and determine that the extra ten minutes shall be ours, not the enemy's.*

Gove had no responsibility for the matter. It had been clarified the previous week. There was no public interest in asking the question of a different minister to the one who had overall responsibility. It was just an attempt to wrongfoot Gove which backfired badly — at the expense of Mrs Ratcliffe.

Lately, the rolling news media have developed a new trick. That of shouting a provocative question at passing politicians, not in the hope of getting a reply (most senior politicians are too savvy for that), but merely in order to get the question on air. 'Is it true you are a serial killer, minister?' (I exaggerate, but you get the idea.)

No sooner does Theresa May put her head out of the front door of No. 10 than she is met with cries of 'When are you going to resign?' and somehow or another they always find their way into the clip on the evening news bulletins. It is intended to undermine and demoralise, and no doubt it does.

It is tempting, of course, for the opposition to play the game by joining in the chorus of unproven allegations and demands for resignations, but they need to bear in mind that it could well be their turn in due course. What goes round comes round. Blair has several times expressed regret that he made such a big issue of alleged 'sleaze' during the last two years of the Major government for that reason. It came back to haunt him.

There is another, more serious, side-effect of trial-by-feeding-frenzy. More important stories get crowded out. The Rohingya catastrophe has disappeared from the headlines. Scarcely any mention has been made of the desperate plight of several hundred thousand people who are trapped in a suburb of Damascus that has been under siege for months. And in Kasai in the Congo, three million people are said by the UN to be facing starvation, a story more or less unreported.

A neighbour of mine remarked the other day that one had to wait until two-thirds of the way down the news bulletin, if then, to find out what is going on in the world outside our little bubble.

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*Chris Mullin is a former Labour minister and a journalist by profession.*



# The royals don't exist, so they have my full support



Prince Harry does not exist and soon Meghan Markle will cease to exist too. None of the royal family exist. This truth, which has come to me rather late in life, has taught me how to stop worrying and love the monarchy.

Despite my boyhood admiration for King Sobhuza II of Swaziland, I was always a bit of a republican. Not a tumbrils and guillotine kind, nor even, really, a campaigner for abolition, because as the decades have rolled it has become impossible not to feel respect for the Queen's hard work; and besides, as the Australians have learned, there's not a lot of point in removing the monarchy unless you can agree on the alternative.

What alternatives suggest themselves? Tame presidencies in Germany and Italy have never seemed to gel as focuses for national identity; while the awkward amalgam of national symbol with political leader that France, the United States or South Africa attempt has always seemed a difficult mental feat. I've smiled to watch Americans at dinner attacking their president bitterly — until foreigners join in, whereupon the Americans become tense.

So for many years my proposition has been that if we British ever do away with kings and queens, we must not replace them with papier-mâché presidencies — I don't know... Betty Boothroyd, Alan Johnson, David Attenborough or Michael Palin, cuddly people — but instead make the full leap from the personification to the abstraction of nationhood. Britain, I've argued (probably here) can be — indeed is — an idea. We can love and respect that idea. We don't need a person in whom to invest our patriotism. It's juvenile to crave icons and figureheads.

I still think this, but have concluded that abstracted patriotism isn't going to happen. In us humans the caveman lurks not far beneath the sophisticate, and tribes need chiefs. Strip them of their feathered head-dresses and call them administrators, and popular hunger will grow for something more magical to dance around, whooping.

For some, of course it's a divinity, which may or may not be linked to a kingdom or caliphate; and a range of models is available: from the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Mohammed at the human end, to Jesus

Christ (hybrid), to God, the Holy Ghost, Allah, Jehovah, Gaia, and a great miscellany of spirits or ancestors in the sky, Valhalla, or the African trees. These can be run in tandem with earthly princes whom, if we so choose, the gods may be said to anoint. But all share this essential characteristic: they embody for us ordinary humans something of the mysterious and something of the divine. They offer us magic.

The cult of celebrity is an extension of this deep hunger among mankind for someone to exalt. In our secular age, women with enormous bottoms like the Kardashians, men with enduring sex appeal like George Clooney, or transient celebrities from the world of music or sport — Justin Bieber,

*The cult of celebrity is an extension of this deep hunger among mankind for someone to exalt*

David Beckham — enjoy a prince-like status for a few months or years. Read the celebrity pages on Mail Online and you may find yourself caught up in a virtual kingdom with virtual ogres, princesses, princes and frogs.

These worlds, worlds of royalty, celebrity, divinity or presidency, are designed not only to offer us figures to look up to, but figures to fear, pity or despise, too. King John was not a good man. Lucifer fell. Wayne Rooney has been a very naughty boy. Princess Diana was a victim and Eva Peron a saint. And we all have our views on Mary Queen of Scots.

You can see where these reflections lead.



*'You must agree to our terms and conditions before crossing the border.'*

With royalty and celebrity, reality lurches into fiction. There is of course a young man with red hair called Harry with a father called Charles, a grandma called Elizabeth, a sweet old great-grandmother called (when alive) the Queen Mother, and an actual mother who was called Diana. All living, breathing people. But we don't know them. They stand before us with their finery bathed in light but their faces in shadow. Each trails a supposed persona and a cartload of hopes and ideas we've constructed around them. They are all in a kind of play, called the Royal Story, with plots and subplots, joys and sorrows; but the narrative is only very loosely related to the real story, to which only they and their intimates are privy. They are walking whiteboards on to which the nation may scrawl its fairytales.

'Absurd,' you say. 'We wouldn't follow their lives and believe in them if they were only our inventions.' Wouldn't we? What then are we doing with *The Archers* or *Coronation Street*, in which millions of us take a daily interest, breathless to know what these people (who do not exist) are going to do next? Theatre, soap opera or indeed the English novel only take to its logical conclusion the thinking and feeling which, preferring the drama to be loosely tied to someone you could touch, creates a constitutional (i.e. powerless) monarchy.

Years ago at the Hay Festival in a marquee in a waterlogged field, I debated monarchy alongside the late Elizabeth (Countess) Longford (pro) and Roy (now Lord) Hattersley (anti). On the republican side I seconded Roy, who spoke magnificently. The chairman, William Rees-Mogg, asked for a show of hands to decide the result. The republicans were indisputably the victors. Lord Rees-Mogg declared the result a draw. And we all trooped out into the rain, where a Rolls-Royce waited to carry Roy Hattersley away, to cheers from supporters. The Rolls got stuck in the mud; we supporters put shoulders behind it; and off it slithered with the great republican inside, showering us with mud.

I adore Roy, but on the throne I'd prefer the Queen. And I can thrill with the best of them to Harry and Meghan's news because they don't exist. And I wouldn't have it any other way.



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# King John

The shadow chancellor on the Corbyn coup and its consequences

MARK LOBEL

John McDonnell looks exhausted, slumped in his parliamentary office chair. Nobody said the revolution would be easy. Do he and Jeremy Corbyn have any catchphrases, I ask, to gee themselves up when battered by the right-wing press, the pundits or the moderates in their own party? ‘This will send the *Daily Mail* wild, OK,’ he says. ‘It’s Gramsci: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.”’

‘No matter how bad it gets, determination is what you need. We’re doing something we’ve been working for for 30, 40 years of our lives. And this opportunity has come. We didn’t expect it. But now it’s come we’re making the most of it.’

Hours before our interview, Labour’s Treasury team had one of their regular meetings with the former head of the civil service, the crossbencher Lord Kerslake. They’ve been meeting active civil servants, the heads of the Treasury and HMRC, and I’m told McDonnell has ‘a good working relationship’ with Mark Boleat, the former City of London Corporation policy chief. The drive is to assure everyone that — contrary to the expectations of many — Corbyn’s Labour is prepared for government.

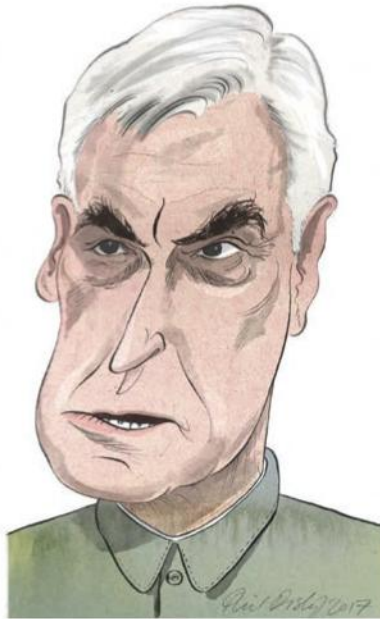
‘The first 100 days will be radical,’ says McDonnell. ‘Within months we’d have our first Budget. We’d be into our Finance Bill a month after that and we’d be setting up the National Investment Bank. We’ll start investing in our housing programme. We’d be scrapping tuition fees. Jeremy laid out the priorities for civil servants about what we’d want in our first Queen’s Speech. It would be a radical laying of the foundation stones for the next five years.’

On Brexit, he says that Labour’s priority would be to ‘protect the economy and protect jobs... we don’t underestimate the mess we’ll be inheriting’. What if Labour found itself in power before March 2019, and the Article 50 deadline for withdrawal from the EU? He doesn’t blink at the idea, but stays away from the technicalities: ‘We’ve built in a transition period, so that will give us a bit of stability... We feel whatever the state of play will be, we’ll be able to secure a better deal with Europe or use that transition period to prepare the future.’

How extraordinary it is to hear McDon-

nell talking so confidently about real power. Just two and a half years ago Jeremy Corbyn’s faction of MPs, the Socialist Campaign Group, didn’t dare to dream that it could seize the leadership of the party, let alone the country. The Labour leadership had put up barriers intended to stop a hard-left candidate from getting to the starting block: every candidate needed the support of at least 15 per cent of the party. In June 2015 that meant 35 MPs — significantly more than the Campaign Group had. They had 12 days.

Much has been said about Corbyn’s surprise successes; how he denied the Tories a



majority in this election and vastly expanded Labour’s membership, making it impossible for him to be ousted in a coup by his MPs. But to McDonnell, the most significant victory was the first: the operation that won over enough MPs for Jeremy Corbyn, a serial rebel with a 1970s script, to be nominated. After that, political currents which no one has yet quite understood swept him to the leadership.

McDonnell takes much of the credit for getting Corbyn on the Labour ballot. One of his first moves was to bring in Ben Sellers, a bookseller in Durham who was to become

their digital guru. Sellers converted his bookshop into Team Corbyn’s social media HQ and his success was instant. A new Facebook page, organising and discussing campaigning techniques, received 10,000 ‘likes’ and 2,000 ‘shares’ within the first few hours. On the @JeremyCorbyn4PM Twitter account, the hashtag #JezWeCan, coined as a joke by a rival campaign’s supporter, was adopted with alacrity. Sellers reckons that his online efforts influenced ten to 15 MPs who nominated Corbyn — a third of the total required.

But with three days to go, and only 18 nominations in writing, McDonnell feared they would fall short. He ordered volunteers from around the country to assemble in one room in Westminster for the weekend for the political equivalent of a lock-in without the booze. McDonnell explains how they tested the strength of prospective nominees.

‘We hit the telephones. We could listen in to conversations about who had spoken to whom, how firm they were on the nomination, and if they weren’t firm, we’d make an assessment about who else we could speak to. Sometimes it was speaking to a relative or friend or whatever and getting a report back and we were all doing odds on how reliable these nominations were.’

By 6 p.m. on the Sunday, as McDonnell left for a long-standing date at the Globe theatre, he felt he had received sufficient support to take Corbyn over the line. That evening, the shadow chancellor watched ‘a very bloody Shakespeare play, blood all over the place’. McDonnell says he can’t remember which play it was. Funnily enough, a quick Google reveals the answer to be *King John*, a tale of ruthless politicking and fatal power struggles. Perhaps the title appealed to him.

At 11 a.m. the next day, with an hour to go, things were getting tense. McDonnell was waiting for another nine MPs to make their way to Labour’s office in Westminster Hall to physically sign the nomination papers.

Finally, those who had pledged to support Corbyn started turning up. With around three minutes to go, Corbyn still had not secured the requisite 35 votes. McDonnell was reduced to sinking to his knees in front of an audience of four prevaricating MPs. He told them the party membership would not understand or forgive if Jeremy was

excluded from the ballot. 'I was very emotional,' he tells me. It worked. As Big Ben struck 12 noon, Corbyn was on the ballot with 36 MPs backing him. From there, as everybody knows, he stormed to the leadership and in June this year, almost to No. 10.

Now Corbyn has cemented his position at the top of the party after confounding so many expectations, I asked McDonnell why Corbyn had succeeded where he and Diane Abbott had failed as leadership contenders. Is he more likeable?

'Yes. He's not a confrontational politician. He's a consensus builder. I am more confrontational and Diane is a bit as well. Jeremy's whole history has been around very principled stands, and even where people have been ardently disagreeing with him, they have respected his view.'

Does McDonnell worry, as his comedy character does on the BBC sketch show *Tracey Breaks the News*, that Jeremy is being distracted by his celebrity? He laughs: 'Jeremy's feet are firmly on the ground. Don't

*'Don't underestimate Jeremy's ability to stay rooted. He refuses to accept celebrity status'*

underestimate his ability to stay rooted. He refuses to accept celebrity status. [His popularity] is just wonderful. It's an emotional commitment from so many young people.'

Not everybody thinks it is fantastic. Many Labour MPs fear Momentum, the driver of all that youthful enthusiasm. Are they not taking over Labour and purging it of its diversity? McDonnell says that since Corbyn won the second leadership election, the party *has* come together in an 'amazing way... The atmosphere has transformed.'

'People in Momentum have their views and they express them and articulate them. But we'll always be a party with different ideas stretching right the way from left to right. That includes whether it's Momentum, Progress, the Fabian Society. You name it.'

But what about the coercing of Labour MPs to sign a loyalty pledge? McDonnell bats the question away as if it's fake news. 'There's no way Momentum is demanding a loyalty pledge. They're asking Labour MPs to uphold a sort of ethics formula.'

'What Momentum did in the last general election was literally have thousands of people moving from constituency to constituency to support people and they did that on the basis of where that support was needed. It wasn't on the basis of what the politics of that individual MP is. It's just mobilising. They're not asking for anything in return.'

John McDonnell may be tired, but his spirits are strong, and his will optimistic.

*Mark Lobel's report on the 12 days that changed politics is on the Westminster Hour on BBC Radio 4 this Sunday at 10 p.m.*

## ANCIENT AND MODERN

### Punished for leaving



Since the EU does not want the UK to leave and will do everything to stop it leaving, it is becoming clearer by the day that the Brexiteers' hopes of a beneficial or even a remotely satisfactory withdrawal agreement are at an end.

Like the EU, Athenians knew how to deal with 'leavers'. After driving the mighty Persians out of Greece in 479 BC, the Athenians proposed that all the Greek city states unite to prevent the Persians ever returning. The means would be a pan-Hellenic naval force on constant patrol across the Aegean, headed by Athens, the leading Greek maritime power.

To bring this about, it was agreed that the city-states would provide Athens annually with either money or ships to build up a sufficiently powerful

fleet to ensure Greek security across the region. The contemporary historian Thucydides reported that the first member to revolt from the League was the island of Naxos, c. 468 BC. It did not, or could not, come up with the money or ships required, but 'the Athenians insisted on obligations being exactly met'.

Since many city-states preferred to provide money rather than military service in the shape of men and ships, Athens could enlarge its own fleet and therefore bully anyone who revolted. Naxos was attacked and forced back into the

League. In 365 BC the same fate awaited the island of Thasos: its defensive walls were destroyed, its navy surrendered, an indemnity imposed and control of its gold mines lost.

Thucydides' analysis of the situation was that states in a position of power held on to it, come what may, for three reasons — status, fear and self-interest. And that was what drove Athens. Even Pericles admitted the empire was 'like a tyranny'.

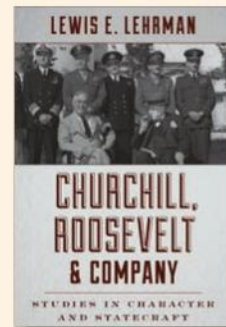
The EU is not a tyranny, but its motivation is identical. Further, like Athens, it holds the whip hand. That is why it is refusing to negotiate on anything but its own terms. Why should it do otherwise? Like the Athenians, it has a duty to protect its own interests. It has none to protect ours.

— Peter Jones

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# Chinese charity

Why is China sending aid money to mend bikes in Surrey?

MELISSA KITE

When I first hear that my well-heeled Surrey neighbourhood is receiving aid from China, I assume it must be a hoax. I don't believe it until I see a press release from the borough council confirming that the Dongying municipal government has made a £5,660 donation to help the unskilled and socially excluded of Guildford through projects including bicycle-mending.

Ever get the feeling you are living in a parallel universe and that the world you once understood a little bit has left you behind, in terms of the dwindling sense that it makes? Who's funding who in the overseas aid fandango is one of the great mysteries of globalisation that can make you feel like you are going stark, staring mad.

The stockbrokers of Surrey ended up on the receiving end of Chinese charity after Guildford borough council 'partnered' itself with Dongying, a city of two million people in Shandong province in eastern China, where the average professional salary is a few hundred pounds a month. Why they did that is all part of the mystery. Dongying is home to the Shengli oil field, the China University of Petroleum and a range of heavy industries whose links with Guildford are not immediately obvious. Nevertheless, council leaders said it was essential to forge links and set off there for some 'fact-finding'.

Their trip cost taxpayers £7,134 in flights and accommodation: on the face of it more than swallowing up the Chinese donation — and causing a stir in the genteel streets of Guildford and its surrounding chocolate box villages. Some complained it was a most dreadful humiliation.

But council leader Paul Spooner insists that the donation assists the council's dogooding arm, 'Guildford Philanthropy', which improves the lives of some of Surrey's 'most vulnerable and less-advantaged residents'. Guildford Philanthropy lists only two projects, the first being Glade, a work experience scheme needed because 'although Guildford has been judged one of the luxury towns of the UK there are around 4,000 people with no qualifications. Some parts of the borough are the most deprived in Surrey.'

That is not going to get any pulses racing in Jeremy Corbyn's office, but never mind. The other project the Chinese will be

helping to fund is called the Guildford Bike Project. This takes donations of unwanted bikes from the general public, fixes them up and sells them back to the community at an affordable price. But hang on just a minute — with the aid of money from China?

The film shows a young chap in nicely pressed overalls working on an upside-down bike, explaining how this project has changed his life: 'Well, it goes on my CV.'

'You get your own bike at the end of it, you know,' says another fellow.

'It's not the same pressure as having a real job or anything,' says a sloaney-looking girl.

'We've created a market for second-hand

*Hundreds of second-hand bicycles in Guildford are now reassembled with money from China*

bikes in Guildford that didn't exist before,' says a project organiser.

Yes, well. I think we've got the picture.

'There are nine million bicycles in Beijing,' as Katie Melua sang. 'That's a fact, it's a thing we can't deny.' And there are now hundreds of second-hand bicycles in Guildford reassembled with money from China. And that's just stir-fry crazy. Not least because Britain is still sending millions of pounds of aid every year to China. The government doesn't admit this, of course. Officially, we said aid would stop in 2011 after the Chinese stepped up their space programme. But, behind the scenes, billions



of pounds of taxpayers' money still finds its way to China under other guises. The Department for International Development has been spending £8-10 million a year to support China 'becoming a more effective leader', with further money pumped in through the Prosperity Fund. And now they're sending us money back. There are, according to Mr Spooner, 50 other partnerships between UK local authorities and China, although I wasn't able to verify that.

Of course, if you believe local councils just twin themselves with remote Chinese petro-chemical towns in return for some help with local bike-mending schemes, or to go on a jolly, you are perhaps a little naive, especially when you consider the presentational difficulties. Guildford is inundated with twinning offers. Versailles is currently making overtures. But no, Dongying it is, where there are rumours of human rights violations, and worst of all, as one councillor opposed to the scheme tells me, there might even be a dog-eating festival.

I put this to the council and they will neither confirm or deny it. Mr Spooner says: 'It's important to remember that there are differences in cultures across the world, and what seems strange, controversial or unacceptable to some is part of other peoples' heritage.'

I wouldn't count on the people of Surrey embracing dog-skinning as cultural heritage. Surely, if you are going to accept that, you might be better bringing back fox hunting?

No, it doesn't make sense. With all the bother, there must be a better reason for accepting five grand from China. Opponents of the arrangement, including local Tories, allege it must be to do with land deals and Chinese eagerness to find safe investments. But when I put this to the council they explicitly deny it and state very clearly that no land will be sold to the Chinese.

Another theory that occurred to me centres on China being the fastest-growing destination for British recyclables. Currently, Guildford sends almost all its recycling waste to one leading British firm. However, the three neighbouring councils send their paper waste to China, where although the environmental impact is less certain, the price they pay is much higher.

Dongying's major industries include paper manufacturing, rubber production, textiles, and it has a number of firms importing waste materials. But when I ask Guildford council if it has discussed recycling possibilities as part of its links with Dongying, I am given a firm no.

So I'm back to square one. I don't pretend to understand any of it, or to have got anywhere near a valid reason for accepting charity from China. All I know is what I am being told: the Chinese have sent the people of Surrey five grand (of their own money back) to mend bicycles. I suppose that makes no less sense than anything else about the overseas aid programme.

# 'Fascist? No! I'm a federalist'

An interview with Matteo Salvini, who might be Italy's next leader

NICHOLAS FARRELL

The man who could become Italy's next prime minister is sat just opposite the entrance to the huge US and Nato airbase near Catania in Sicily at a hotel confiscated from the Mafia. It's not Silvio Berlusconi, no matter how much the British press tells us that 'Berlusconi is Back!' *Silvio Il Magnifico* (as I call him) cannot be prime minister because he is banned from public office after his four-year jail sentence for tax fraud in 2012 (commuted to a year's community service in an old people's home).

No, the man I'm talking to is Matteo Salvini, leader of Lega, the leading party on the right (15 per cent, give or take, in the polls), just ahead of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (14 per cent), whose support has collapsed since the good old days. Together with the post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (5 per cent), they have enough support to win a working majority at the election, when Italians will attempt to empower their first elected prime minister since Berlusconi was forced to resign in 2011.

Comic demagogue Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement tops the polls on 27 per cent. But it cannot win because it refuses to join coalitions. Ex-prime minister Matteo Renzi's post-communist Partito Democratico is second on 25 per cent, but is dogmeat after five years of failure and three unelected premiers (including him).

We had gone outside to smoke at my suggestion (Salvini instantly agreed) and we got on like a house on fire, as smokers invariably do these days. Salvini, 44, is a big smoker and has a fairly big beard, too. I'd spent a week following him around Sicily before last month's regional elections in what was a dress rehearsal for the national campaign. Who wins Sicily, wins Italy. The coalition of the right won hands-down.

Lega was founded in 1989 to detach northern Italy (La Padania) from everything south of 'Roma Ladra' (thieving Rome). Southern Italians, it preached, were parasites and thieves and/or mafiosi. Yet here is its leader in Sicily, where trees are few but the state employs more forestry police (24,000) than Canada, courting Sicilian

votes. On the eve of his visit, Salvini even changed the name of his party from Lega Nord to just plain Lega.

So we lit up and I asked him what he would do about the migrant crisis. Since 2013, half a million migrants, mainly sub-Saharan African men, have arrived in Italy by sea from Libya. According to the UN, only 30 per cent are refugees. Most were picked up just off the Libyan coast near Tripoli by EU and NGO vessels and ferried to Sicily 300 miles away. Several NGOs



are under criminal investigation in Italy for alleged collusion with the people-smugglers.

There are 180,000 migrants in welfare centres and, Salvini assured me, 'another 300,000' at large. His solution? 'I'll send the navy to blockade Libya to stop them, and deport those who are not genuine refugees (that's nearly all) within a year of coming to power,' he said.

'Come off it, you don't even know their names, let alone where they're from.'

'We do know,' he said. 'And we'll do the necessary deals with their governments to send them back. Out, tutti!'

The previous day he had been to a luxury hotel near Agrigento, now a migrant welfare centre whose owners get the standard €35 a

day for each of their 200 migrants (all men, bar two) from the government.

'I welcome women and children who've escaped from the bombs of Syria as sisters and brothers, but we can't take in all the *disaddattati* (misfits) of the world,' he says. 'All I see is loads of fit-as-a-fiddle young men who look like they've just come from the gym or from under the sun lamp. I tell the truth and they call me a fascist, a racist, an ugly, dirty, nasty, xenophobic populist. But my success reflects the reality that Italians are at the end of their tethers.'

Is he a fascist? 'No. I'm a federalist. Look, the so-called "far right" defends the working class far more than the left does.'

From what? 'Cheap Tunisian olives and Moroccan tomatoes produced with chemicals banned in the EU and *clandestini* (illegal immigrants) in Italy who work for peanuts.'

Salvini, who abandoned a history degree at 20 to be a politician, is trying to transform Lega from a regional-federalist party into a national-federalist one and attract enough votes nationally (while keeping its support in the north) for it to become the top party of the right and so provide the premier. He became party leader in 2013 when its support had collapsed to 3 per cent. It is now at an all-time high. Since 2004, he has been a Euro MP on and off, and Lega is in the same bloc in the Euro Parliament as Marine Le Pen's Front National and Geert Wilders's Freedom Party.

Until Le Pen's defeat in France's presidential vote last spring, Salvini had promised to take Italy out of the euro and even the EU unless there were drastic reforms. But when Le Pen's euro-hostility was seen as a vote-loser, he changed his tune. So will he or won't he take Italy out of the euro?

'No need. It will collapse when the Germans refuse to fork out any more for the Mediterranean countries, which of course they will.' The EU? 'It can't survive in its present form. It must give back power to the people, which means to national governments.'

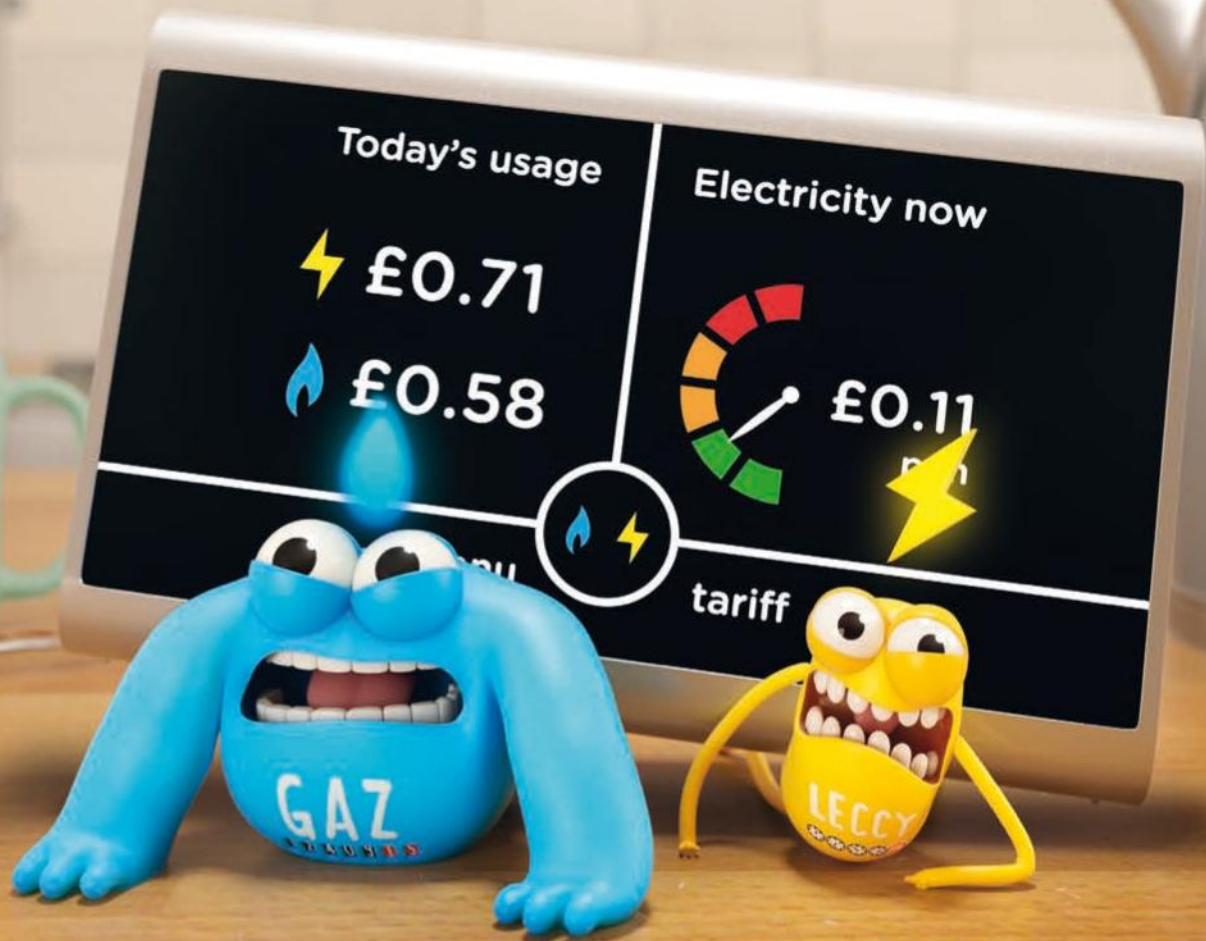
Whatever you make of his politics, Salvini, a fanatical supporter of AC Milan, is *molto simpatico*. Everything he says drives the liberal left wild with anger, but he does not rant and rave like Mussolini or Beppe Grillo and he tells lots of jokes. He is — dare I say it? — an Italian version of the *Daily Mail* columnist Richard Littlejohn, with a beard. You just could not make it up. Divorced with a son, 14, and daughter, four, by different women, he lives with Elisa Isoardi, a TV presenter and former Miss Italia contestant.

Does he believe in God? 'Yes, but I'm not very good at confessing my sins and going to Mass.' Salvini as premier? A dead certainty? No way. A distinct possibility? Definitely.



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## The Carlile report

Sir: The Bishop of Bath and Wells tells us (Letters, 2 December) that nobody is holding up publication of the Carlile report into the Church of England's hole-in-corner kangaroo condemnation of the late George Bell. Is it then just accidental that the church is still making excuses for not publishing it, and presumably for fiddling about with it, more than eight weeks after receiving it on 7 October? The church was swift to condemn George Bell on paltry evidence. It was swifter still to denounce those who stood up for him, falsely accusing them of attacking Bell's accuser. Yet it is miserably slow to accept just criticism of itself. Somehow, I suspect that, had Lord Carlile exonerated the apparatchiks involved, his report would long ago have been released. May I commend to the Bishop the words of Our Lord (Matthew 5:25): 'Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him.'

Peter Hitchens  
London W8

## Why the war went on

Sir: Simon Kerry's article (18 November) about his grandfather Lord Lansdowne's peace proposals during the first world war is a rare gem. Much of the focus of published works has been on the causes of the war, but virtually nothing has been published on why it continued for as long as it did.

My father, Colin Clark, was an Oxford academic who repeatedly claimed that a peace accord was on the cards right up to 1916, pointing out that the royal family only discarded their German titles that year. This coincided with Lansdowne's memo of November 1916 which was knocked down by Lloyd George. My father never revealed his sources for this assertion, but claimed that Lloyd George, together with Beaverbrook and Churchill, were responsible for killing off peace proposals. He did say that the Beaverbrook papers in Canada held the secrets.

David Clark  
London SW6

## Riding round the world

Sir: In his kind words about my book *Churchill at the Gallop*, Charles Moore was quite right to query the claim that 'Winston Churchill rode more extensively than any Prime Minister before or since' (The Spectator's Notes, 2 December). My defence admits to a degree of sophistry in that it uses 'extensively' in the geographic sense. The Duke of Wellington certainly rode more often than Churchill — just

about every day of his adult life — and he and Copenhagen famously jumped their way out of trouble at Waterloo. But unlike Churchill, he never rode in Cuba, Canada, Malta, Sudan or South Africa. Neither could he match Winston at scoring a cup final hat trick in India, since the first British polo club was not established there until 1862 — ten years after the Iron Duke's demise.

Brough Scott  
Ewhurst, Surrey

## Harry's alternative bride

Sir: While I applaud Melanie McDonagh on being a lone voice in pointing out that a 'groomed and glossy' Netflix celebrity may not be the best role model for young women ('The trouble with Miss Markle', 2 December), I think our local vicar has come up with an inspired solution to the nation's problems. During Sunday's service he said that, while preparing his sermon on the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, he had the radio on and caught two headlines: about the German Chancellor trying to revitalise the Brexit negotiations; and about Prince Harry's engagement. Somehow he confused the two stories

and for one glorious moment believed that, with Brexit hitting the buffers, Prince Harry was to marry Mrs Merkel. Now that really could work miracles.

Kathy Walton  
Chorleywood, Herts

## Waugh's degree

Sir: In his letter (25 November) Alexander Waugh denies that his grandfather, Evelyn Waugh, 'scraped a third at Hertford' and that he graduated from Oxford or anywhere else. If Evelyn did not attend the graduation ceremony, then he did not graduate from Oxford. All reference to a third is not out of place, however, since the Oxford University Calendar, 1932, lists him in the third class 'In Historia Moderna' for 1924 (p.232). By what margin he was assigned to this class, I have naturally no idea. 'Scraped' might be the right word.

Dr Geoffrey Thomas  
Peterborough, Cambridgeshire

## Tiny helpings

Sir: Reading Tanya Gold's review of Farmacy (Food, 25 November), I was strongly reminded of a passage in *Good Omens*, by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman. It concerns one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Famine, who invented nouvelle cuisine while visiting Paris. After visiting a restaurant, he muses: 'He was remembering the exclusive little restaurant. It had occurred to him that he had never seen so many rich people so hungry.'

Damian Gallagher  
Fleet, Hampshire

## Keep on trucking

Sir: Matthew Parris should not be concerned about driving a 20-year-old truck ('The era when you could love a car is over', 25 November). Indeed, he could be congratulated for being green. Many other truck users might buy two, three or more new vehicles during that period. The impact on the environment of building them would far outweigh that of his old truck chugging around for a few miles each week. Of course, the downside of everybody keeping their vehicles for so long would be the significant loss of jobs.

Jem Raison  
Shipston on Stour, Warwickshire



## WRITE TO US

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

# The LSE's skulking assassins are a terrible advert for the City's global aspirations



The revenge tragedy at the London Stock Exchange whose plot I outlined last month has reached its third act, but the carnage may not be over. Chief executive Xavier Rolet has left the building, rather than staying one more year as the LSE first announced, and declared that he won't come back under any circumstances. Despite whispers that 'aspects of his operating style' sparked this row in the first place, Rolet is due a £13 million golden farewell — which the *Daily Mail* called 'obscene' but his fans see as fair reward for all the value he has delivered.

Chief among those fans is LSE shareholder and hedge-fund princeling Sir Chris Hohn, who agitated for Rolet to stay and LSE chairman Donald Brydon to go. So far Hohn has achieved precisely the opposite. Brydon has agreed to retire, but not until April 2019, when he will be almost 74 and surely (even for a man apparently hewn from Scottish granite) ready to ease back. Hohn still wields a dagger, however, and will aim it between Brydon's shoulder-blades at a shareholders' meeting later this month. Meanwhile, City punters eager to spot Rolet's successor are putting bets on ex-JPMorgan banker Blythe Masters, famed (though not seriously blamed) for developing the credit derivatives that created such global havoc a decade ago.

One way or another, the planets are still misaligned in this saga of clashing egos and skulking assassins that has embarrassed the City at a time when — as the raised eyebrows of Governor Carney communicated last week — it most needs to give a positive presentation of itself to the world. There was another timely reminder of what's at stake in the engineering multinational Siemens's decision to float its medical business Healthineers in Frankfurt rather than New York or London, delivering a sideswipe about Brexit in the announcement by Siemens's director Michael Sen. He would do, wouldn't he, you're thinking: he's German and so is his company. But Siemens also has 13 UK factories and a long history here, and there was

a time when London would have been an obvious contender for such a high-profile listing. Not now it isn't — and certainly not while the LSE's 'Welcome' mat is splattered with blood.

## Trump's bull market

'With the great vote on Cutting Taxes, this could be a big day for the stock market — and YOU!' tweeted Donald Trump on Monday morning, after the Senate joined the House of Representatives in supporting the tax-reform agenda which looks likely to give him a legislative victory at last. The market wasn't as euphoric as he may have hoped, with the Dow Jones index rising only 0.8 per cent on the day and the tech-dominated Nasdaq actually falling. But if he achieves his proposed cut in corporation tax from 35 to 20 per cent — the most sensible piece of the package, the rest being largely unaffordable giveaways to the rich, including extra relief for estates and private jets — share prices will surely take another leap.

And Trump will hail that as a ringing endorsement for himself, however low his real approval rating among voters. When the inevitable (and according to many pundits, already overdue) stock-market correction kicks in, he'll just find other narcissistic ways to praise himself.

## Madder by the day

I don't know which is more worrying: that the bitcoin market becomes madder by the day, or that it becomes more mainstream. The market price of a unit of the cryptocurrency has spiked above \$11,800, up from \$750 a year ago, for no reason other than speculative fever. The total value of bitcoins in existence (if that's the right word) has surpassed the GDP of New Zealand. The first bitcoin billionaires have been announced as Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss, the American twins who were in at the birth of Facebook. The Chicago Mercantile Exchange is about to launch its first bitcoin futures con-

tract and an analyst at JPMorgan says bitcoin could soon rival gold as a safe-haven holding. What started as a virtual mystery story is fast becoming part of global financial furniture while regulators, central banks and Wall Street bosses watch, warn and try to work out what the real-world impacts will be if bitcoin self-combusts.

Which I continue to believe that it will, though I have not had an opportunity to test my scepticism in debate against, for example, someone who has sold bitcoins for dollars or pounds close to the current peak — unlike the Winklevoss duo, who haven't sold and whose billion is entirely notional. I note that the most avid bitcoin traders these days are in Japan, where there's a common personality type who in earlier eras gambled obsessively on gangster-owned pachinko slot-machines. But the only true believers in the cryptocurrency concept I've actually met (as opposed to those who just fancy a flutter on a rising market) tend to be rich wacko west-coast Americans who also believe that nation states and their monetary constructs are an outdated notion, overtaken by the potentialities of the internet.

Their view is that state-backed 'real' money no longer reliably performs as a store of value and means of exchange because it is undermined by inflation and bad government — and only performs at all because users choose to trust the system. So that makes it no different from money tokens in virtual-world computer games, out of which cryptocurrencies took wing. Except that (as I wrote in a review of a tiresome book on this theme called *Wildcat Currency* by Edward Castronova) 'every normal person above the age of six and not over-affected by chemical stimulants should be capable of distinguishing between the real and the imaginary'. We recognise Monopoly money, but when the game ends its 'value' evaporates — and that's what I think will happen, sooner or later, to bitcoin; most likely with colossal elements of fraud. My advice, if you're in it, is to take your profits while you can and look for the next game to play.

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# BOOKS & ARTS

**Marcus Berkman**

recommends some fiendish puzzles and quizzes for Christmas

**Anne Margaret Daniel**

sees Bob Dylan as a modern Odysseus – vagabond and complicated man

**Valentine Cunningham**

is awed (and a bit shocked) by Edward Garnett's influence over 20th-century English literature

**Tanya Gold** remembers the time the Queen was mounted by Leslie Nielsen in *Naked Gun*

**Kate Chisholm** finds out what it's like to hold a heart

**Lloyd Evans** thinks it's hard to muffle the role of Scrooge – but Rhys Ifans manages it



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*'Bump, bump, bump',  
Winnie-the-Pooh chapter  
one, pencil drawing by  
E.H. Shepard, 1926  
Melanie McDonagh – p42*

## BOOKS

## Cold comfort

The fridge may have saved us from food poisoning, but is it now poisoning the planet, wonders *Stephen Bayley*

### Refrigerator: The Story of Cool in the Kitchen

by *Helen Peavitt*

Reaktion, £18, pp. 222

Mrs Thatcher once explained that she adored cleaning the fridge because, in a complicated life, it was one of the few tasks she could begin and end to total satisfaction. In this way are refrigerators evidence of our struggles, our hopes and our fears.

Moreover, if you accept that the selection and preparation of food is a defining part of our culture, then you must acknowledge the primacy of the refrigerator in human affairs. In 2012, The Royal Society declared refrigeration to be the single most significant innovation in food technology since Fred Flintstone invented the barbecue. Me? I wrote these notes while chewing chilled sapphire grapes from Brazil, via Waitrose, messengers from our refrigerated global food chain.

Your domestic fridge is your autobiography. By its contents are ye known. People ostentatiously arrange green vegetables to signal virtue. I know I do. The ratio of yoghurt to beer is always revealing. That withered and wretched celeriac root lurking at the back of the salad drawer always puts me in mind of a medieval theologian's diatribes about the appearance of my soul. The evil-looking celeriac reveals a mixture of ambition and incompetence.

Size matters. There was, perhaps, once a time when I would ask visitors if they would like to come upstairs and see my etchings. Now I ask if they would like to come downstairs and admire my smackdown, look-at-me, double-door stainless steel Gaggenau RB491 combo. This is as big as a small car. And the latest refinement is a dedicated wine fridge. I know. I have one. You can cali-

brate self-improvement as well as the march of civilisation by the evolution of the fridge.

Then there are freezers, acting like medieval oubliettes where stuff of indeterminate value is suspended in limbo until it is thrown away. Who has not known the crisis of confronting a rock solid sub-zero brick of something brown but of unknown provenance? Freezers are touching evidence of our sophisticated pursuit of futility: expensively and ostentatiously preserving waste is surely a sign of decadence.

But refrigeration is not new. The Roman author Apicius has a recipe for chilled chicken soup. His slaves would bring ice down from the mountains and, wrapped in straw, it might last a summer, chilling his libations as well as his chook broth. Yet Francis Bacon sensed something sinister in the process of making things cold: it is against nature. In 1624 Bacon says: 'The producing of cold is a thing very worthy of the Inquisition.' Indeed, it goes against instinct: the preparation of cold food appeals, as the critic Ingrid D. Rowland once explained, to a very different part of the psyche than the cooking fire.

Yet, evidence of our perversity, ice has always been cultivated, as Elizabeth David explained in her last great book *Harvest of the Cold Months*, a 1994 study of ice-houses and cold cooking. Every country house once had an insulated, usually subterranean, ice-house and, by all accounts, it worked very well. But modern refrigerators have their origin in the Victorian insistence on mechanising absolutely everything.

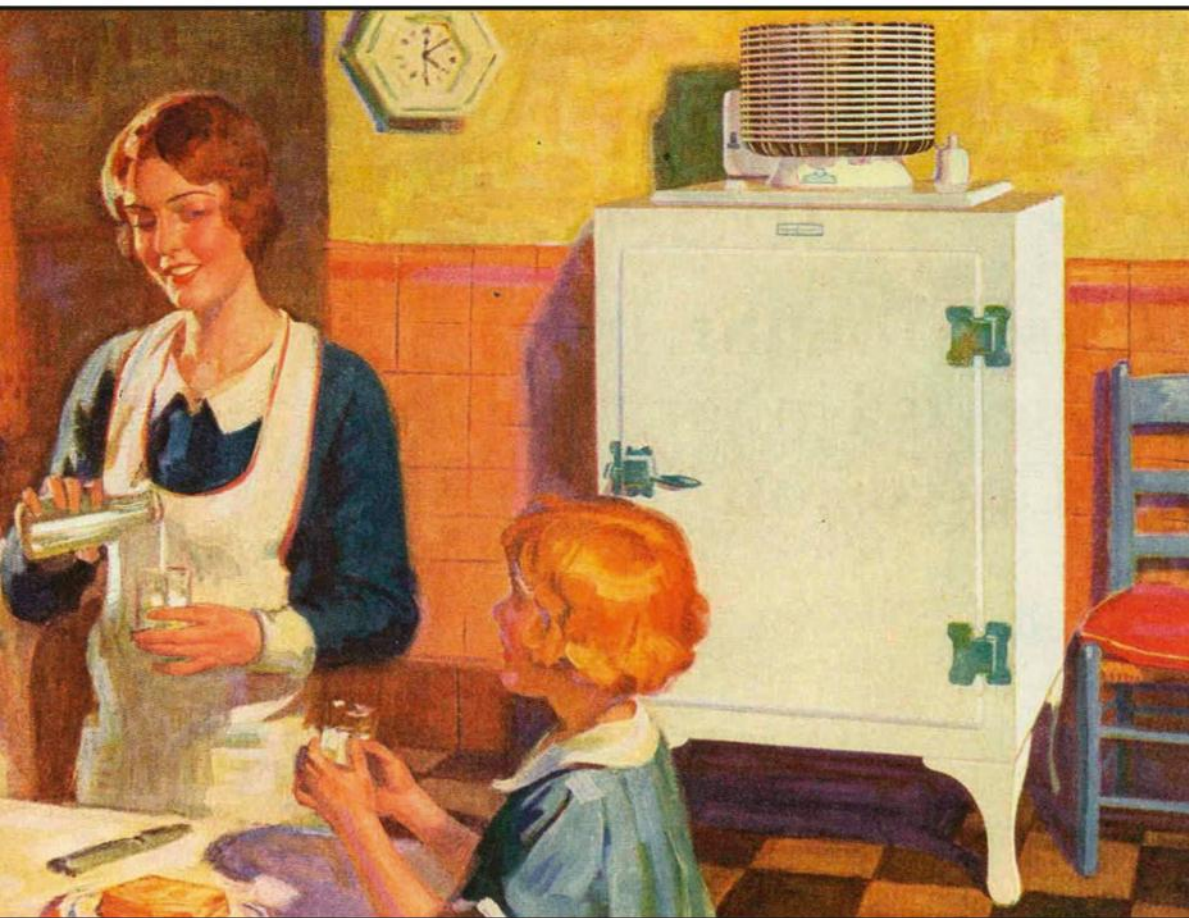
Ships were an inspiration: meat travelling from South America to Europe required chilling. At first, cargo holds were stacked with ice, but soon mechanical refrigeration, which is to say the arti-

ficial generation of ice, evolved at sea. Progress was rapid: in 1844 consignments of natural ice were still being shipped from a frozen lake in Massachusetts to London. By 1861, Mrs Beeton mentions a 'refrigerator' and the following year, the wheezing and gasping Siebe-Harrison ice-making machine was demonstrated at the 1862 Exhibition in London. Then in a signal event, in 1927, Clarence Birdseye patented his fish fingers. Such comestibles can exist only in a refrigerated culture. Refrigeration preserves food, but preserves a lot of other things as well.

The principle of mechanical refrigeration involves the neo-divine fundamentals of physics: when liquids vaporise, they get cold. So, in a refrigerator, a liquid is squirted into a low-pressure chamber whereupon it duly vaporises and the temperature drops. The vapour is then compressed into liquid and the cycle begins again.

Inevitably, early fridges had very visible, noisy and clunky compressors. The dream kitchen of Clarence Birdseye would have smelt and sounded like the cargo hold of a transatlantic meat ship. Then, as they became more familiar in the domestic environment, the technical need to seal compressors from dirt was, historically, coincidental with the





*The making of a happy home: cold milk for tea. A 1930s advertisement for General Electric*

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANK S. BENSING/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

artistic need, first felt in the 1930s, to streamline mechanical devices... irrespective of their need to travel through air.

To this end, the very first generation of consultant industrial designers, established in New York, made fridges their set pieces, since to design a beautiful and desirable refrigerator was to demonstrate masterful insights into consumer psychology. Of course, American manufacturers took the lead in this democratisation of luxury.

General Electric flirted with Norman Bel Geddes as an appliance designer, but settled for the more sober and reliable Henry Dreyfuss (who later popularised ergonomics as a practical science). And Raymond Loewy's career was based on the stylish transformation he made of Sears Roebuck's best-selling Coldspot. To an electrified Victorian ice-box, Loewy, who travelled the world in correspondents' shoes and a miasma of eau-de-cologne, added bravura chrome accents. Soon, the General Motors 'Frigidaire' became an eponym for a genre of appliances: it was designed by the same people who gave us two-toned paint and rocket-inspired tail fins on Cadillacs. In some countries, 'Frigidaire' is a generic, not a brand.

The statement refrigerator became a

part of the iconography of the American Dream Home in the 1950s: all pastels and smooth radii with racy chrome flourishes, as seductive as a 1958 Oldsmobile Holiday hardtop. Look at an American architectural magazine from about 1960 and you can see that the fridge was a low-temperature hearth: a sub-zero symbol of home comforts. How else would you source an ice-cold Coke?

*Your domestic fridge is your autobiography. By its contents are ye known*

This interior design language soon melted into a Britain hungry for post-imperial imagery and ready to find it anywhere, but especially in aerodynamic America. The rhetoric of the labour-saving kitchen with a fridge as centrepiece was amped up by women's magazines, the Good Housekeeping Institute and the Daily Mail Ideal Home exhibition. True to say, on both sides of the chilly Atlantic, the democratisation of refrigeration was part of Cold War semantics.

Tricity even offered the 'Diner Cold' fridge, dressed in veneers of Sapele wood.

So confident was Tricity that this was a readily construable status symbol in the never-had-it-so-good era, advertisements confidently suggested that this chilly wooden sarcophagus might be as much at home in the dining-room or 'lounge' as it was adjacent to the old-fashioned pantry. Herein, the origin of our 'luxury kitchen'.

'As a museum curator,' the author writes, 'I am offered a lot of old refrigerators', surely one of the most unconsciously funny lines of all this year's books. This, even as the abandoned Greystone quarry near Lewes now houses a fridge mountain 20 feet high comprising the ruined carcasses of 70,000 dream machines while errant CFCs eat what remains of the atmosphere. The fridge may have saved us from toxic rotting food, but its larger health and environmental benefits are, to put it no more warmly, arguable.

This is a book of hallucinatory wonder by a Science Museum keeper who writes with that rare combination of synoptic, grandiose academic majesty and wry humour. Midnight kitchen wanderers know the strange light an open fridge casts into darkness. Helen Peavitt's *Refrigerator* illuminates not just our kitchens, but our entire value system.

## Gift books

## Fiendishly puzzling

Marcus Berkmann

There can be few challenges more daunting for the assiduous reviewer than a pile of Christmas 'gift' books sitting on his desk exuding yuletide jollity. But this year's aren't bad at all. Some are serious works of quasi-academic research, others are tooth-pullingly funny and one or two are utterly bizarre.

For sheer magnificent pointlessness, you should look no further than *Great British Pub Dogs* by Abbie Lucas and Paul Fleckney (Robinson, £12.99). Lucas (a photographer) and Fleckney (a journalist) have, for no doubt pressing reasons of their own, roamed the nation to identify the 'wonderful variety' of Britain's pub-dwelling dogs. Oh, and one pig, Frances Bacon. One pub had three Jack Russells, another had four red setters, and a third had a bulldog that spun like a ballerina. Sadly, one or two of the dogs photographed have since died, and several pubs have closed, so this is, in its strange way, a moment captured in time. It certainly has an elegiac quality that may not have been entirely intentional.

## The Spirit House

Mould in the bread bin,  
ants in the sugar bowl.  
There's the damp  
smell of earth  
in every room. We  
bring it back  
on wet clothes  
and soiled shoes. The year's  
running low on the warmth  
it loves most, and the dark  
is closing in. So it's time  
to build a small Spirit House  
with gifts of mulled wine  
and an old Chinese poem  
about a loved one  
coming home. We'll  
place it next to those ants  
in the sugar bowl  
and a couple of thin bees  
blown in from the cold.

Alexei Sayle once starred in a radio sitcom I wrote, and needless to say I was too shy to go up and engage him in conversation in the pub afterwards, where he sat looking every bit as scary as his stage persona. Chucked off the telly in the 1990s, he wrote two excellent books of short stories and three novels, but none of them sold that well — an appalling injustice. So he's back on the stand-up, and *Alexei Sayle's Imaginary Sandwich Bar* (Bloomsbury, £9.99) is essentially a version of his recent Radio 4 show. It's only 80 pages long, but it's wonderful stuff: discursive, daft, alternately angry and almost preternaturally calm, this is comic riffing of the highest quality. I suspect he may be a better writer than performer, but if you want someone to tell him that to his face, I'm not your man.

Michael Heath's *The Battle for Britain* (Wilkinson, £23.50) is a collection of his *Spectator* strips and, rather bizarrely, has been published in Australia, although copies are available via the good souls of Amazon. Many of the strips are doctored versions of 1930s and 1940s drawings and, as ever, reflect Heath's obsessions with tattoos, silly facial hair, baseball caps worn backwards and idiots walking into lamp posts while staring at mobile phones. As these are my own obsessions too, I found

it almost indecently funny. 'But mother, I don't want to grow a beard!' says a young boy, carrying a mobile phone. 'But all the other boys have them, you little creep!' says his furious mama.

There are, for some reason, many millions of puzzle and quiz books published this year, maybe because these things are cyclical and it's the turn of puzzle and quiz books. The best puzzle book is Alex Bellos's *Puzzle Ninja* (Guardian/Faber, £14.99), which is both a fascinating overview of the Japanese puzzle scene and a collection of 100 glorious puzzles of the Sudoku-Kakoru-Futoshiki variety. Sudoku, it turns out, isn't Japanese at all but nicked from an American puzzle magazine in the 1980s, where it was called 'Number Place'. Would we all have gone mad for it if it was still called Number Place? Having spent four days on a single Slitherback puzzle, I'm not sure I care any more.

*I recognised one quote immediately and thought myself very clever. Then hours passed before I knew another*

The best book about quizzes is Mark Mason's startlingly good *Question Time* (Weidenfeld, £12.99), but as the idiot has mentioned me by name several times, I can say so only in passing. Not far behind, though, is *The Cryptic Pub Quiz*, written and illustrated by Frank Paul (Duckworth Overlook, £16.99), a collection of mainly brutal questions from the quiz at the Mill in Cambridge that all sensible quizmasters will steal from without attribution over the next couple of years. Geoff or Damien is to the highest degree as which former archbishop is to a lesser result? Desmond Tutu, of course. (Rhyming slang. Geoff or Damien = Hurst, or first-class degree. Desmond = 2:2). Ingenious, no? And by far the most recondite quiz book is *Nemo's Almanac: A Quiz for Book Lovers* (Profile, £9.99), a compilation of the extraordinarily tricky literary quizzes produced annually for the frighteningly well read. I recognised one quotation immediately (from a book I had read the previous week) and thought myself very clever. Several hours then passed before I knew another one.

W.P. Sheridan's *Streakers of Distinction* (Bluebell Publishing, £9.99) is a splendid idea, excellently done and beautifully packaged in an elegant little hardback. Sheridan has interviewed a dozen people who streaked through or across sporting events: some did it for bets, some for a dare, some because it seemed like a good idea at the time. It usually was. There are many wonderful photographs, mainly of buttocks, and the whole project is infused with an extraordinary joy. This one is also available through Amazon.

My favourite book of this and possi-

— Peter Bland



bly any other Christmas is Mark Forsyth's *A Short History of Drunkenness* (Viking, £12.99), which I have reviewed elsewhere, but which deserves to be an enormous hit, so I'm mentioning it again. Here's the Greek playwright Euboulos, telling us how much wine he likes to give his guests at a good knees-up. A krater is a large ornamental bucket of wine:

For sensible men I prepare only three kraters: one for health, which they drink first, the second for love and pleasure, and the third for sleep. After the third one is drained, wise men go home.

The fourth krater is not mine any more — it belongs to bad behaviour; the fifth is for shouting; the sixth is for rudeness and insults; the seventh is for fights; the eighth is for breaking the furniture; the ninth is for depression; the tenth is for madness and unconsciousness.

Merry Christmas.

## From Bradford to Belgravia

Andy Miller

### Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile

by Adelle Stripe

Fleet, £8.99, pp. 256

In her debut novel, Adelle Stripe recounts the brief, defiant life of the playwright Andrea Dunbar. Dunbar was raised on the Buttershaw council estate in Bradford, one of eight siblings. Her first play, *The Arbor*, which premiered at the Royal Court in London when she was just 18, originated as a CSE English assignment. She was, according to one tabloid newspaper at the time, 'a genius straight from the slums'. *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1982) was also a hit at the Royal Court and was subse-

quently filmed by the director Alan Clarke. Dunbar wrote one more play, *Shirley*, and died of a brain haemorrhage in 1990. She was 29.

*Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile* (its title lifted verbatim from that same patronising profile) restores Dunbar to the place and time that made her — the north of England of the 1970s and 1980s:

The ground up here is always sodden, and it rains almost every day. Can't wear anything nice. It feels like we're on the edge of everything. Miles to Bradford centre. Miles to Halifax. And we're stuck up here with not much to do. Holme Wood is another big estate. Sometimes I wished I lived there instead.

Dunbar had more talent than most and, at first, good fortune too. As Stripe's account makes clear, her untutored potential was recognised, nurtured and given a platform by the Royal Court and its artistic director Max Stafford-Clark, a chance in a million. But over time the distance from Bradford to Sloane Square would prove impossible to close, and Dunbar found herself caught between the world of the arts and her life on the Buttershaw estate, some of whose residents objected to the way she depicted them, first on stage, then film.

Stripe's novel mixes fiction and biography in a manner that brings to mind the work of the late Gordon Burn; indeed *Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile* was recently shortlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize. It fizzles like two Disprin in a pint of cider. The author's voice and Dunbar's mingle to create not just a portrait of an artist — funny, mischievous, reckless and truthful — but also divisions of class, geography and opportunity which continue to shape this country. You can read it in an afternoon and should; there are too few British novels as effervescent or as relevant as this.

## Crime

### Close up and far away

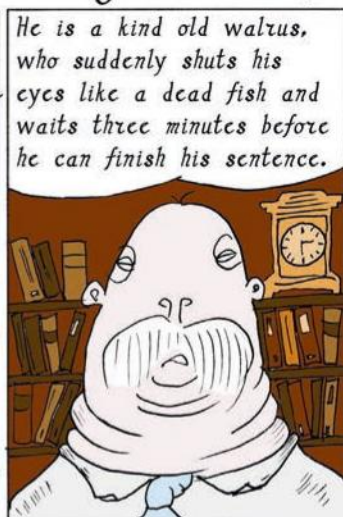
Jeff Noon

It's difficult to keep a crime series going after 11 books but Boris Akunin manages it well in *All the World's a Stage* (Weidenfeld, £20). His hero, Erast Fandorin, is now in his fifties. It's 1911 in Russia, and while the Bolsheviks gather their power, another revolution is taking place in the theatre, and the Noah's Ark Company are at the forefront of this new expression. When their star actress Eliza Altairsky-Lointaine's life is threatened during a performance, Fandorin is called in to investigate. He's working undercover as, of all things, the writer of their next production.

This is a traditional crime drama in which members of the company are killed off one by one in ever more mysterious circumstances. The actors merge with their on-stage characters, and this adds another layer to the levels of deceit on offer. There are two different suspects, and both possibilities are fully explored, their contrasting plots wrapping around each other to form the complex thread of the book's narrative. This aspect is brilliantly done, and it's entirely satisfying when the final reveal tugs both narratives apart, showing a third possibility.

A more down to earth approach to the historical crime novel is taken by the writing team of Meg and Tom Keneally in *The Soldier's Curse* (Point Blank, £16.99). Hugh Monsarrat is an Englishman charged with forgery. In 1825 he finds himself shipped halfway around the world to become a convict in New South Wales. He's employed as a clerk to the prison's commandant, so he's ideally placed to move through the different strata of this small, enclosed society. When the commandant's wife Hono-

## Writers' Letters: Virginia Woolf



## Dexter

## Clacton-on-Sea

Full of fetid, fungal marshland people  
 Who echo the pasts of the young and bored.  
 Who don't know of a life of freedom, full.  
 It's a coastal trap, unknown of abroad,  
 Just down as a lost, starfish hole, end place.  
 Not within any free man's mental map.  
 Clacton Man is only one desperate face,  
 Seen in an alley that's full of crap,  
 Or in the market selling stolen tat,  
 Or most likely at home having a nap.  
 They are all broke and smoke but still get fat.  
 I was a fibber and a rocking horse clown,  
 Stuck between Jaywick, Frinton and point clear.  
 Living next to the sea, ready to drown.  
 Then, I thought, as I looked back from the pier  
 'I am able to call this place my town.'  
 So like smoke made beautiful by far view  
 I now see Clacton in most perfect hue.

— Ed Young

ra dies from poisoning, Monsarrat takes charge of the case, facing both the cruelties of his overseers and the suspicions of his fellow prisoners.

Tom is Thomas Keneally of *Schindler's Ark* fame, here working with his daughter on the first of a projected series starring Monsarrat. However, the novel fares much better as historical drama than it does as a murder mystery. Twists and turns are absent and the first half of the book moves too slowly, as it concentrates on building up details of the camp and its inhabitants. It's all quite fascinating. The setting's great, the characters beguiling; but we need a few more puzzles to crack before this can take off as a series.

Jane Robins deals very much with the modern world in *White Bodies* (HQ, £12.99). Callie and Tilda are sisters. Tilda is an actress who falls in love with Felix, a man whom Callie believes is a predatory male. She suspects that he's being abusive and violent, but how can she prove this when Tilda seems so enamoured of her new lover? Callie takes on the task of saving her sister from this relationship. But how far can we trust Callie? She reveals evidence of her own madness and the whole thing might well be a paranoid fantasy. The story hinges on a plot to kill Felix, and its surprising consequences.

The MacGuffin is borrowed from Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*; indeed the Hitchcock film version is discussed early on by the characters. Callie comes across as snobby and a bit of a prig, so it's very difficult

to feel sympathy for her. There's a good twist at the end, but Robins has to embrace a number of improbabilities to make it happen. This thriller offers very little that's new, but the standard tropes are woven with enough skill to keep us reading.

What a joy it is to turn to Attica Locke's *Bluebird, Bluebird* (Serpent's Tail, £14.99), a novel that examines contemporary problems in a literary and astute style. Darren Mathews is one of the few black Texas Rangers, and the story starts with him on the brink of indictment. Then he hears about two murders in a small town along Highway 59, one victim a black male, the other a white woman. Are the crimes connected? Mathews becomes obsessed with solving both cases, and almost loses his job and his marriage over it. This might well be his last assignment.

The book deals head on with the racial tensions of today's America, unflinchingly, but with a fair eye. There are good and bad people on both sides of the racial divide. Mathews is a stranger in town and is under suspicion himself, from both communities. A lot rests on one question: is this a race crime or not? But Locke seeks motives beyond the headlines: the real reason for the killings is not race, not hate, but love. It's a startling way of seeing things. The final pages cast doubt on the morality of the hero. He's also guilty of a crime; is Mathews any better than the people he's arrested? The questions continue well after this brilliant novel is finished.

## What will Katie do next?

Tanya Gold

### Rude

by Katie Hopkins

Biteback, £9.99, pp. 320

In her memoir *Rude*, the former Mail-Online columnist Katie Hopkins reveals her true self. She does this by accident, because she has no self-awareness, but it is there, on page 233:

It may we'll [sic] be that by the time you are reading this I will be going through a dominatrix phase... a fierce bedroom warrior, nipples pinched tight by clamps, an orange in my gob, more buckles than a boot store, locked into a metal girdle with only my front bottom on show.

Oh Katie! Don't you know anything? The dominatrix doesn't wear the nipple clamps; she doesn't suck the orange; she isn't locked into a metal girdle. This is the costume of the masochist.

Once you realise that Katie's op-ed is the faulty instrument of her unfulfilled sexual longings, it is easy not to mind her politics so much: her snobbery; her loathing of feminists; her description of migrants, in a *Sun* column as 'cockroaches'. (I didn't mind her calling for a final solution on Twitter because she obviously didn't know what the Final Solution was.)

Her politics are mere projection: she is the outsider seeking sanctuary, she is the woman coveting power. I have always found her anger fascinating — and here is the raw material in *Rude*, incoherent and disorganised, but present in her accidental prose.

*Rude* is, essentially, a self-help book from a nutter but there is one immutable truth in it: her epilepsy. She went to Sandhurst, but collapsed on the parade ground, and was expelled from her natural element, which is working-class men screaming at her — the army. Her fits got so bad that her father said that if she were an animal, she would be put down. Three paragraphs in, and what else is there to say?

Not much, and so *Rude* is a list of things she hates, written in the duplicitous style of a semi-educated 'just folks' everywoman who is vastly more irritating than the real Katie Hopkins, or anyone.

She hates fat people because they chose their disability, and she did not. She hates most women — full-time mothers, single mothers, and particularly working-class single mothers (she is lower middle class — close enough to fear the council estate). Men get off more lightly — she only really hates men with 'micro-penises', lefties and gingers. She likes a certain kind of working-class man a lot; there is a reverie about an odd-job man, naked under his boiler suit in Lundy, and

this passage is, by far, the best descriptive writing in *Rude*.

Perhaps her real genre is pornography. I sense an urge in Katie for much rough sex — why else would you join the army? — but she is conventional enough to avoid this in life. No functioning woman over 40 can have rough sex with odd-job men in Lundy — and Katie, with her grade 8 in piano, is proud to function. She attempts, rather, to experience rough sex through her columns — which is, if you will forgive me, a hiding to nothing, and is why her political writing makes no sense at all.

For example, she loves strong women — she writes a homage to her cleaner as evidence — and other women over 40, who she names ‘the big boobers’. But she also disapproves of maternity leave, and thinks that ultra-orthodox Jewish women who shave their heads and wear wigs are having ‘a right laugh’. It is gobbledegook, and I am not surprised that some gentlemen columnists want to strangle her.

I suspect that, somewhere inside the construct, she knows that a pathology is not a career. And so she is thrillingly self-destructive. At these times, I come quite close to loving her. She criticises Paul Dacre, editor-in-chief of the *Daily Mail*. She pictures Sarah Vine — a *Mail* columnist, also Michael Gove’s wife — ‘with Mr Dacre’s hand up her back working her mouth, spitting out whatever editorial he wants’. When she claimed a newspaper editor — Dacre again? — insists his female employees wear high heels because ‘he believes women in brogues are lesbians’, I wondered if *Rude* was close to her last word, and I was right. Last week she left MailOnline, in that richly suggestive phrase, by mutual consent.

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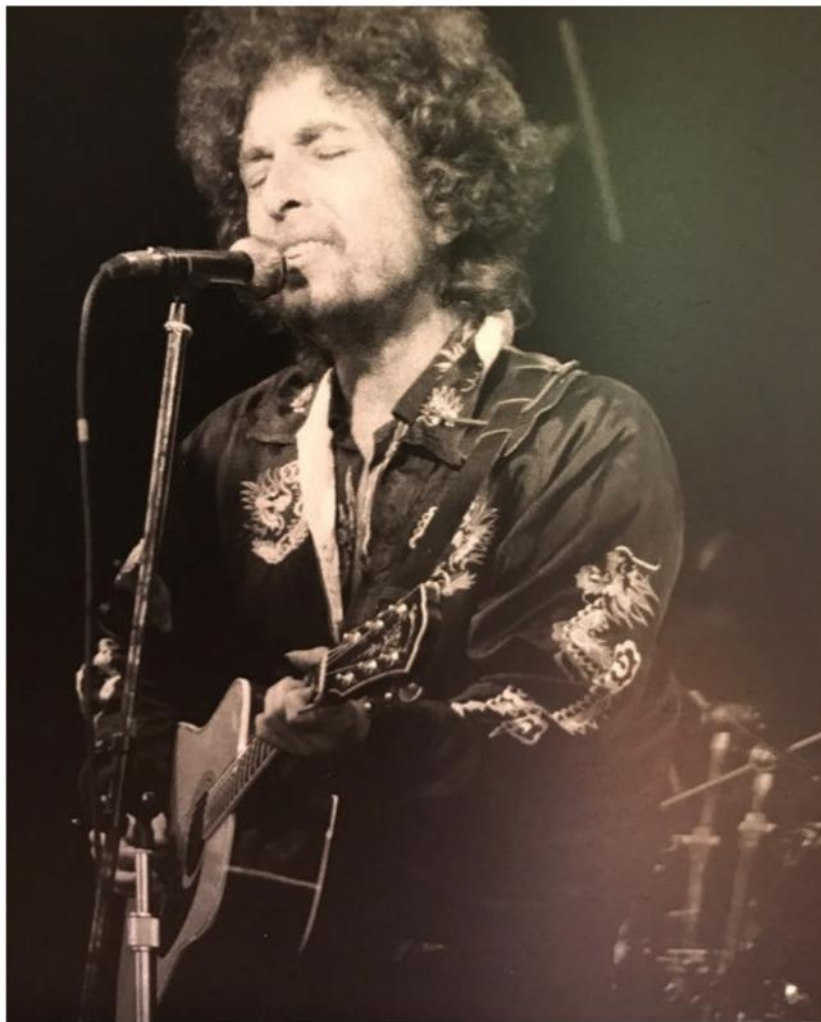
## A complicated man

Anne Margaret Daniel

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‘There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.’ Lord Henry Wotton said that. It is always better to read Bob Dylan than to read about him. I said that.

Two new books by Dylan, and two about him, prove my point. Just out in a lovely slim hardback is Dylan’s Nobel lecture (Simon & Schuster, £14.99). Its 32 pages have already been well picked over and much written about, but Dylan’s own account of the way he took ‘folk lingo’ and ‘fundamental’ literary themes — by way of *Moby-Dick*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the *Odyssey* — to write ‘songs unlike anything anybody ever heard’ should be both read and heard. There are differences in the recorded and printed version to keep fans and Dylanologists busy, of course; is it ‘Lord Donald’ or ‘Lord Darnell’, more likely, whose ballad he invokes? A signed



SUSAN HENNING

A previously unpublished photograph of Dylan in 1981

limited edition of the lecture can be yours for £1,900 or so.

*100 Songs* is a selection made not by Dylan himself but by the publisher (Simon & Schuster, £14.99). It performs the difficult feat of presenting only that number of original songs from a canon of close to six times this. Beginning with ‘Song to Woody’, written by a 19-year-old for Woody Guthrie, the dying hero he came to New York City to find in the frozen early days of 1961, and ending with four songs from *Tempest* (2012), the collection spans Dylan’s professional career of six decades, and counting.

According to a recent interview in *Harvard Magazine*, Richard Thomas, the George Martin Lane professor of classics there, ‘sat down at his keyboard a couple of weeks after the announcement last fall of Dylan’s Nobel prize in literature’. He finished *Why Bob Dylan Matters* six months later (Collins, £12.99). ‘Why Bob Dylan Matters to Richard Thomas’ would be a more accurate title. The best parts of the book recount Thomas’s own autobiography in terms of a lifelong love for Dylan’s music — but much of his book attends to ‘the

thefts and reworkings’ in Dylan’s writing.

Contributors to the Dylan website Expecting Rain have long been noting Dylan’s use of lines from other writers, including classical poets. Eyolf Østrem wrote about his paraphrase of Allen Mandelbaum’s translation of the *Aeneid* in ‘Lonesome Day Blues’ 15 years ago. Dylan contains multitudes, that is sure. But too much in Thomas’s book is speculative. The wild geese in ‘When I Paint my Masterpiece’ ‘likely refer to’ a story ‘bound to have been on the quiz shows of the Latin Club’ to which Dylan belonged for two years at Hibbing High ‘in which the sacred geese of the goddess Juno’ warned the Romans of attacking Gauls. Ahem: ‘geese’ also rhymes with ‘masterpiece’. It’s a song. And when Thomas insists on finding ‘intertextuality’ in the repetition of a single word — Rimbaud’s use of ‘ones’ in his poem ‘Poor People in Church’ and Dylan’s ‘ones’ in ‘Chimes of Freedom’; or Dylan and the Beatles using (very different) words of one syllable in ‘Fourth Time Around’ and ‘Norwegian Wood’ — he’s on shaky ground.

What Thomas neglects is how coolly

Dylan stands on the shoulders of generations of giants: Shakespeare's versions of classical plays; W.B. Yeats's revisions of William Blake's intense symbolism and allegories; Homer's epics filtered through Byron and Joyce. That Dylan is a creative magpie has been old news since 1961. The world of folk singing is one of sharing, trading, teaching and learning songs that belong to no one and everyone. But he also, which is more compelling, obeys Ezra Pound's Modernist dictum: make it new. What Dylan takes from writers (and artists and photographers) past is far less interesting than what he makes from it all, in the forge of his own imagination and skill.

Clinton Heylin, one of the most acclaimed and authoritative biographers of Dylan, turns in his new book, *Trouble in Mind* (Route Press, £16.99) to the 'Gospel Tour' of 1979–1980, exploring the events of the tour, its background and its aftermath. The extensive interviews with members of Dylan's band, particularly his guitarist Fred Tackett, are grand accompaniments to surviving film footage of the tour.

Heylin's greatest strength here is the breadth of his knowledge about Dylan's other tours. He amasses a chronology for the 'Gospel years' composed of contemporary interviews and reviews and thousands of quotations, framed in his own writing. Heylin is a strong and often idiosyncratic writer, emphatically anglicising things like Dylan's grabbing a smoke (a 'fag', in inverted commas), though he is not kind to the women on this tour. Clydie King is Dylan's 'paramour', and collectively the backing choir are 'girlsingers'. King was making records as one of Ray Charles's Raelettes while Dylan was sitting at his desk in high school and Mona Lisa Young has recorded with everyone from Barbra Streisand to Bruce Springsteen. They're no one's 'girlsingers'.

Anecdotes abound, and are wry, sly and telling: Dylan, looking at a signed photo of Springsteen (who Heylin describes as a 'nemesis' at the time) leaning against the hood of a car, and asking 'That guy still driving that stolen car?' Fred Tackett, recalling Dylan's wearing all Willie Smith's silk Hawaiian shirts and putting them back in Smith's wardrobe unlaundered. Concluding a detailed discussion of Jann Wenner's 1979 review of *Slow Train Coming*, Heylin says: 'For once, a *Stone* review mattered.' For flourish, facts and transcriptions of Dylan's religious speeches from his stages, and a fine complement to the just released recordings of Dylan's official 'bootleg series', Heylin's your man.

But Dylan remains at a remove from all these post-Nobel ink-spills, on the road somewhere. Emily Wilson's new translation of the *Odyssey* speaks of 'a complicated man' with an 'old story for our modern times'. She might be singing of this original modern vagabond — wanderer, laureate and so much more.



Portrait of Carrington by Mark Gertler

## Loving in triangles

Paul Levy

### **Carrington's Letters: Dora Carrington, Her Art, Her Loves, Her Friendships**

edited by Anne Chisholm  
Chatto, £30, pp. 448

Dora Carrington (1893–1932) was at the heart of the Bloomsbury story. As an art student, she encountered the love of her

*Carrington only stuck with her husband Ralph Partridge because Lytton Strachey adored him*

life, the homosexual biographer Lytton Strachey; and this pair of Edwardian virgins actually managed to consummate their relationship in 1916. She loathed her given name, and insisted on her new friends, such as Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant and the entire large clan of Stracheys using her surname alone.

Whatever her merits as an artist, the dramatic story of her life with the Bloomsbury group, and death by her own hand, is so enthralling that it was made into a film, in 1995, with Emma Thompson playing the title role. Like her frustrated suitor and fellow Slade student, Mark Gertler, she painted at least one masterpiece. In Carrington's case, this was the National Portrait Gallery's portrait of Lytton Strachey. Painted in 1916, when Strachey was in his mid-thirties, it shows him in profile reclining, reading a book, with his fine hands and long fingers and every whisker of his full red beard lovingly detailed. How you rate Carrington as a painter is largely a matter of taste; but though probably mildly dyslexic, she was a superb writer of letters.

This first came to attention when Michael Holroyd quoted some of them in his pioneering two-volume biography of Strachey, and was made gratifyingly clear in David 'Bunny' Garnett's 1970 selection of her heavily illustrated letters and extracts from her diaries. There were problems with his editing, in that he seems not

to have had full access to her often passionate letters to one of her lovers, the Hispanist Gerald Brenan; and he omitted some good letters to Gertler and others. Moreover, many recipients of Carrington's letters were still alive in 1970, and Garnett would not, for example, have wanted to embarrass Frances Partridge by publishing vituperative letters about her, written when Frances was starting her own affair with Carrington's husband, Ralph Partridge. (Carrington only stuck with Ralph because Lytton adored him, and she was afraid of breaking up their *ménage à trois*.)

My own edition of the letters of Lytton Strachey (revised in 2006) was not subjected to considerations of tact, as almost everyone mentioned was dead, and it has long been felt that it was time for another, fuller edition of the Carrington letters. These are good reasons to welcome this new volume edited by Anne Chisholm, the distinguished biographer of Frances Partridge — and it is a particularly handsome production, designed to resemble one of the books that issued from the Woolfs' Hogarth Press.

As one would expect, there are many more recipients of Carrington's epistles than Bunny Garnett was able to muster: members of the family of Augustus John, to whom she was close in the last years of her brief life, plus Rosamond Lehmann, Dadie Rylands and Roger Senhouse (Strachey's partner in S/M experiments), all still living when the last edition came out. Bloomsbury fans, and those who merely love reading other people's letters, will cheer this new collection of mostly very good writing, with their line drawings, gorgeous, concrete descriptions of people, places and things, and details of what she ate, painted and was reading. And Chisholm's own introduction and postscript are splendid examples of fine prose.

Comparing Garnett and Chisholm is intriguing. Chisholm is more generous in giving space to Carrington's lesbian dalliance with the 'Kentucky princess' Henrietta Bingham. She has, however, removed some coarse anti-Semitism from a letter to Brenan of 13 June 1924, and omitted entire letters to him from the month before, including an amusing rude poem on 26 May, and a great letter that June, telling Brenan that 'my secret life is with you'.

Chisholm commits one egregious error. She consistently labels as 'pacifist' the Bloomsbury conscientious objectors to conscription in the first world war. Scarcely any of them (except for Duncan Grant — and Frances Partridge, who is the obvious source of this vulgar mistake) were pacifists in the sense of categorically rejecting war. Virtually all of them subscribed to Strachey's anti-conscription statement, which said that he did not believe 'that I should never, in

any circumstances, be justified in taking part in any conceivable war'. It is offensive both to the careful use of language and to the memory of the COs, because they genuinely risked imprisonment for the stand they took.

In the end, though, my main regret is that so many of these letters have been trimmed or omitted. It would be glorious if we could read Carrington's letters together with Strachey's, Brenan's and the rest of her correspondents (in the dozen volumes it would surely take). In the meantime, what is needed — both for scholars and interested general readers — is not this excellent edition of extracts but Carrington's complete correspondence.

## Perturbed spirits Claire Kohda Hazelton

### Sing, Unburied, Sing

by Jesmyn Ward

Bloomsbury, £16.99, pp. 304

The events of this book take place where the world of the living and the world of the dead rub shoulders. Mama, 12-year-old Jojo's grandmother, hears the voices — singing, talking, crying — of ghosts; Leoni, Jojo's mother, sees her brother — 'given, that he's been dead 15 years now' — sitting at the table, in the car, on the sofa between her and her friend, and every time she is high; and Richie, a 12-year-old boy whom Jojo's grandfather, Pops, knew in prison, haunts Jojo, searching for a way 'home'.

Sometimes despondent and aimless, at other times desperate and angry, the ghosts of almost exclusively black people are present everywhere — contorted into small spaces, crouched outside windows, 'laying, curled into the roots of a great live oak, looking half dead and half asleep, and all ghost' — each one 'stuck', due to the violence of his or her death.

These ghosts are the 'unburied' of a book that is otherwise grounded in realism. With them comes a reminder of the legacy of slavery, which hangs off the shoulders of each of the living characters like a heavy, physical thing dragged behind them, and influences how they are perceived by white people.

Jesmyn Ward is the first black woman to have won the National Book Award twice, first in 2011 for *Salvage the Bones*, a novel about an impoverished family in Mississippi in the days leading up to Hurricane Katrina, and second, this year, for *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Also set in Mississippi, where Ward grew up, this new novel is equally real, uncompromising and devastating — and again has children at its centre, deprived of basic care or security.

It is a painful read. Small things tell us about the characters' relationships: Jojo

does not call Leoni 'mother'; Kayla, Jojo's three-year-old sister, refuses to be held by Leoni; Jojo refers to Michael, his white father, as 'an animal'; Leoni is most at ease when on drugs, and least at ease when with her children.

When Jojo, Kayla, Leoni and Leoni's friend leave to pick up Michael from prison, we understand Leoni's incompetence

*Sometimes aimless, sometimes angry, the ghosts of black people are everywhere present*

as a mother and her violent temperament, Jojo's dread and fear of leaving Pops, and the potential dangers of their journey. Yet this is also a disarmingly beautiful book — beautiful in every sense: in Ward's full, complex characters, and in her prose, that can transform the ugliest moments ('the latent violence coiled in Leoni's arm, running from her shoulder down to her elbow and to her fist').

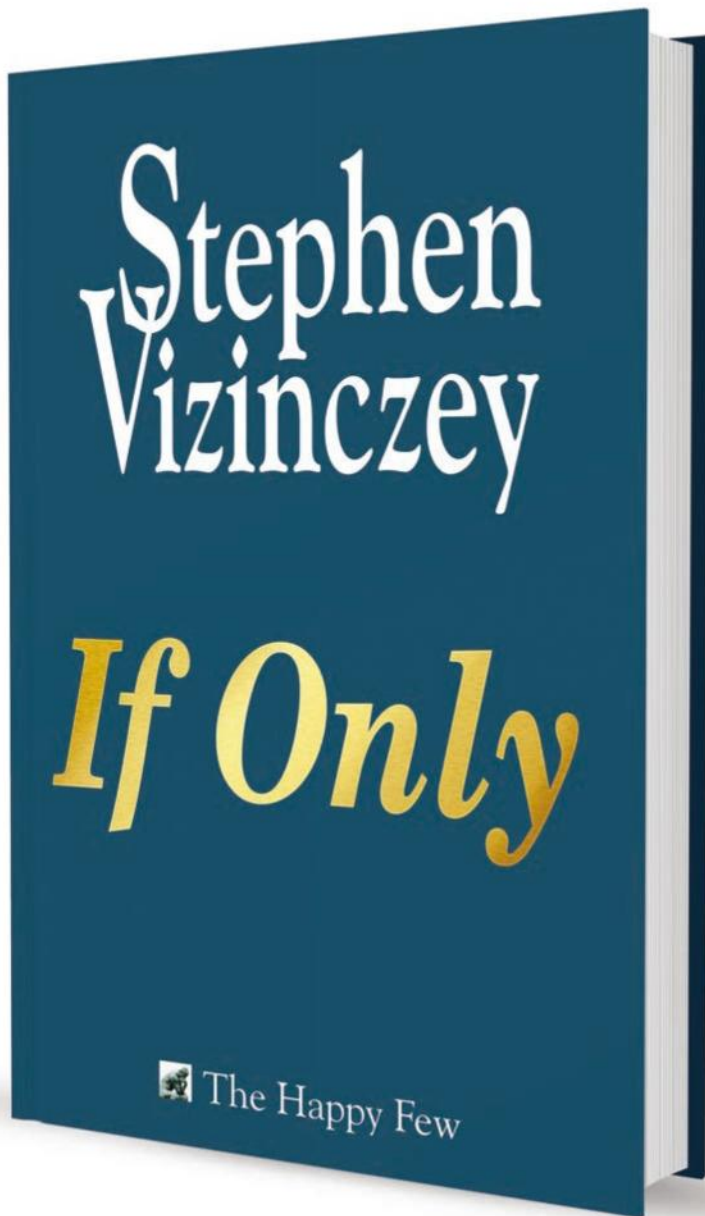
Ward has achieved something extraordinary with *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The voices, relationships and histories of her characters feel wholly true; and like the ghosts that occupy the book's pages, they come to haunt us. Long after the end, we continue to worry after them, love them in spite of their faults, and feel their pain.

Give something clever this Christmas — and get a little present of your own.

Turn to page 63



By the author of *In Praise of Older Women* and *An Innocent Millionaire*



*'Beautifully written and utterly compulsive...  
sums up everything one hates.'*

CHRISTOPHER SINCLAIR-STEVENSON

*'Part pitilessly real and part fairy tale, but then so  
is Gulliver's Travels. Vizinczey is a master of the  
fantastical that bares the wrongs of the world.'*

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Vizinczey has a rare gift: he is able to blend disparate threads  
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*The Godfather: Edward Garnett had a keen eye for talent, but was blind to modernism*

## Literary mafia boss Valentine Cunningham

### The Uncommon Reader: A Life of Edward Garnett

by Helen Smith  
Cape, £30, pp. 440

Edward Garnett, radical, pacifist, freethinker, Russophile man of letters, was from the 1890s onwards for many years the pre-eminent fixer of English literature. D.H. Lawrence's widow Frieda hailed him as 'the midwife' of Lawrence's 'genius'. And so he was; while he also nurtured Joseph Conrad, T.E. Lawrence, Edward Thomas, Liam O'Flaherty, H.E. Bates and Henry Green. He presided as 'reader' over the shoals of expectant manuscripts piling up daily at the publishers — starting out at Fisher Unwin, doing the business for Heinemann and Duckworth, putting in long stints at Dent and ending up at Cape.

Jonathan Cape headhunted Garnett for his new firm in 1921 as 'the best reader' in the land. Garnett was by then famous as the main man with an eye and a nose for literary promise and — even more valuable for publishers — for promise's opposite. 'Hurl away,' he'd scribble on duds; 'Reject... sarcastically.' But his 'cubs', as they came to be known, got the fullest care and attention: copious badgering, cutting, rewriting, and unforgiving rudeness about characters, ideas, unrealisms — and endings.

Above all, endings. He pedgilled away — D.H. Lawrence's lovely Midlandism for Garnett's unremitting diligence, his self-

less slaving over the heaps of manuscript — and all for rather scanty financial reward (the unremunerative nature of this life as super-hack is a constant theme of Helen Smith's caring inspections). He laboured day and night for the mere good of the literary cause. It was practical criticism in every sense — literary fostering backed by cash handouts and bed and board, digging out funding for needy writers.

He became, in effect, one writer's agent, another writer's manager; went out of his way to secure (his word) paid work for his protégés — short-story outlets, reviewing and so forth. He would enthusiastically

*Garnett's bodged version of Sons and Lovers blurred its wonderful provincial realism and religiosity*

review works that he had nudged into life (with nary a thought about maybe declaring an interest). He found homes elsewhere for writers who his current employers wouldn't take — Jean Rhys, for instance, at Chatto. Garnett knew the ropes, cannily played the scene and was in fact a kind literary mafia boss. Naomi Mitchison called him a literary Godfather — and it's hard not to take that also in the gangland sense.

Not every cub enjoyed being 'barbered up', in D.H. Lawrence's phrase: given the critical short-back-and-sides. But Garnett prided himself on the rightness of his hard-mouthings, and kept on dishing them out. ('I write what I feel on impulse, without bothering ahead about the effect.') He seems never to have doubted his much

rehearsed lines about what made the literary goods: realism, detail, truth to 'life' and to the writer's actual experience, and above all closeness to the great Russians (which his estranged wife Constance Garnett notably translated). Russophilia was the key. In Constance's case, that extended to loving the notorious exiled anarchist assassin Sergei Stepniak. Garnett never went that far. But again and again he thrusts his adoptees into the arms of Dostoevsky, Chekhov and above all Turgenyev. They must be imitated.

Conrad too, Garnett's first great find — prickly Polish Conrad, of course, who was mightily irked to hear Garnett publicly insisting that his fiction had 'Slavic' virtues. Godfather Garnett never passed up his right to describe and name and identify as he chose, even if it meant bone-headedly ignoring Conrad's pervasive Russophobia like that.

Garnett's critical *idéés* were fixed and adamant. In many ways the keenest eye in town for talent had his blind spots, not least when it came to high modernism. His critical partiality is witnessed by his preference for the Bennett-Wells-Galsworthy triumvirate that Virginia Woolf lampooned as the materialists whom modernity must leave behind. The manuscript of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* should be returned as 'curious' and 'unconventional'. Cape should spurn Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*: 'eccentric in language and full of disgustingly affected passages'. The fictions that became *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* needed heavy lifting — which Lawrence rejected. One of the most important modernist manifestoes for fiction, Lawrence's rejection of the 'old stable ego of the character' and the moral schematisings of the Russians ('dull, old, dead'), starts life in a letter protesting Garnett's customary negations. This cub had had enough of the Godfather's settled attentions.

Such resistances, when they came, never put Garnett off. He pedgilled on as a literary midwife till he died in his sixties in 1937, having successfully cast swaths of British writing in his own image. It's characteristic of that masterful Garnettising that his bodging cut-down version of *Sons and Lovers* — blurring and occluding Lawrence's wonderful provincial realism and religiosity — was the only one in existence from 1913 to 1992.

The strong-arming work of Edward Garnett is the bright and also dark star of Helen Smith's lovely, telling biography. It's a sort of Conrad novel *manqué* — pleasingly peopled by Russian anarchists and exiles, Fabians, pacifists, vegetarians and free-ish lovers, the keen Russophiliacs of the culture, with droves of writers, critics, and publishers all contentiously scabbling away, all got up by Godfather Garnett.

# Drama queen

Good witch, victim or female Alan Bennett? *Tanya Gold* on how Elizabeth II has been portrayed on screen

If cinema is propaganda, Elizabeth II can be grateful to it. Film is a conservative art form, and almost nothing has attempted to thwart or mock her. (The *Daily Star* once printed that Princess Margaret would appear in *Crossroads*, but *Crossroads* was not cinema, and it was not true. Instead the award for tabloid lie of the year was named the Princess Margaret Award.) I could not find an art film with the Queen weeping under a table in her nightgown, although she did appear in *The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!* (1988), and was mounted by Leslie Nielsen. She also appeared in the disaster film *2012* (2009), attempting to flee a tsunami in an ark built by China, with the dogs. This is less preposterous than the Leslie Nielsen scene. She would not go to China to die. But that is it. *Spitting Image* did more to damage her than Hollywood. A lot more.

*The King's Speech* (2010), in which she appeared as a child, was mere submission. 'Halting at first, but you got much better, papa,' says the 13-year-old Princess Elizabeth (Freya Wilson) to her father George VI (Colin Firth) after he makes a speech to the empire without stuttering.

In *The King's Speech*, Wilson establishes what is believed to be the Queen's abiding characteristic, which she inherited from George VI: duty. She curtsies to her father and looks sadly at him, for she knows they are both cursed. The privilege is irrelevant. They exist for our benefit, and it is painful for them. There is also the usual subplot, in support of the 'good Windsors' — dreadful David (Edward VIII) and creepy Wallis — who did not do their duty and are consigned, as punishment, to the hell of café society and foreigners.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which is also conservative, responded by giving *The King's Speech* four

major awards: best film, director, screenplay and actor. The director Tom Hooper looked shocked. The last film to do that was *Silence of the Lambs*.

It is not worth asking whether cinema likes the Queen, because it clearly does; the only question worth asking is how accurate it has been.

For a long time, the definitive Queen was Helen Mirren in *The Queen* (2006), a film by Peter Morgan, who has made the monarch his life's work. Morgan is really Morgenthau; Jews are often bewitched by the establishment. It tells the story of the crisis when Diana died. Mirren's Queen is tall, slim and uneasy — she is not posh at all, but brittle, and nervy. The film surmises isolation — hers, not Diana's — which may be true, but it is built on a lie, and the idea fails. The central metaphor is a stag, which the Queen

## *Does the Queen see herself as beautiful, and hunted by bankers?*

sees near Balmoral; does she see herself in him? Does she see herself as beautiful, and hunted by bankers? It feels unlikely. When the stag is shot, she goes to visit his body, which is ridiculous. The Queen shot her first stag as a teenager; even so, the Academy gave Mirren the best actress award, possibly for being filmed in a dressing gown with curlers in her hair.

I did not believe in this queen at all. She was a victim, but the wrong kind.

Morgan is spikier in his play *The Audience*, which also starred Helen Mirren; there is one vicious insight in it. 'Honestly, you lot and your "Scottishness",' Harold Wilson tells her. 'Doesn't fool me for a second. You should have someone playing the accordion in lederhosen. This place looks like a Rhineland schloss.' They then talk wistfully about bungalows.

Morgan's masterpiece is *The Crown*, for Netflix, with Jared Harris as George VI and Claire Foy as Elizabeth II. This Elizabeth is utterly decent, initially unsure of herself, and inspired by her grandmother Queen Mary. 'While you mourn your father, you must also mourn someone else,' Queen Mary (Eileen Atkins) tells her by talking letter. 'Elizabeth Mountbatten, for she has now been replaced by another person: Elizabeth Regina. The two Elizabeths will frequently be in conflict with one another. But the crown must win. Must always win.' This is drama, but it feels plausible. Elizabeth says she does not have a strong character, like others, but the crown has landed on her head, and there it is. Practical.

Alan Bennett could not resist projection in *A Question of Attribution*, a BBC play about Sir Anthony Blunt, in which he makes the Queen an intellectual — a female Alan Bennett, who could live in north London, wrapped in the *London Review of Books*.

Blunt removes a Titian from the wall;

MONISTORE/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK







Leslie Nielsen and  
Jeannette Charles in  
*The Naked Gun*

the conceit is that he thinks it a fake. As he is! Elizabeth (Prunella Scales) comes upon him with stealth, and fierce cleverness. She doesn't want to be painted by Francis Bacon, she tells him; she doesn't want to be a screaming queen. Bennett hints that she knows of Blunt's treachery, as if she, the head of state, has some magical power to discern a threat to it; and this is true. In life, she had not trusted Blunt since he admitted his atheism to her. In 1951, atheist = communist.

In Steven Spielberg's *The BFG* (2016) Elizabeth is, explicitly, a good witch in league with a big friendly giant, or BFG. The orphan Sophie (Ruby Barnhill), terrified by flesh-eating giants, sees a photograph of Queen Victoria in the BFG's cave. 'We are going to the Queen,' Sophie tells him. 'We really, really need her help.' This film has no faith in liberal democracy. It is a fairytale, and it craves a benevolent autocrat, in Penelope Wilton.

This Elizabeth is witty, and humane,

with the vision of a sorceress; she is a pre-medieval queen. She believes Sophie. She gives her, and the BFG, breakfast. Nothing surprises this queen, for she sees everything in heaven and earth. She sends in the army, and dispatches the flesh-eating giants to an island. But they will not be starved. Elizabeth gives them the seeds of a disgusting vegetable called a snozzcumber; she has

*She doesn't want to be painted by Francis Bacon, she tells him; she doesn't want to be a screaming queen*

delivered justice. The orphan Sophie, meanwhile, goes to live with the Queen, which is the most preposterous thing in any film about her. Impoverished children do not live in the palace. That is a myth, and a bitter one.

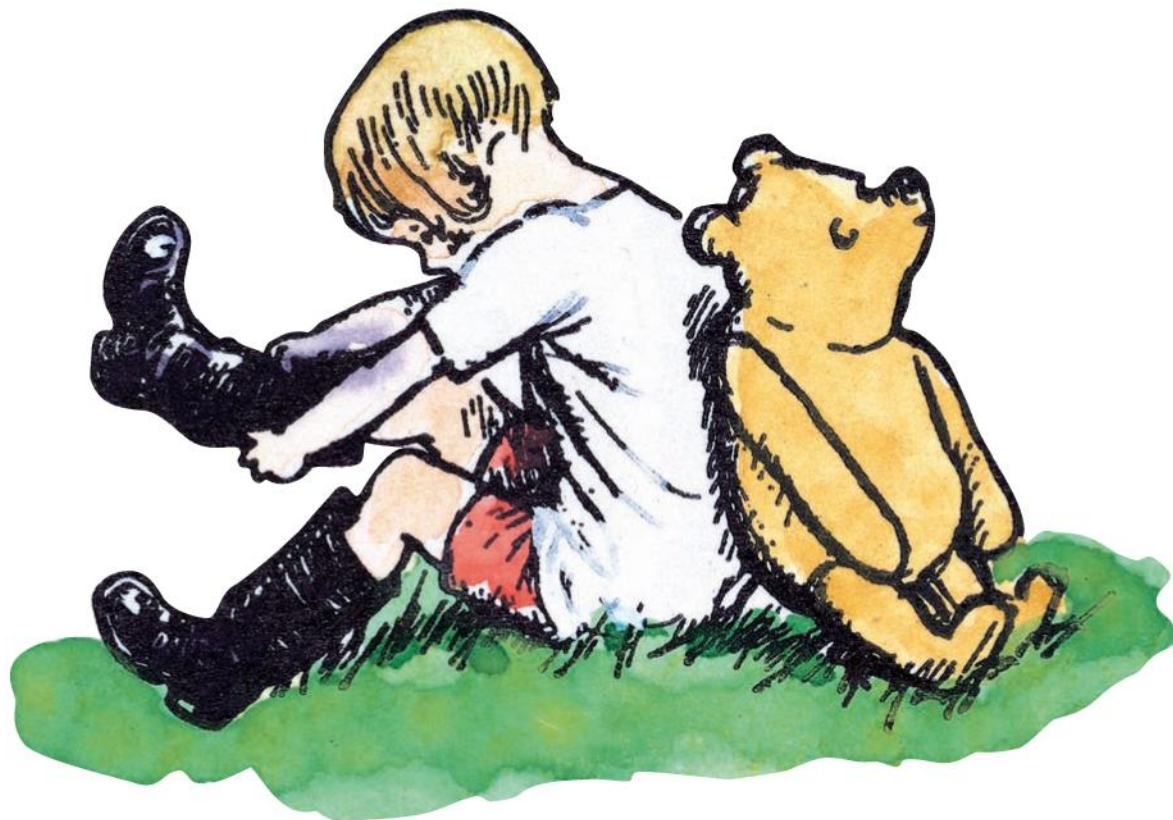
There is one final clue: her appearance as herself in a James Bond short for the Olympics 'starring Daniel Craig and Her Majesty the Queen'. She didn't get top billing, which

may in itself be telling. Who is her agent?

The real Elizabeth, here, is patient, and faintly mocking; she is a constant. She is not fierce like Scales, or saintly like Foy, or anxious like Mirren. She is gaudily beautiful in pink feathers and sequins, for who is immune to Daniel Craig? As Disraeli wrote of Queen Victoria, 'Remember, she is woman.' Or is it just that she is appearing in a film, and film stars are pretty, and so she must be pretty too? Is it yet another piece of duty?

Elizabeth II has eluded cinema, then, as she has eluded us. We can choose from a variety of myths, and the most plausible, to me, is Foy in *The Crown*; and the most comforting is Wilton in *The BFG*. We can bounce off her silence because we all have a stake in believing in her; if not, what was it for? We see only — as Bennett did — the Queen we want to see, and that is worth an Academy Award.

*Season two of The Crown airs on 8 December on Netflix.*



*Bear necessities: line block print, 1970, hand coloured by E.H. Shepard*

## Exhibition

### Lines of beauty

Melanie McDonagh

#### Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic

Victoria & Albert Museum,  
until 8 April 2018

The thing about Winnie-the-Pooh, 91 years old this year, is that he's the creature of E.H. Shepard, who drew him, quite as much as he is of A.A. Milne, who created him. The words and the pictures came together for anyone who encountered Pooh Bear in the books rather than the film. Any exhibition about him, then, has to grapple with the difficulty of doing justice to the text as well as to the drawings. And, moreover, to the fact that many of those who love him best heard about him first in a story that was read aloud. And for all that Pooh is a byword for world-class — or rather, middle-class — whimsy, there is something fragile and evanescent about the world he inhabits: he evokes the

time *When We Were Very Young*. Tread softly, then, around this bear.

The V&A's exhibition — *Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic* — and the double act of Milne, the 'laureate of the nursery', and E.H. Shepard, who drew the pictures, is the first in 40 years. But the star of this show is Shepard who, remarkably, immortalised two of the seminal books in English children's literature, *Winnie-the-*

*Once they enter the world of Christopher Robin, they come to life — Roo bounces, Kanga bustles*

*Pooh and The Wind in the Willows* (a far greater book).

Among the exhibits here are replicas of two bears on whom Pooh was based (as well as the actual bear in London zoo) — Christopher Robin's own Pooh (who made a noise when you pressed his tum), and Growler, who belonged to Shepard's children and was chewed by a dog. Looking at those unprepossessing creatures, you realise that Shepard didn't draw what he saw. They had ordinary toy-bear noses; the geni-

us of Shepard was to give Pooh that distinctive upward curve to the snout — a lovely line — which is his hallmark. And he gave his body those curves that are reminiscent of the tubby tummy of a child.

Look, too, at the first drawings of Kanga and Roo. They look like toys; they have seams. Then look at them once they enter the world of Christopher Robin. They have come to life — Roo bounces, Kanga bustles. What you see in these preliminary sketches, and then in the drawings for the book, is the creation of something vital.

He was such a wonderful draughtsman was Shepard. The line is so assured, the shading so delicate, the idea of movement conveyed with a stroke. His preparatory sketches for the woods of the story — done from the place itself — are beautiful. Even if you can't stand nursery stories you'll love the trees.

Most visitors will be divided into young children and those who remember the books from when they were young. There's something for both. The exhibition almost entirely ignores the Disney Pooh, though it does find a little space for the Russian

television version, drawn by Eduard Nazarov. This bear looks, to us, nothing like the real thing: no clothes, very brown, with dark ears and paws (but he was very popular in Russia, apparently). The recent film about the making of Pooh, *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, doesn't feature, but we're conscious now of the cost that being Christopher Robin exacted on a small boy.

The exhibition combines several elements of the books: there are words from them suspended from the ceiling or projected on to it; children can hear readings of the stories in a private corner. On entry, you see blue balloons hanging from the ceiling. Then there's a big case filled with some of the umpteen spin-offs of Pooh, from Spirograph characters to the tea set that the Queen (who is exactly the same age as W-the-P) was given for her playhouse.

From there we go back to the beginning of the whole thing, to an imaginary nursery with reproductions of the original toys, and then on to the genesis of Pooh and the collaboration between Shepard and Milne. After that, you find yourself in scenes that

*The soundtrack that made me want to reach for my revolver was Ann Lloyd's recording of 'Cottleston Pie'*

evoke Hundred Acre Wood, including a wooden bridge over a moving projection of a stream, with Poohsticks floating from one side to the other. At the end, there are assorted editions of the book.

As for the aural backdrop, for the most part it's the sound of birds, though when I was there the soundtrack that made me want to reach for my revolver was Ann Lloyd's bright recording of 'Cottleston Pie'.

Small children can sit halfway down a flight of stairs, as in the poem, or ring the bell at the entrance to Pooh's house, or turn a wheel to see how the footprints in the snow look in the hunt for the woozle. Meanwhile, the adults can read excerpts from A.A. Milne's column in *Punch*, or look at the letters from Milne to Shepard and the photos.

There is a glimpse of the after-life of the stories, and some amusing spin-offs and parodies in the catalogue. Absent, alas, is the most devastating assault on the Pooh phenomenon, 'Far from Well', Dorothy Parker's 1928 *New Yorker* review of *The House at Pooh Corner*, which concludes with the immortal line: 'And it was that word "hummy", my darlings, that marks the first place in *The House at Pooh Corner* at which Tonstant Weader Fwowed Up.'

Yes, yes, of course it was whimsy. But as Frank Cottrell Boyce wrote in a preface to Ann Thwaite's *Goodbye Christopher Robin*: 'The magic of the Hundred Acre Wood is that it takes something painfully fleeting and makes it stay for ever.' Childhood passes, but Pooh remains.

## Live music Sugar rush Richard Bratby

LPO/Vladimir Jurowski  
Royal Festival Hall

Cecilia Bartoli and Sol Gabetta  
Barbican Hall, and touring until  
17 December

To get a flavour of Joseph Marx's *An Autumn Symphony*, picture the confectionery counter in a grand Viennese café. Beneath the glass lies sweetness beyond imagining: towers of sponge cake, billows of whipped cream, and icing that shines red and orange. You wander down the display: there are Sachertortes, petits fours, candied angelica and glacé cherries. It goes on — dark chocolate glints over golden pastry and pink marzipan cushions swell beneath tangles of spun sugar. At which point you realise that what you really want is an espresso and a bread roll.

And it looked like it would be such a treat, too. There's hot competition for the title Last of the Viennese Romantics but Joseph Marx, who died in 1964, is a definite front-runner; a composer of well-made songs and lavish orchestral music written in a style that is (to borrow a phrase from Michael Haas, author of *Forbidden Music*) not so much post-Romantic as hyper-Romantic. *An Autumn Symphony* provoked a modest riot when it was premièred in Vienna in 1922. Practically unheard since then and rumoured to be the last word in jugendstil lushness, it had acquired a cult following. This performance by the London Philharmonic under Vladimir Jurowski was its UK première, some 95 years overdue.

For the effort alone, Jurowski and his orchestra deserve only praise. Every part of the woodwind and brass section was expanded; harps, piano and celeste jangled along, and horns and percussion sprawled halfway across the back of the stage. The LPO could have saved itself a lot of trouble (and judging from the gaps in the audience, a sharp financial hit) by just doing Mahler's First instead. But Jurowski made a leap of faith, and his players did too. The strings slid between notes in fine style. The horns powered out their climaxes as though they were playing *Ein Heldenleben*, and the woodwinds repeatedly found the G-spot of their silky, writhing solos (the principal bassoon's part, in particular, sounded bigger than the Mozart and Weber concertos combined). Jurowski swept it all forward with heroic stamina.

But there's no getting around it — all that gorgeously exhausting. Marx begins in a shimmer of golden beauty. The strings pour out a lyrical melody while the harps, wood-

winds and celeste glitter behind them like the gold leaf on a Klimt portrait. It's ecstatic. And then it stays ecstatic, unremittingly, for well over an hour: no melody unadorned by a swirling countersubject, no climax without its glockenspiel vajazzle; not much contrast (the radiance dimmed, mercifully, in the third of the four movements) and a fatal shortage of really arresting ideas. It felt at times like hearing all the most orgasmic moments in Austro-German late Romanticism — the waterfall from Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*, the prelude to Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, the bit in Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* where Paul shouts 'Wunderbar!' — played one after the other for some 70 minutes (Jurowski had reinstated several cuts). Man cannot live on Sachertorte alone. Strauss, Korngold and Schoenberg are master-confectioners precisely because they grasped that.

If nothing else, though, Marx succeeded in making an evening of baroque-ish showstoppers with Cecilia Bartoli and the cellist Sol Gabetta seem like the height of tasteful understatement — and that includes the third of their four encores, in which Gabetta and a tambourine-waving Bartoli trilled their way through an orchestral version of Rossini's 'La Danza', complete with the honking period oboes of their house band, the modestly named Capella Gabet-

*It was 70 minutes of the most orgasmic moments in Austro-German late Romanticism*

ta. The idea was to recreate the 18th-century concept of a musical duel between two rival divas, but it was far too good-natured for that. Bartoli and Gabetta made eyes at each other, traded tasteful ornaments and wore matching dresses as they threw off a series of arias, variously tearful and flashy, by the likes of Caldara, Albinoni and Hermann Raupach. Bartoli effectively conceded the second half to Gabetta, who brought a focused tone and yards of bubbly passage-work to a concerto by Boccherini.

It was a lot of fun, although with no surtitles, and the house lights dimmed throughout, only a very fluent speaker of 18th-century Italian would have had any idea what Bartoli was actually singing. Never mind: just enjoy the pretty sounds. Bartoli projects such charisma, and has so uninhibited a sense of theatre, that the sizeable patches of wear and tear on her voice didn't register unduly; or at least paled beside her ability to pull out a telling phrase and float it, luminous and still, in her honey-sweet top register. I doubt many singers these past two centuries will have made a more expressive case for, say, Boccherini's 'Se d'un amor tiranno'. Her fan base certainly loved it, sighing with recognition when she began Handel's 'Lascia la spina' and yelling 'Brava!' after everything, which was fair enough, really.

## Radio

### Don't go breaking my heart

Kate Chisholm

It's been heart week on Radio 4, celebrating the anniversary of the first 'successful' heart transplant in 1967, which was performed, controversially, by Dr Christian Barnard in South Africa on a patient called Louis Washkansky (who survived the operation and lived for 18 days). The heart, that mysterious, almost mystical organ, is freighted with such cultural significance that back then there were some who thought such feats of medical skill were tampering dangerously with our humanity. Change the heart, and the person within would never be the same. Now, though, as Giles Fraser discovered in his series *This Old Heart of Mine* (produced by Victoria Shepherd), the official definition of death is determined not by the persistent thump of that heartbeat but by whether the brainstem is dead. The heart is nothing more than a pump. Vital, maybe, but only an essentially mechanical device; nothing emotional about it.

Earlier this year Fraser underwent major heart surgery and in his five short

*Fraser wanted to know what it felt like to hold his heart and literally massage it back to life*

programmes he tried to defy this truth by looking at how not just his arteries have been affected but also his thoughts, his feelings, his beliefs. There was no health warning attached to the programme. You know the kind of thing: 'Listeners are warned they might be upset by what follows...' But this was strong stuff from the Canon (best known for scything through questions of conscience on *The Moral Maze*), and most definitely not for the faint-hearted.

He goes to meet the surgeon at St Thomas' Hospital in London who performed his quadruple heart bypass. Fraser wanted to know what it felt like for the surgeon to hold his heart and literally massage it back to life. 'You have to be a good sewer,' said the surgeon, 'as there's not much room for error.' (The bypass is stitched into the pumping system.) Mr Avlonitis had just explained how he began work by cutting through the skin on Fraser's chest, then into the soft tissue underneath, before sawing through the bone to get to his heart and the four damaged arteries (blocked, Fraser was told after being admitted to A&E with chest pains, 90 per cent, 90 per cent, 70 per cent and 100 per cent).

'What was it? A circular saw?' Fraser asked, after hearing the kind of details about

his operation that would make most normal people blench.

'No. It was oscillating,' said the surgeon, quietly.

Meanwhile someone else was cutting through Fraser's leg to get to the vein that would be used to provide the bypass material.

'The heart. It's a pump. That's all it is for you,' said Fraser to his surgeon. To which Avlonitis replied, 'Once we can make an artificial heart, it can easily be replaced.'

For those in search of a less clinical dissection of heart trouble, Michael Blastland's *The Skipped Beat* on Monday night (produced by Kate Taylor) took a more poetic approach. He was diagnosed with arrhythmia some years ago and has become intensely aware of changes to his heartbeat, and to the way this makes him feel. 'The heart rhythm is such a violent thing,' he says. When it goes wrong, the turbulence in his chest is so strong he's left 'utterly unhinged'. He can't think straight; he can't sit still. 'This beast heaves around, swells and pushes, contracts and thumps. It's a monster.'

He talks to others who have experienced cardiac arrest, whose beating heart has stopped, that rhythmic pulse, known since before birth, disrupted, broken. For them, the pulse delivers more metaphysical messages, says Blastland. The heartbeat's rhythm is part of who we are. We try to replicate it in music, through walking, in poetry. Blastland has even had a trace of his own sinus rhythm framed and hung on the wall. It's 'one of the most beautiful things'.

With the deftness that now characterises the Radio 4 schedule, Saturday afternoon's drama was a repeat of a play about Robert Mugabe and how he came to power. *God's President: Mugabe of Zimbabwe* by Kwame Kwei-Armah (and produced by Julia McKenzie) was first heard in 2010 and celebrated the 30th anniversary of that country's independence. It tells the story of how that was achieved through the lengthy negotiations held at Lancaster House in London between 10 September and 15 December 1979. Ian Smith, Bishop Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo and Mugabe were all involved, seeking to safeguard their own interests against the wishes of the British government, represented by Lord Carrington and his sidekick at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Robin Renwick.

It's rather a dry subject — the toing and froing between hotel rooms and conference suite as the delegates battled out their differences, with Carrington and Renwick always in the background, seeking to influence what happened and ensure the right outcome. But the timing, just as Zimbabwe has a chance to redeem itself after the fall of Mugabe, and the writing — stylish, refined, persuasive — brings it all to life through character, showing how Mugabe

emerges as the cleverest and most cynical of them all. 'This is war,' says Mugabe. 'When faced with extinction, it's in man's nature to scrape to the bottom of his own humanity in order to preserve himself.'

## Television

### Women on top

James Delingpole

Boy came to me the other night in a state of dismay. 'Dad, I just turned on *Match of the Day* to watch England vs Kazakhstan and guess what: they never mentioned this, but it's the women's game.'

What bothered him was not so much being forced to watch a slower, less athletic, duller version of real football — though obviously that too — as that the BBC was being so utterly disingenuous about it. This policy of pretending there's absolutely no difference between men's and women's international sporting fixtures has, I know, been operational for some time. But for those of us living outside the PC metropolitan bubble — i.e. most of the BBC's actual audience — it still feels insulting, hectoring and dishonest.

But you can't escape it. Even really good drama series that you might actually want to watch have been infected. The new Netflix cowboy drama *Godless*, for example.

Or rather, I should perhaps say, cowgirl drama. *Godless*, you see, is set largely in La Belle, New Mexico — a mining town that is

*For those of us outside the PC metropolitan bubble, the BBC's policy feels hectoring and dishonest*

mysteriously inhabited almost entirely by women. This, we later learn, is because all the men were wiped out in a mine disaster. But astonishingly their wives and girlfriends — not to mention the pretty prostitute who has had to turn the customer-less Magdalena's House of Rapture into a school — all doggedly stayed behind. Now the women manage the town and its various operations as well as, or possibly even better than, those useless dead men ever did.

Don't worry. Once you get over this politically correct implausibility, the drama is a cracker, for reasons I shall shortly explain. But I don't think we should let it off the hook just yet. For example, the mine disaster, we learn, happened some while ago: so how come, in the interim, those widows haven't been snapped up by hordes of male suitors in a region and era when eligible women must have been in desperately short supply?

Also, did we really have to have a scene where the tough, possibly lesbian girl who decides she would much rather dress as

a man than as a woman taunts one of the male characters for never having experimented with wearing a dress. This is the 1890s Wild West, for heaven's sake, not a gender-neutral toilet facility on Yale campus last week.

I felt much the same way when I half read my way through that acclaimed Sebastian Barry novel *Days Without End*. All that fantastically compelling historical detail about fighting the injuns, all those Civil War battles, all those grisly disease outbreaks and biblical weather disasters — all of it quite ruined by the author's insistence on making the narrator gay. And it's not the gayness I mind so much as the baggage that goes with it: that feeling that a) both you and the incorrect past are being improved and updated with a more correct modern narrative, and b) that there are lots of hideous SJW types really applauding all this stuff and that you're just a dinosaur who will never be allowed old-fashioned, politically unloaded entertainment ever again because those are the New Rules.

Mind you, I've a suspicion — or rather a fervent hope — that the series creator Scott Frank only included this trope so that he could sell it more easily as a 'feminist Western'. And also in order to create a handy narrative device where there are lots more pretty girls than you'd get in a more

plausible Wild West scenario; girls who, furthermore, are about to be in the direst of dire peril.

That's because, as we saw in a promisingly brutal establishing scene, there's a gang of very bad men on the loose led by one Frank Griffin. Griffin has just wiped out an entire town, lynching or shooting every man, woman and child. So just imagine the havoc he might eventually wreak at La Belle...

Unless, of course, the outlaw Roy Goode — husky voice and gunfighting skills out

*This is the 1890s Wild West, for heaven's sake, not a gender-neutral toilet facility on Yale campus*

of Clint Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter*; horse-whispering skills out of Robert Redford — can somehow train up the girls in time to mount a defence like the one they managed in *The Magnificent Seven*.

This is why *Godless* is really so good and watchable, of course. Not the PC nonsense, which no one ever wanted or asked for. But, rather, because it's a well acted, gritty, dusty, uber-violent and actually clandestinely old-fashioned mash-up of all the great Westerns you ever knew and loved. Oh, and also — thank God — there's the blessed relief that it's not that interminable bloody *Westworld* remake.

## Theatre

### Festive feast

Lloyd Evans

**A Christmas Carol**  
Old Vic, until 20 January 2018

**Julius Caesar**  
Barbican Theatre, until 20 January 2018

Maximum Victoriana at the Old Vic for Matthew Warchus's *A Christmas Carol*. Even before we reach our seats we're accosted by bonneted wenches handing out mince pies. Merchants in top hats roam the aisles proffering satsumas, which they call, with accurate Victorian incorrectness, 'oranges'.

The guts of the theatre have been ripped out for this show. A slender catwalk stretches 40 yards from the rear of the stage to the farthest wall of the auditorium, with the seats gathered around this runway in odd little clumps. The narrow performing area leaves no room for scenery, so Dickens's London is suggested by dozens of oblong lanterns dangling overhead, like mini-Tardises, all glowing amber, as if recently nuked. Then a soapy blizzard starts. White suds flayed into aerated granules tumble down from on high and settle on our shoulders like plump drifts of snow.

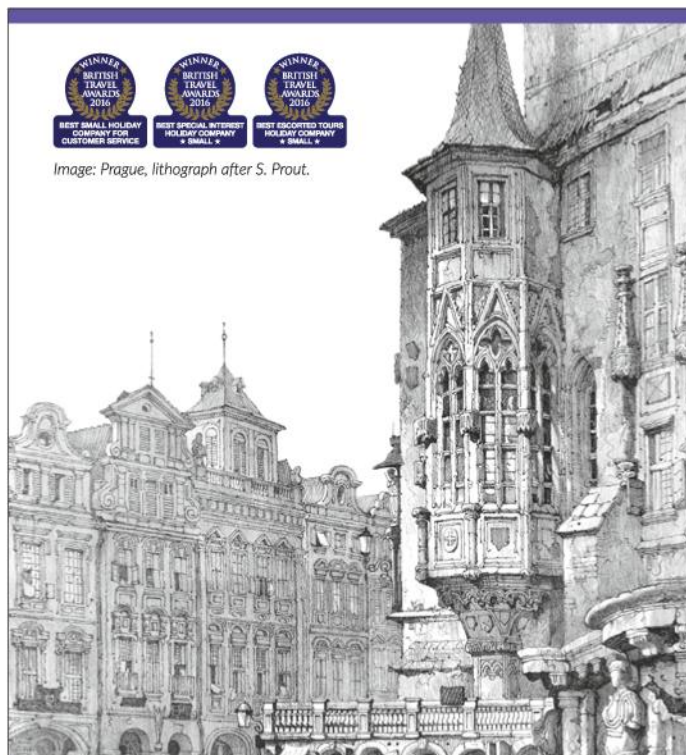


Image: Prague, lithograph after S. Prout.

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*Togas, sandals, breastplates, ketchup and daggers, not guns: Julius Caesar at the Barbican*

At the heart of this visual feast is Rhys Ifans's Scrooge. An easy choice for a popular thesp. It's almost impossible to muffle the role. It moistens the tear ducts of the Kleenex-prone, and it contains one of the most satisfying transformations in all literature. Facially, Ifans seems overly contemporary. His long blond hair is bolt-upright, like Boris Becker in the electric chair. His partially shaven jowls look a bit Woodstock, and he booms out his lines in a Home Counties wobbleboard voice that might be better suited to toffee commercials. He can certainly capture Scrooge's emotions (both of them: aggressive nastiness and aggressive generosity), but his Welshness has gone missing, his sense of mischief, his elusive and sinuous naughtiness. By nature, Ifans is a bandit, an outlaw, not a religious convert.

In the early scenes he's charming as an ambitious romantic with an eye for the ladies. He wins a job at a funeral parlour by correctly predicting how best to 'prioritise' two competing customers. ('Prioritise' was a rare departure from Victorian authenticity.) As he moves into finance, he finds his moral voice and declares that debt instils discipline. But when he sees the suffering caused by bankruptcy he suffers a full Rada breakdown: hunched shoulders, wracking sobs. It's decent enough but unexceptional. Only at the end does Ifans shine through in his

own colours. As Scrooge embraces virtue, he finds it deeply troubling. 'I love Christmas,' he yells, and then does a double take at his transformation. This is hilarious and true to the character. Less satisfying is the self-parodying note of the closing scenes. 'I've always wanted to be called Brenda,' says the Spirit of Christmas Present. This gets a laugh but it belongs to stand-up, not Dickens.

*Julius Caesar* is regarded as a dry, intractable and overly masculine play. I love it. The RSC's version is made of the right stuff: togas, sandals, breastplates, ketchup and daggers, not guns. (No guns ever, please, in Shakespeare.) The casting is imperfect. Andrew Woodall finds something deliciously ogreish in the polished monolith of Caesar. Less convincing are his opponents Cassius and Brutus, a pair of revolutionary daredevils plotting to take over the world. Martin Hutson (Cassius) is a gifted comedian who can do exasperated prissiness as well as anyone. If the Beeb were remaking *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*, Hutson would head the list of possible Frank Spencers.

But Cassius is an elusive prize that requires craft and forethought. His rhetoric is captivating, magical, timeless. But as a person he's prickly and small-minded, caustic and brittle, without cordiality or even humanity. Significantly, he receives no praise from any other character until he dies. Hutson is

too shrill and his repertoire of hand gestures limited. And there's a graver problem. Shakespeare knows that Caesar died aged 56 and he portrays Cassius as an embittered contemporary, steeped in long-marinated envy. Cassius recalls the conqueror of Gaul as a sickly and feeble junior officer in long-forgotten campaigns. But Hutson looks at least 15 years too young to have served alongside a youthful Caesar.

The role of Brutus is, if anything, trickier than Cassius. He's a frosty and grandiloquent prig obsessed with his own virtue and with his ancient namesake who purged Rome of its early kings. In a word, Brutus is a family tree with a halo, but Alex Waldmann lacks the poise or substance to convey Brutus's sense of his own magnificence. This void is filled by James Corrigan, who plays Mark Antony as a sexy, slippery and utterly ruthless political operator. He gives a convincing and natural shape to the funeral speech 'Friends, Romans, countrymen', which the audience greeted with chuckles of approval and a ripple of applause. And he included a tiny contemporary gesture. On that curious line, 'I only speak right on,' he added a characteristic Blairite motion with his fist, the hand loosely clenched, the thumb uppermost, thrusting forward. Subtle touches like that are a hallmark of fabulous artistry.

## Cinema

### How's your father

Deborah Ross

#### Menashe

U, Key cities

*Menashe* is a drama set amid Brooklyn's ultra-orthodox Hasidic community. It is performed entirely in the Yiddish language. It is peopled exclusively by Hasidic non-actors. (Real-life grocer Menashe Lustig plays the title character.) It is small and specific, admittedly, but it also tells a universal story about a father's struggle to hold on to the son he loves, and it tells this story tenderly, thoughtfully, beautifully. It may even be my favourite frum film of the year. Thus far. (Still a few weeks to go.)

This marks the feature debut of director Joshua Z Weinstein (no relation), who made documentaries previously, and who wrote this with Alex Lipschultz and Musa Syeed. Weinstein, a secular Jew, had decided he wanted to make a film set within the community, so was hanging around Brooklyn's Borough Park — home to one of the largest populations of orthodox Jews outside Israel — looking for his story when he discovered Menashe Lustig, a widower with a son who, by his rabbi's decree, would have to remarry before his son would be allowed to live with him. So this is a fictionalised account of that situation, starring Lustig, who is such a sublimely natural performer that he inhabits every scene as if it were effortless. Weinstein has described him as 'Chaplin-esque', with this 'deep sadness about him' and that's it exactly.

The camera first shows Menashe at work at the till in a supermarket. He is a bear of a man, somewhat dishevelled, who wears the yarmulke and tzitzit but not the big hat and coat, which may be his mini-rebellion against the restrictions that conspire against him. His wife Leah had died a year earlier and, ever since, his son Rievan (Ruben Niborski) has lived with Leah's brother Eizik (Yoel Weisshaus), who is stern but has a settled family life and is well healed.

The rabbi (Meyer Schwartz; otherwise a taxi driver) tells Menashe that Rievan will not be returned to him until he has 'nice wife, nice home, clean dishes'. However, he will allow Rievan to stay with his father until Leah's memorial in a week's time.

From this set-up, you expect Menashe to prove what a great dad he can be. And, certainly, you want Menashe to prove what a great dad he can be. You show them, Menashe! And you show Eizik! (Eizik has zero faith in Menashe. Menashe, he says, is a schlemiel.) But while Menashe's intentions are always good, he is hopeless. His boss despairs, particularly after a gefilte fish shipment goes awry. He is in debt and behind with his rent. He gets drunk. He loves Riev-

an with all his heart — their scenes together juggling fruit or eating ice cream are magical — but he can't get him to school on time, or provide him with a proper breakfast. We find him frustrating but endearingly frustrating, and are rooting for him. (Menashe, just get it right this time. Please.) As for remarrying, he's in no hurry. His relationship with Leah had not been happy. We discover this via a terrific scene where he hangs out with some of his Hispanic co-workers, drinking beer.

Shot in the *vérité* style, this invites you into a highly insular and little-known world — as a Jew, but a non-observant one, this world is as little known to me as to anybody — without explanation. The morning washing rituals, the burning of the chametz, the mikveh... it is enough just to observe. And while Weinstein never brings the ferocious paternalism to the forefront, we see it out of the corner of our eye. A teenage girl storms

out of the rabbi's office because she won't be allowed to attend college. A rabbi who allows women to drive is scorned. One youngish, pale, tired woman already has eight kids. This is also just observed, with some restraint. (I have to say that if I ever met G-d I would sit Him down and ask Him, most respectfully, what his problem is. All that infinite love and you couldn't embrace both sexes equally?)

There is, it's true, an element of cultural voyeurism here, particularly as most members of the Hasidic community won't see it, given they are prohibited from watching television or films — to find out about those who agreed to appear in it, you'll have to do your own research; no space here — and that does make me a little bit queasy, along with the fact that some of the scenes were filmed guerrilla style. (Do people know they might be in a film they'll never see?) But even so, it's still my favourite frum film of the year. Thus far.



About a boy: Ruben Niborski as Rievan in *Menashe*

# The Watford Gap

By David Butterfield

In a shallow dip between two unremarkable Northamptonshire hills you will find a road, a motorway, a railway and a canal jostling for position. It is neither a place of natural beauty nor a spectacle of human ingenuity. Yet it has been the subject of books, art exhibitions, pop songs and even a (mini) musical.

This is Watford Gap, a three-mile break in the limestone ridge that runs from the Cotswolds to Lincolnshire. Perched between Daventry and Rugby, it subtly marks the watershed of the Nene and Avon to the east and west. However understated the depression geographically, it's of high status culturally. For this is the gateway between the South and All Things North: the Midlands, northern England and Scotland.

The Romans first steered Watling Street through these parts, trudging from Canterbury to Wroxeter via London and St Albans. This is the street that saw Boudicca fall; the street that separated the Danelaw from English Mercia. Watford Gap also sits on the linguistic fault line running (roughly) from Shropshire to the Wash — the frontier of the 'foot-strut' and 'bath-trap' splits. South of here, these words (and their kind) have different vowel sounds; to the north, they sound identical. Such differences matter: to northerners, the authentic clipped



*The Watford Locks on the Grand Union Canal*

'a' of grass and fast is a proudly worn badge of collective identity.

But the modern marker of this national dividing line is a motorway service station: Watford Gap services were the first of their kind, opened with the M1 in 1959. To the fresh, footloose generation of music lovers, the station's Blue Boar café offered the eye-popping novelty of a 24-hour clubroom; of sausage rolls and seven-inches through the night. In its heyday it hosted everyone who was anyone in beat-boom Britain: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and the Who. Even Jimi Hendrix arrived in Britain fizzing with excitement about the

Blue Boar, which he presumed to be an oh-so-swinging nightclub.

There was no live music, of course. But its jukebox was the stuff of legend: infiltrating its carousels was like smashing the charts. Mods and rockers met to trade records — and blows — with each other. Gradually, the electric vibe started to flicker, before cutting out. The waitresses disappeared in 1965, and by the early 1970s reports condemned the station as 'lacking any quality'. The folk-rocker Roy Harper sang in 1977 of 'Watford Gap, Watford Gap, a plate of grease and a load of crap'. The Blue Boar of legend is now a Roadchef.

So why the 'Watford' Gap? Simple enough: a village of that name lies nearby. But its namesake in Hertfordshire has seriously muddied the waters. Most friends I've asked assume Watford Gap to be a cultural fosse dug with sniggers above north London. Yet the two Watfords are more than 60 miles apart. Look at the Tube map, though, and Watford Junction is the apex of the north: for the austrocentric Londoner, 'North of Watford' was destined to subsume 'North of the Watford Gap'. This injustice needs rectifying — so please spread the word about this iconic button on Britain's fabric. After all, it boasts quite a CV for a minor declivity.

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'The fate of these Ashes was decided when Ben Stokes got into a spat with the locals outside a Bristol night club'  
— Roger Alton, p61

# LIFE

## High life Taki



As the song almost says, what a difference a year makes: 2017 is not over yet, but it's been a lousy one so far. Losing two very close friends was a real bummer, for starters. Then the Brexit negotiations and the Trump presidency revealed that I had declared victory too soon. This time last year I was singing about what a great year it had been, what a great mood I was in, and so on. The British people had decided that they no longer wished to be led by and take orders from a peanut vendor from Luxembourg called Jean-Claude Asshole. Yippee!

One year on, the asshole, in cahoots with British left-wing rabble, seems to have confused the issue enough that the hapless Theresa is upping the ante for Britain to become independent again. Not so yippee! The Donald isn't making my life any easier either. Not on account of his tweets — the jihadis do it non-stop, so why shouldn't he? The reason I'm starting to doubt his sanity is that he's climbed in bed with the Saudis, which is like investing all one's moolah with Madoff on 9 December 2008. No one benefits from a deal with the Saudis. They even cheat the hookers who work hard for a living. I have great respect for John Bradley and our sainted editor who wrote about that sandy hellhole four weeks ago. The only trouble is that they are giving the benefit of the doubt to this mini-Napoleon Mohammed bin Salman. My experience with the Saudis is that they never pay their debts, cheat on contracts and agreements, and tell lies that make Baron Munchausen sound like Enoch Powell.

The mini-Napoleon had a fool like Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times* in for a chat, fed him some lamb, and Friedman began gushing like a Texas oil well. What they didn't talk about were those thousands of Yemeni children with swollen bellies who are being starved to death by the Saudi blockade, and the fact that the heroic Saudi pilots, led by American navigators and forward air controllers, have managed to bomb

hospitals and schools, and even marriages and funerals. Famous victories that are all, according to the Saudis, on a par with the Battle of Britain.

When the mini-Napoleon arrested Al-Waleed bin Talal, a man reputed to have 20 or so billion smackers, he asked him where the loot came from. The same place the \$500 million dollars that you overpaid the Russian oligarch for his boat last summer came from, should have been the answer. Mind you, between you, me and the camels, all the greedy ones from the west, people who used to hang out in Tripoli trying to do business with Gaddafi, are now hanging out in Riyadh. I know I sound jaded, but what is going on as far as I'm concerned is a shake-down by gangsters of other gangsters who got there first.

The Saudi Caesar was assured by the Donald that if the Saudis played nice with the Israelis, the latter would do to the mullahs in Iran what they more often than not do to the Palestinians every week or so. The Israelis, however, have been accused of many things, many of them true. But stupidity is not one of them. And Iran is no push-over. Israel's nukes will never be used except in dire circumstances when the nation is about to go under. And Israel is not about to get into a war in the deserts of Arabia so the camel-drivers can visit London and enrich the few hookers who demand payment before rather than after.

But enough of camels; let's have some real news for a change. Last week Jay-Z, a billionaire rapper, music entrepreneur and ex-crack cocaine dealer, finally admitted cheating on his wife Beyoncé, a singer. (So that would explain why, three years ago, her sister kicked him in the shins, rather hard. Michael Mailer and I had been in the elevator where it happened a few moments before history was made. Had Mikey and I taken that lift up to the Boom Boom Room ten minutes later, we could have seen history in the making. A billionaire ex-crack cocaine dealer ferociously attacked by a vengeful sister-in-law.)

How did I get this world exclusive? Easy. The editor-in-chief of the *NY Times*, Dean Baquet, got an exclusive interview with Jay-Z, published it, and I bought the paper and read it. That's how great scoops are achieved. The top banana of the *Times* waits patiently to interview one of our greatest men ever, and then the poor little Greek boy reads it while riding on the subway. (And if you believe the last item,

you believe that Jean-Claude Asshole is a great man.)

So, 2017 is drawing to a close and I am very busy organising my 'goodbye to New York' Christmas party, an annual event I host with Michael Mailer. One of last year's guests, Harvey Weinstein, will not be attending, and in a way I feel cowardly for not inviting him. But then we have about 40 young women coming and if he were to show up we'd end up being 40 men and no women, so there you have it. Hello, girls; goodbye, Harvey. Yippee!

## Low life Jeremy Clarke



I took a dab of antiseptic gel and rubbed my hands together. 'Alone tonight, sir?' said the charming head waiter. I was, I said. For the sake of conviviality, he seated me opposite the only other lone diner in the ship's restaurant, a chap in his mid-sixties with his head in a book. This bookish loner had a jutting Mr Punch chin and an old-fashioned lothario's pencil moustache. A few hours earlier, I'd noticed him prowling the deck wearing only a minuscule pair of leopard-skin print bathing drawers and a sea captain's hat. We shook hands and exchanged Christian names. Gunter hailed from Germany but spoke basic English.

I asked him what his book was about. 'It is about life after death,' he said. He was disinclined to elaborate, but willing to initiate a conversation about death. 'And was your grandfather killed in the first world war?' he said. No, I said. He was only wounded — shot in the leg near Ypres. And your grandfather, I asked? Was he killed? 'No, no,' he said. 'My grandfather was only a regimental tailor. At Verdun. He mended the broken uniforms.' I pictured his grandfather pedalling away on his sewing machine in a dugout, then ventured that my grandmother's brother was killed by a direct hit from a shell on the Somme. 'The headmaster at my first school lost his arm at the Somme,' said Gunter. 'He was kicked by a horse and the

arm was destroyed and the surgeon had to cut it away. Have you ever seen an amputation? Or perhaps a dissection of a dead person?' Alas no, I said. 'And would you like to see a photo of a dissection? I have one in my cabin. One moment. I will bring it.'

He rose from the table. While he was away, a waiter appeared with a menu and took my order for asparagus soup followed by the stir-fried pork. A minute later, Gunter returned to the table, with the photo buttoned into the breast pocket of his country and western-style shirt. He unbuttoned the flap, took out the photo and passed it across. 'I was in Thailand,' he explained. 'I just walked into the university, found the dissection room and nobody said anything.' The photo showed a hideously bloated, flayed corpse face-down on a table. A young student was leaning over it and making a careful incision in the neck. I congratulated him on his audacity. 'That was 20 years ago. I also have something else,' he said, unbuttoning the other breast pocket.

This second photo showed what looked like a ball of fire. Gunter invited me to guess what it was. I admitted defeat. 'It is a cremation. You know what is a cremation? I was lucky. One day, a friend who works in a cre-

*I watched as the body burned. I saw the hair burn and then the skin and then the skull*

matorium allowed me to look into the oven and watch as the body burned. I saw the hair burn and then the skin and then the skull. I put my head so close to the opening that my own face was burnt.' The grave face with the pencil moustache suddenly lit up with a radiant smile. The alteration in his appearance was so great that I laughed.

'And have you ever been to the Royal College of Surgeons?' he said, grave again. A third photograph appeared. This one showed a child with a head grotesquely swollen with encephalitis, upright and naked in a jar of preserving fluid. 'I was lucky. I wrote a letter to gain permission to view these exhibits. But you now have to pay, I believe.'

Everyone suddenly broke into song. Another birthday. A procession of waiters, their leader toting a guitar, the second one a flaming cake, were homing in on the birthday girl. Those passengers who were cruise 'repeaters' had attended a champagne reception before dinner and tonight 'Happy Birthday' was rendered with a kind of ho-ligan gusto.

Had he ever seen anyone die, I said? He studied the tablecloth for a second, then said, no, he had not. But he had once rushed to view the remains of an aunt hit by a train at a level crossing. 'There was almost nothing left,' he said sadly. A subsequent attempt to view a suicide hit by a train — no relation this time — had result-

ed in failure and a caution from the police. And last year he had put on a white coat and pretended to be a medical student at an autopsy class at his local medical school in Germany. This, too, had resulted in his being cautioned by the police.

It's always the same. Before you go on a cruise, you picture the sun and the blueness of the sea, and maybe the white beaches and the iced drinks. But once aboard, the various personalities you encounter at the dinner table obliterate everything else.

## Real life Melissa Kite



While the vet was checking Gracie, I asked him to take a look at Tara, the old chestnut hunter. Just a look, mind you, from a safe distance. I wouldn't recommend anyone, however qualified, approach the red devil.

Aged 32, she is slower than she used to be but still finds ways to express her love of violence. Imagine the dragon from *Lord of the Rings* coming at you with its neck stretched out, baring teeth, and somehow bending itself round to aim its back end at you at the same time.

She has always been like that — coming at you with both ends, they call it — so no suggestions on a postcard, please, as to what made her this way. She's had a wonderful life, and she has never stopped celebrating it by being unconscionably aggressive and hideous. If you anthropomorphise animals enough to give them lovely attributes, then you have to make the leap to allow them to have awful traits, too.

Anyone who has ever met Tara won't argue with this. She is the horse equivalent of a sociopath, or possibly a full-on psychopath. Anyone else would have traded her on years ago. But I found a way to harness her psychopathic tendencies by riding her at full pelt and we reached an accommodation.

She has this weirdly seductive power. I would like to call it the life force, but it's more like the death force, as Sybil Fawltly once said of her mother. She is indestructible, infallible, dare I say immortal? She is the only horse, or indeed person I know, who has never had a single day sick.

She is a force for evil certainly, but a force nevertheless. When people ask why on earth I love her, I say it's not love exactly. It's way more complicated than that. My relationship with her is a lot like the relationship between Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter.

She wouldn't come after me. She would think that rude. I'm fairly sure she considers the world a more interesting place with me in it, and I certainly feel that way about her.

During our many years together, there has grown, against all odds, a deep respect between us. She would defend me to the end. If a rambler comes along the footpath next to her field and I am standing near her, she lunges at them with her ears flat as if to say 'get away from my person'.

She once galloped across the field at full pelt when a passer-by ran towards us carrying a runaway Cydney in her arms. The dog was fine, but evidently Tara thought the pup was injured. Like the Krays, family is important to her.

She jealously guards Gracie, the hunter pony who now lives with her. And because Gracie knows that Tara is the boss, they get along just fine. But any other horse or person better not come near.

I have had to put up notices warning passers-by not to pet Tara or, God forbid, let their children feed her treats.

I once caught a nice family offering her a carrot over the fence and as I ran towards them screaming 'No!' Tara decided to take

*Tara is the horse equivalent of a sociopath, or possibly a full-on psychopath*

the carrot and the child on the end of it. As she lunged almost through the fence, ears back, jaws gaping, the family only just snatched their offspring to safety in time.

I would say that she has never bitten me but she did once put her teeth through my hand, en passant, as I was feeding her a Polo mint because someone walked by her stable at that moment. She lunged at the door open-mouthed and half swallowed my arm as she warned them off. That was an amusing evening in A&E.

Then there was the time I got kicked in the eye by a horse she was turned out with because the pair of them had formed an evil bond and didn't want to be separated. Again, try explaining these things to the NHS, it's not easy.

But she is incredibly old, and I do worry. During the summer, she took to her shelter and I feared the worst. I took her hay and water twice a day. But after two weeks, she sauntered out and started grazing again.

I'm fairly sure she was just bored and decided to amuse herself by watching me schlepp buckets and haynets.

But surely, I keep thinking, this can't go on. I must be missing something. So I asked the vet. This horse can't live for ever, can she? There must be something wrong? The vet looked her up and down, bravely approached, tried to lift her feet. Then he backed away as she flashed him the whites of her eyes before galloping off. 'She'll outlive us all,' was the verdict.



**“WHEN MY CHILD IS CRYING AND I HAVE NO FOOD TO GIVE HER, IT HURTS ME AS A MOTHER”**



Rebecca, 6 years old - Thulnaath's daughter

**Mothers like Thulnaath urgently need your help. Torn from their homes and farms by war, they are walking for days to find food for their children. Too often, though, they come back empty handed.**

Watching your children fade away on just one meal is something no parent should have to endure. For mothers like Thulnaath, this is the stark reality. Ever since the civil war broke out in 2013, South Sudan has faced critical food shortages, putting the most vulnerable at risk of starvation. Every bit as deadly as the conflict itself is the hunger crisis that has accompanied the fighting: the devastating food shortage that is the reason we are turning to you for help. Young children like Rebecca have already seen so much pain and suffering.

**£16 could feed a family**

It is not uncommon for mothers like Thulnaath to go to extraordinary lengths to feed their children, some risk being attacked, raped or even killed. “We are suffering a lot because of the famine in this area,” she says. “When my child is crying and I have no food to give her, it hurts me as a mother. There is no cow, so no milk to give my children. There is no money to buy fish for them. It’s challenging for me as a mother.” If we do not act, then families like Thulnaath’s will be unable to survive.

Will you help us get food to people like Thulnaath and her children this Christmas?

**Putting an end to the suffering**

Teams at Mercy Corps are doing everything in their power to get lifesaving food into the hands of those suffering most, but we can’t do it alone. With the cost of food skyrocketing, families have no choice but to scrape by on just one single meal, eating wild water lilies and bark. So many lives have been lost already and we need your help today to put an end to the suffering.

**With a gift of £64 you could help us get food into the hands of four families like Thulnaath’s.**

I will give:  £16  £64  My choice amount of: \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque/postal order/CAF voucher made out to Mercy Corps OR  
 Please debit my  Mastercard  Visa  CAF Card  Maestro



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**Tick the box below to make your gift go 25% further with Gift Aid** *giftaid it*

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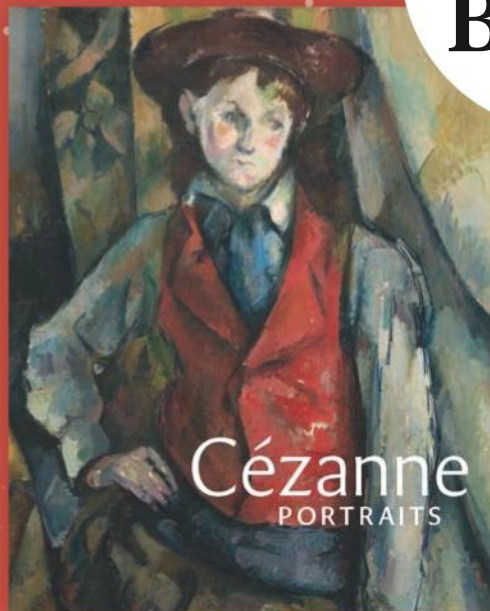
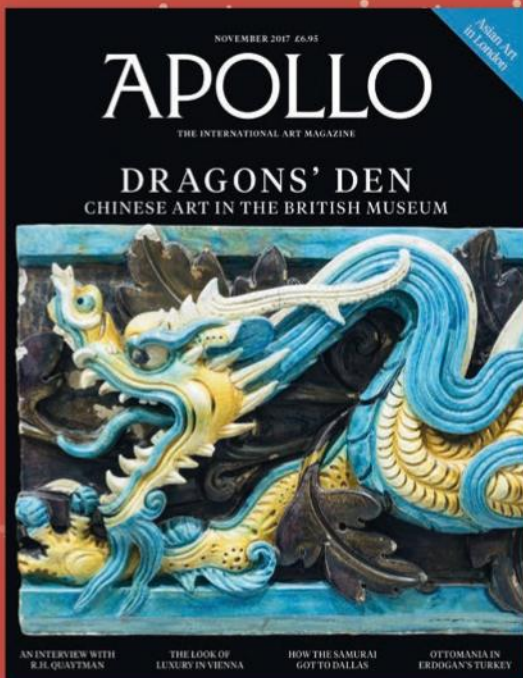
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## The turf

Robin Oakley



Spotting Mark Grant's name on an Ascot racecard, I remembered a dashing young mop-haired rider I first encountered some years back as stable jockey to the splendid Andy Turnell, with whom I once shared a syndicate horse. Since that first meeting, Mark has not become a household name. Last season he had only 82 rides and produced just four winners. Since April 2013, he has won only 13 hurdles and 14 chases from 564 rides. But here was Mark, hairline receding yet enthusiasm undimmed, riding Count Meribel for the all-conquering Nigel Twiston-Davies stable in a novice hurdle. He rode him well, too, getting the four-year-old into a nice rhythm for a convincing victory that completed a hat trick for the pair after two earlier victories at Carlisle.

With a jump jockey's riding fee of £165, less the percentage of around 14 per cent all in for an agent, insurance, the Professional Jockeys Association and the on-course physio, plus £17 for the weighing-room valet (with more for extra rides), those 564 rides in five years won't exactly have kept him in luxury. So how does a 'journeyman jockey' like him get by. 'Oh, I've got my own pre-training and breaking yard,' said the now 36-year-old rider. He has his business, but he rides on because partnering horses in races is a calling, a compulsion, a way of life that it is hard to kick when you know you'll be a long time retired.

In almost 20 years in the saddle, Mark has ridden nearly 300 winners. He began in Ireland with Enda Bolger, riding his first on Spot the Difference. Then he joined David Wachman at the wrong time. 'Before he went for the Flat, he had 40 jumpers. When it was down to two, I came over here.' Racing needs jockeys such as Mark as well as the McCoys and Johnsons. And since the Turnell days there have been rides for Lambourn trainers Charles Egerton, Charlie Mann and his neighbour Dominic Ffrench-Davis. The opportunities now with Nigel Twiston-Davies are thanks to Count Meribel's owner, Charles Walker. 'I'm lucky the owner has stayed loyal to me. I've ridden him plenty of winners over the years.' With Count Meribel and a likable bumper horse who ran that day, Bomber's Moon, owned by Mr Walker and former trainer Jim Old, himself now part of the Twiston-Davies operation, there should be further opportunities for Mark, who insists that while more rides would be welcome, 'I do my own yard

and I like what I'm doing. I'd love to be racing every day but it's just not feasible.'

*Form* (Simon & Schuster, £20), the autobiography of former champion Flat jockey Kieren Fallon, a sublime talent who has been through the mill with alcoholism, depression, drug bans and court cases, is another testament to the loyalty within racing. If Sir Michael Stoute, Luca Cumani, Michael Bell and Ed Dunlop were prepared to stand up for Kieren that is good enough for me. Kieren likes horses better than people because they have never let him down. Troubles, some self-inflicted, were shut out when he was on a horse. The horse, he says, was his army and he was confident in his weapons. 'I knew I was going to get 100 per cent from the horse and it was going to do the best for me. I knew if I got in trouble it was going to get me out of trouble. I knew that I could rely on it. I never felt like that with people.'

His story gives us a graphic picture of the downside of racing at the highest level — the pressures, the 'flipping' to keep to an unrealistic weight, the travelling grind — and sadly but inevitably much space is occupied by the various Fallon court cases. For me the best pages are those in which he describes his riding methods, how he used his legs and his body while others used the whip: 'I could work on a horse from behind the shoulders to keep them at their maximum speed for as long as possible. The whip was the last thing I used... most jockeys want a tight rein on a horse so you are travelling with them but I have a long, loopy rein because I always maintain that if you have a tight rein the horse is using more energy.' Above all, Kieren used whistling rather than a whip to get his mounts to lengthen and quicken: 'When I leaned forward and whistled in their ear, they wanted to try to get away from the whistle.' His story of Kris Kin's Derby victory is riveting.

Retired since depression took the strength from his legs and the zest from competing, Fallon now happily rides work for Saeed bin Suroor and says he will never stop riding horses. The overriding emotion I was left with after reading *Form*, though, is sadness that this flawed genius could not have been happier when riding the very best on the racecourse.



## Bridge

Janet de Botton

The year is drawing to a close and this is my last column before Christmas. May I wish you all a very merry one!

TGR's autumn Superleague finished last week and was won by my friend Jonathan Harris and his merry men. For once that evil old mantra 'When a friend succeeds a part of me dies' did not push itself unbidden into my bitter little brain. 'Is it the first time you've won this?' I asked him. 'It's the first time I have won anything — including a raffle,' he replied, quick as a bunny. Jonathan is one of those rare birds, a bridge player who loves the game no matter what the result. He never blames his partner or teammates and he never looks shattered if things go wrong. Note to self...

Today's hand is a delicious little stocking filler that I couldn't resist. You may have seen the theme before but it's worth a reminder:

**Dealer South** **N/S vulnerable**

♠ A 6 5  
♥ J 10 4 2  
♦ A 9 8  
♣ 10 9 8

♠ 8 4 3  
♥ 9 7  
♦ K Q 10 6  
♣ K J 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 2  
♥ 8 6 5 3  
♦ J 7 5 4 3  
♣ 7 5 3

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

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT	pass	3♣
pass	4♦	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
All pass			

At table one the ♦King was led, won in dummy with the Ace... and now there is no way home. Declarer played trumps hoping for a 2/2 break, but no cigar. Next he tried 3 rounds of hearts but West ruffed, exited ♦Q and sat back and waited for his club trick. One down.

At the other table South also got the ♦K lead in the same contract but he took a few minutes to work out the hand before playing — and he ducked! He won the trump continuation in hand, cashed another high spade, cashed the Ace and King of hearts, crossed to dummy with the third trump and jettisoned the ♥Q on ♦A. Finally he discarded his losing clubs on dummy's good hearts and claimed.

Happy holidays.

## Chess

### Books of the year

Raymond Keene

The English Chess Federation has awarded its Book of the Year prize to *Timman's Titans: My World Chess Champions* by Jan Timman (New in Chess). This is a good choice for a present: Timman's book is aimed at both the expert and the general chess enthusiast, and describes his interactions with many world champions.

A perennial favourite for the committed chess fan is the great series by Garry Kasparov on himself and his predecessors as world champions. This comprises a 12-volume set which analyses his clashes for the title with Anatoly Karpov, Nigel Short and Vladimir Kramnik. This contribution by Kasparov is probably the most significant account ever produced in world chess literature.

This week, Kasparov losing to Jan Timman.

**Timman-Kasparov:** Hilversum 1985; Ruy Lopez

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 O-O Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 O-O** At the time this game was played, such lines of the Ruy Lopez, where White strives for d4 in one go, were the height of fashion. Nowadays, contemporary grandmasters almost universally prefer to store up energy with an early d3. **9 h3 Bb7 10 d4 Re8 11 Ng5 Rf8 12 Nf3 Re8 13 Nbd2 Bf8 14 a3 h6 15 Bc2 Nb8** A retreating concept attributed to that innovative Hungarian master Gyula Breyer. Black loses some time but reinforces the centre and prepares to advance his c-pawn. **16 b4 Nbd7 17 Bb2 g6 18 c4** So much of White's strategy in these older lines of the Ruy Lopez consisted of finding a path for his bishops to enter the game. White's 18th move clears a route for his queen's bishop while the glorious future of the king's bishop is yet to come. **18 ... exd4 19 cxb5 axb5 20 Nxd4 c6 21 a4 bxa4 22 Bxa4 Qb6 23 Nc2 Qc7 24 Bb3** White's king's bishop now nestles on its preferred diagonal. **24 ... Ba6 25 Rc1 Bg7 26 Ne3 Bb5 27 Nd5 Nxd5** In a later game Garcia-Lukacs, Havana 1986, Black sought to improve with the dour 27 ... Qa7 28 Ra1 Qb7, holding his lines intact. **28 Bxg7** (see diagram 1) **28 ... Kxg7** No human player would think twice about this obvious recapture. However, modern computer analysis proves that the amazing 28 ... Nxb4 29 Bxh6 Nd3 30 Qg4 d5 in fact favours Black. Hence Lukacs's innovation on move 27 turns out to have

Diagram 1

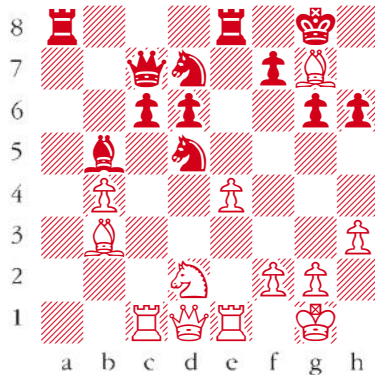
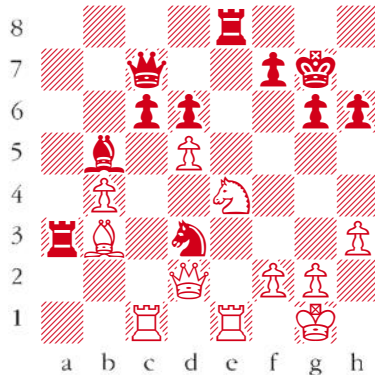


Diagram 2



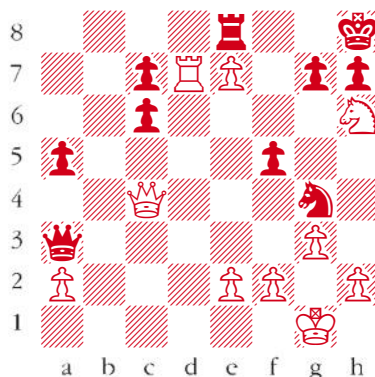
been unnecessary. **29 exd5 Ne5 30 Ne4** He should have played 30 Re3, meeting 30 ... Nd3 with 31 Rxd3 Bxd3 32 dxc6 and White is better. **30 ... Nd3 31 Qd2 Ra3** A blunder. 31 ... Qe7 leaves Black well on top (see diagram 2). **32 Nf6** Overlooking 32 Rxc6 Bxc6 33 Qxd3 with too many threats. 32 Nf6 is optically brilliant but objectively not best. **32 ... Rxe1+ 33 Rxe1 Kxf6 34 Qc3+ Ne5 35 f4 Ba4** This loses. 35 ... Kg7 36 fxe5 dxe5 37 Qb2 Qa7+ 38 Kh2 f6 and White has compensation for the pawn but nothing more. **36 fxe5+ dxe5 37 d6** This stiletto thrust resurrects White's bishop and terminates Black's resistance. **37 ... Qxd6 38 Qf3+ Ke7 39 Qxf7+ Kd8 40 Rd1 Ra1 41 Qf6+ Black resigns**

## PUZZLE

White to play. This position is from Timman-Short, Tilburg 1990. Can you spot Timman's classic finish? *We regret that this is not a prize puzzle owing to Christmas deadlines.*

**Last week's solution** 1 Nxd6

**Last week's winner** Ray Fisher, Buxton, Derbyshire



## Competition

### Shipping lines

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3027 you were invited to submit a poem inspired by the Shipping Forecast.

Life-saver, lullaby, poetic reminder of our maritime heritage, the Shipping Forecast celebrated its 150th anniversary this year. Charlotte Green has described it as the nearest she ever came to reading poetry on air; Carol Ann Duffy ended her poem 'Prayer' with the lines 'Darkness outside. Inside, the radio's prayer —/ Rockall. Malin. Dogger. Finisterre'; and Seamus Heaney wrote a beautiful sonnet 'The Shipping Forecast'.

Its incantatory magic inspired an entry that was funny, poignant and varied, in both content — cricket, adultery, the choppy waters of Brexit — and form (haiku, sonnet, villanelle...). The winners, printed below, take £30 each. D.A. Prince snaffles the extra fiver.

Valentia, my sweetest love,  
Sandtietie's playing jazz above  
while we let Ardnamurchan point  
the Scilly way to light a joint.  
We're in our Forties so we know  
how German Bight can spoil the show;  
to me your Sole Bay spirit's dearer  
than both the kingdoms of Utsire.

My love, Valentia, my dear,  
your Biscay's now becoming clear;  
the Cape Wrath of our youth is past  
and we are Fastnet bound at last.  
Let trumpets make the Malin ring  
and Rockall dance and Dogger swing.  
We'll Lundy on without a care  
until we reach our Finisterre.  
D.A. Prince

Nicely spoken palpitations  
In the early hours of night:  
Steadily, like incantations:  
*Fisher, Dogger, German Bight.*

As the sleepless settle in  
To the darkness they patrol,  
As stealthy as a bedouin:  
*Lundy, Fastnet, Shannon, Sole.*

A roll, a schoolboy brotherhood,  
Uttered to the teacher's liking —  
Hoping for the comment, 'Good':  
*Rockall, Malin, Bailey, Viking.*

Perhaps a tribute to the lost,  
Now their bitter lives are over —  
Quietly, their graves embossed:  
*Fitzroy, Biscay, Portland, Dover.*  
*Bill Greenwell*

Do not go gentle to the German Bight  
Rage, rage and rowing keep the sea at bay;  
Be like a Viking ready for a fight.

And when you leave the sanctuary of Wight,  
The waves will thunder, menacingly grey.  
Do not go gentle to the German Bight.

When Fair Isle tempts and even may excite,  
Beware the sirens singing far away;  
Be like a Viking ready for a fight.

Go forth to meet the demons of the night  
And brave gigantic storms where monsters play;  
Do not go gentle to the German Bight.

There dragons lurk; a thousand perils invite  
And mariners unwary always pay.  
Do not go gentle to the German Bight.  
Be like a Viking ready for a fight.  
*Frank McDonald*

The Skipper sank another rum and stared into  
the night.  
'Is this the Hebrides?' he asked, 'Or just the  
German Bight?'

The First Mate poured himself a tot and  
answered, 'Don't ask me,  
For all I know it's South Utsire or the Irish Sea.'

They summoned up the boatswain, who'd been  
at the bootleg gin  
And suggested 'South-East Iceland' with a  
disrespectful grin,  
Then fiddled with the radio as though it were  
a toy.  
They tipped the numbskull overboard and called  
the cabin boy.

The young lad was a simpleton. He stank of  
rotgut wine.  
No flicker of intelligence, of morals not a sign.  
He mumbled, 'Dogger Fisher — either that or  
Dover Sole'.  
He went into the briny with a kind of western roll.

The Captain and his Number One took equal  
turns to pour  
As wicked winds whipped up the waves and  
battered Britain's shore.  
Both pissed as newts, they slumbered as the ship  
went round and round.  
You don't need navigation when you don't care  
where you're bound.  
*Basil Ransome-Davies*

The ring of odd and yet familiar names  
Recited in its stately, settled round  
Beguiles us as a soothing day's-end sound  
Whose litany of states and numbers tames  
Wild elements with words, and neatly frames  
In measured lines those forces which, unbound,  
Can render vessels wrecked and sailors drowned  
As victims that the challenged ocean claims.  
For those at night who brave the open sea  
(Not those prepared for sleep in some quiet  
place)  
The forecast, as an overseeing eye,  
Keeps watch beyond their own vicinity:  
They're tuned to catch the hazards that they  
face —  
Not hear some quaint euphonious lullaby.  
*W.J. Webster*

**NO. 3030: FIRST THOUGHTS**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Carlos Williams and R.S. Thomas all wrote poems entitled 'January'. If they did it, so can you. Please email (wherever possible) entries of up to 16 lines to [lucy@spectator.co.uk](mailto:lucy@spectator.co.uk) by midday on 3 January.

**Crossword**

**2339:  
Interesting  
by Columba**

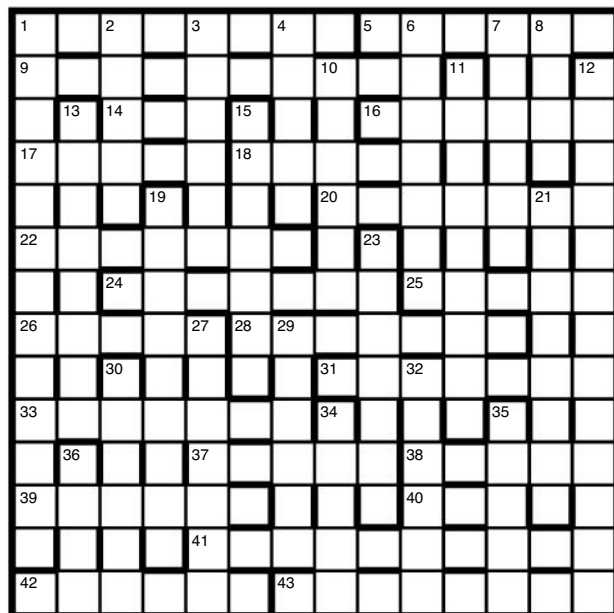
Cryptic indications in four clues are incomplete; in each case, the part not indicated is supplied by a 1D (two words). Two unclued lights and the 35 are synonyms of the first word of 1D; each of three unclued lights is defined by the second word of 1D, which is also the surname of a fictional character whose first name is the answer to a clue without a definition.

**Across**

- 9 Just disloyal, having time off (10)
- 14 Run and stop Greek character (3)
- 16 Take in troublesome situation with navy scattered (6)
- 17 Complete sphere around family (5)
- 20 Smirk depressing expert (7)
- 22 Learner in corrupt turn from direct course (7)
- 24 Silly rule hit instrument maker (7)
- 25 Tag, first off, attached to English tree (5)
- 26 Way of walking with a bagpipe (5)
- 28 Augment formerly unfinished home (7)
- 31 Being nervous near trap (7)
- 33 Hardest reforms for cardinals (7, two words)
- 37 Loud music in mass and elsewhere (5)
- 38 Unit designed with area for massage (5)
- 39 Pods, last in tub, fed to goose by baron (6, hyphenated)
- 40 Pipe cover, not cold (3)
- 42 Strain altered form of insect (6)
- 43 Unhappy about tangle with man, grumpy type (8)

**Down**

- 2 High priest seen in bazaar once (5)
- 3 Lackey on demand in extremity (6)



- 4 Unavailable story mostly concerning birth (5)
- 6 Wrong to cut rate arranged for wine (7)
- 7 Room to manoeuvre east and west in field and yard (6)
- 8 Have to support good members of university (4)
- 10 Flag put forward in stand (6)
- 11 Prince in mob deployed old charm (9, hyphenated)
- 12 Not reformed? Need true anger to change (13)
- 13 Vertebrate sea bream upset (8)
- 15 Spy worked with fashionable medium (7)
- 21 Stupid fellow ignoring Dutch saxophonist (8)
- 23 Turn left after end of track (7)
- 27 Notice article about unsatisfactory walk (7)
- 29 Convention about American name for bell (6)
- 30 Trouble with most of highest bricks (6)
- 32 Bristly plant grew upward, right away (6)
- 34 Ban also broken by sailor (5)
- 36 Messenger exercises in advance (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 8 January. 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 2339, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

.....

.....

.....

**Email** .....

.....

**SOLUTION TO 2336: IRRELEVANT**

The action that results in 6, 10, 29D and 30 is HAIR-RAISING (7, defined by 5). RAISING A HARE (39) results in 13.

**First prize** Norma Jacobs, Linton, Wetherby, W. Yorks  
**Runners-up** Mrs E. Knights, Wisbech, Cambs;  
Trevor Evans, Drulingen, France



## Status Anxiety

### The subtle art of showing off

Toby Young

This has been an interesting year for me. Back in January, I took up a full-time job as director of New Schools Network, the free schools charity, and it's the first time I've worked in an office since parting company with *Vanity Fair* 20 years ago. It has taken a bit of getting used to.

Until I took this job, I used to work out of a shed at the bottom of my garden. It is not so much a 'man cave' as a 'Toby cave'. The walls are covered with egocentric tat — framed newspaper cartoons, posters of plays I've written, pictures of me with famous people, etc. It's all pretty dog-eared and mildewed, but it serves its purpose which is to let visitors know, in a way which isn't too obviously vainglorious, what a Big Swinging Dick I am.

When I first arrived at NSN I discovered that my predecessor, Nick Timothy, had based himself at the end of a row of desks — that is, he didn't even have his own office. That wouldn't do at all. There were two self-enclosed cubicles overlooking the open-plan space, but one was occupied by the finance director and the other by a separate education charity. I say 'education charity' but, in fact, it was just a bloke called Mike with a laptop and a phone. When I discovered he wasn't paying any rent I switched places with him



*At first, I confined myself to just having a 'trophy row' on the bookshelf*

and took possession of it. It wasn't much of an improvement. This cubicle had become a dumping ground for unwanted office furniture, not to mention cardboard boxes full of things like envelopes and sticky labels. For the first three months I was too timid to ask anyone to clear it out.

Eventually, the office manager took pity on me and arranged for 'maintenance' to remove it, leaving a desk, a swivel chair, a table and a bookshelf. Oh, and a huge black cabinet full of computer equipment that makes a loud humming noise. This cubicle is also known as 'the server room', which is why no NSN employee had sought to occupy it before now.

OK, so I had managed to commandeer an office, which means I could start decorating it with some high-status indicators. But what? I consulted Caroline and she suggested I put a framed picture of my children on my desk. 'It'll make you look human,' she said.

All well and good, but not up there with the picture of Jim Carrey and me at the 1996 Vanity Fair Oscars party that has pride of place in my shed. So I also put up a photograph of the first 240 pupils admitted to the West London Free School, which seemed appropriate and not too boastful. The problem is, you need a magnifying glass to spot me beaming proudly in the front row. Did I dare put up any of my other trophies?

The stuffed deer's head probably wasn't a good idea, what with most NSN employees being female, under 30 and unlikely to be impressed by my stalking exploits. And I didn't fancy schlepping across London with my grandfather's first world war cavalry

sword from his posh regiment. I know the Met Police have been ordered by Sadiq Khan to abandon stop-and-search and concentrate on stamping out 'racist hate crimes', such as waving a Union Jack, but it's 2ft long.

At first, I confined myself to just having a 'trophy row' on the bookshelf rather than a 'trophy wall'. This contained a few copies of my books, the DVD of *How to Lose Friends & Alienate People*, the last four issues of *Spectator Life*, etc. But the drawback was that visitors to my office had to crane their necks to see it. It didn't jump out at them and say, 'This guy is a SUCCESS.' And after a few awkward attempts I realised I couldn't emerge from behind my desk, stroll casually over to the bookshelf and pull out one of my books to look something up without seeming like a total plonker. (Come to think of it, that's probably unavoidable.)

In the end, I settled on a giant movie poster of *How to Lose Friends & Alienate People*. It covers almost an entire wall, so you really can't miss it. The fact that it bears the legend 'The true story of a real idiot' is perfect because it enables me to pretend it's self-deprecating. 'Oh yes,' I chuckle, when people ask about it. 'It's the movie that got made about my failure to take Manhattan. Bit embarrassing really.' They're not fooled, obviously, and nor do I intend them to be.

But, ultimately, it's not quite enough. My ego is so gargantuan it won't be satisfied until every last scrap of self-aggrandising memorabilia has been transferred to my new office.

*Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.*

MICHAEL HEATH



## Spectator Sport

### Why Stokes should be picked for Perth

Roger Alton

And so to a cloudy, chilly Adelaide, more like London in October than Australia in the early days of high summer, for one of the most thrilling Ashes Tests of modern times. Now the key moments in the fate of these Ashes are becoming very clear. Forget Joe Root putting Australia in, or Steve Smith's unimaginative reluctance to give his bowlers more work and enforce the follow-on on the third day under the lights. Forget that rousing final session for England as the pink ball seamed and darted and hooped as if it were on crystal meth, and the Aussies were reduced to 53 for four. Forget even that extraordinary fightback led by Root that, for a tantalising few hours, allowed us to dream of a miraculous victory.

No, the fate of these Ashes was decided in the small hours of a late September night when Ben Stokes, the best all-round cricketer in the world and vice-captain of the national side, got into a spat with the locals outside a Bristol nightclub. It was the only place to get a drink



*It was not English cricket's responsibility to do the work of the police and Crown Prosecution Service*

at that time of night, so Stokes and some teammates, including Alex Hales, had clearly decided to get 'on one'. Whatever your feelings about that — I think it was irresponsible and selfish and Stokes deserved to be severely disciplined — surely the time has come for some common sense. He was punished by England with a heavy fine and banned for two one-day matches and two Tests. But it was not English cricket's responsibility to do the work of the police, and now the Crown Prosecution Service.

Why did the ECB indicate that Stokes would not be picked with legal proceedings pending? He obviously couldn't pick up his bat if he were in the dock at the Bailey, or doing time, or breaking rocks in the hot sun. But the wheels of justice grind exceedingly slow, and rather than leave him in limbo, the cricket authorities should have said that the legal process was none of their business.

That is why Ben Stokes should be picked for the Third Test next week in Perth. I fear he won't be, but it could transform a beleaguered tour. Sure, there will be a whole heap of argy-bargy from the Baggy Greens when Stokes walks to the wicket, but most of the England players are getting mouthfuls of that anyway. And Stokes has never struck me as a man unduly flustered by a bit of verbal aggro. Or indeed anything much.

England haven't won at the

WACA since Nelson came off his long run at Trafalgar, and they are unlikely to do it again this time, least of all without Stokes. What's more, the tattooed battler is just over the water in New Zealand, to 'see the family' and play a bit of cricket. So come on England: do the brave thing. The Aussies won't like it and the CPS might raise a bewigged eyebrow, but my gosh all England fans will love you for it.

Finally the BBC has got round to tweezing a cricketer into the shortlist for its Sports Personality awards. Not Root, nor Moeen Ali, nor Anderson nor even the inspirational Jonny Bairstow. It is in fact Anya Shrubsole, the talented England player who, fair enough, helped the women's team to a fine World Cup win.

Of course, women's sport is a jolly good thing, but this when England's men have been riding high for most of the year, and in Joe Root have one of the best batsmen in the world. The BBC is happy to give a nod to eventing or triathlon or darts, but its cruel neglect of our national game is shameful (of course, I don't mean you *TMS*: we all know how wonderful you are). Like many who grew to love cricket while watching flickering images of Compton, Trueman and May on tiny black and white TVs, I wonder how many youngsters who can play the game are turned away because they can only see it on pay-TV.

#### DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



**Q.** My wife and I were having lunch in our local bistro. A boy of about two was wandering around the restaurant and after a while began to scream loudly, with no remonstrations by his parents. At this point my wife asked them if they could make the child desist. This brought a diatribe of abuse from the Aussie hipster father. The mother's response (she was a Mitteleuropean) was that he was only small. Management was reluctant to intervene so what should we have done?  
— C.H.-T., by email

**A.** The same people who fly off the handle in response to someone trying to 'boss them about' will happily obey the same orders if they come in the form of a general announcement. You might have gone outside and recorded a voice memo on your mobile to the effect of 'For the enjoyment of other diners, please would parents ensure that small children are kept under control'. Had this been played, with the collusion of a waiter, over the sound system, while you and your wife chatted blandly and pretended not to notice, you would have seen a different result.

**Q.** In my dotage, I am deriving much pleasure from taking out friends one by one for lunch and conversation at good restaurants. If one of my younger companions takes out a 'smart' telephone, I make it clear that it must be

turned off and put out of sight. My impression is that this comes as a pleasant surprise to those who have not previously encountered such a rule, and my seniority ensures compliance. But when I am with a contemporary, I feel unable to act in this way. The occasion is therefore ruined by references to the beastly machine (to verify facts etc), as if a third person, unknown and uninvited, is sitting at the table. How can I stop such bad manners from those of my own age, without losing ancient pals?  
— F.B., London E3

**A.** Times are changing and even civilised members of your own age group may find themselves sucked into the 'fountain of all knowledge'. It's partly to do with mental laziness. Why not preempt the behaviour by asking

*solicitously at the outset of the lunch if your old friend feels his memory is as good as it always was or if he constantly needs to check facts on his mobile. Hint that your own brain seems to be functioning as well as ever. By introducing an element of competitiveness, your friends may rise to the challenge of enjoying an olde-worldde lunch.*

**Q.** How can I tactfully explain to my heroic son-in-law, who shops and cooks for all six of us, that eggs and tomatoes do not belong in the fridge?  
— E.R., Scotby, Carlisle

**A.** A third party, in the form of a visiting friend who heads into the kitchen to make a cup of tea, should be briefed to deliver this message so that you don't seem to be critical.

## Food

## Henrietta without a hairband

Tanya Gold



Henrietta is a restaurant in a boutique hotel on Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, around the corner from the actors' church St Paul's, which is very plain. It is as if, when actors die, their feathers are put away and they die as they really are: plain. As Uncle Monty might say: I choose the Doric. Henrietta Street is full of tall, sad houses — the kind London does so well in fiction and in life.

They are grand and desolate; you can imagine misery behind them. This one is red brick and, because it is a boutique hotel, they have tried to build a fairyland behind the façade: wealth and whimsy are unwilling collaborators but I can see the attraction, and it is all denial. London is so Edwardian in looks, but now it has the Candy Brothers to shower it in glass. It is a robot Edward VII of a town. On Henrietta's website, there is a photograph of a man in a red velvet jacket reading the *London Evening Standard*. Or possibly *Metro*. It may be Giles Coren but he only has half a face, so who

*This is a casual restaurant with formal food for people wearing hats*

knows? Where is the other half of his face? But this is the ideal guest at Henrietta. The real guests have good hair, and moustaches, and some have hats.

I cannot divine the hotel, because I am unwilling to pay £324 to stay in a small room in Covent Garden, especially if it has bobbly grey carpets. Some 'luxury' is false, and should be simply called 'a small room in Covent Garden with a bobbly grey carpet for £324'. But the ground-floor restaurant has a menu designed by Ollie Dabbous. He was the first man to sprinkle flowers on plates of food, and the only one of them you did not want to punch in the face. Who eats a meadow if they are not a goat? His Dabbous in Whitfield Street did crazy things with eggshells and hay. This restaurant, meanwhile, is 'ingredient-led', as if it could be anything else. Led by Marxists, for instance. Or pens.

It doesn't look like a Henrietta. It isn't wearing a hairband; it doesn't have Daddy issues; it isn't reading *Tatler* and believing in it. If we are

naming places after people, it looks like Mick Jagger after a bath: clean but seedy. There is a terracotta wall and an open kitchen — false equality, but the chefs look like the customers — a glittering bar, pale walls, low tables and strangely shaped velvet chairs, for we are, if you are into decorology, living through a renaissance of velvet chairs. They are taking over, spying on us, moving into positions of influence. One day, perhaps, they will control us entirely. These ones are quite small; this is not a formal restaurant. It is a casual restaurant with formal food for people wearing hats. There is a painting on the ceiling of a cat lying down. It looks flat, and undangerous, unless it fell on you.

If you can survive the ennui of a fashionable yet casual restaurant in Covent Garden ('laid-back, effortlessly cool,' said *Time Out*, like a computer program written by a mad PR flunkey out to destroy respectable criticism), the food is fine. It is not amazing, as it was at Dabbous — they guillotined an egg, as if it were an egg aristocrat, though I cannot remember if they placed the head in the hay — but this is less political. It is to please the crowds of laid-back, effortlessly cool people who do not know what they want because their identity is written by magazines and hats. There is flatbread — with aubergine, and also with lardo — a bloody sirloin which comes alone, like a dog's breakfast, a pinkish goose, and a glass of wine for £39. It's all OK, but I long for hay.



'He wants coal again.'

Henrietta, 14 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8QH, tel: 0203 794 5314.

## MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

## Tired Mountain Syndrome

'You must have Tired Old Woman Syndrome,' said my husband as I fell back into an armchair with a sigh after a morning clearing out the kitchen cabinets. It had to be done. He of course had just been sitting in the drawing-room waiting for a plausibly respectable hour to have a drink. His abuse was not utterly random, for we had been discussing Tired Mountain Syndrome. It is being blamed for small earthquakes near Mount Mantap in North Korea, where they have been testing nuclear weapons underground. The rocks become many times more permeable along lines of weakness. The name *Tired Mountain Syndrome* was



popularised by a paper in 2001 by Vitaly V. Adushkin and William Leith on Soviet underground nuclear explosions. Well, I say 'popularised', but I hadn't heard of it until last week.

Syndromes have escaped from the medical world where they have thrived since the 16th century as the name for a group of signs that are concurrent ('running together'), as the Greek origin suggests: *syn* 'together' and *drom-* 'run', as in *hippodrome* ('horse run') or *palindrome* ('a

word that runs back again'). A nice new syndrome can embed one's name in the language. The psychiatrist Nils Bejerot missed his chance when he gave the name *Stockholm syndrome* in 1973 to the emotional ties that can develop between a captive and his captors. John Langdon Down, who died in 1896, did not have his name attached to *Down's syndrome* until 1961, when the *Lancet* declared: 'Our contributors prefer *Down's syndrome* to *mongolism* because they believe that the term 'mongolism' has misleading racial connotations and is hurtful to many parents.' Dr Down had been investigating 'the possibility

of making a classification of the feeble-minded, by arranging them around various ethnic standards' and a 'large number of congenital idiots are typical Mongols'. Of course Down knew nothing of genetics; race was the best analogy he could think of.

Syndromes named after places are being mixed up with those named after people in a 21st-century movement to abolish the possessive form of eponyms, on grounds of simplification. People now say *Down syndrome* instead of *Down's syndrome*. So my own post-exertion chair-flopping behaviour may perhaps become known as *Wordsworth syndrome*. — Dot Wordsworth

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