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ABOUT
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By Ross Clark and Lionel Shriver

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Corbyn's latest triumph

For Jeremy Corbyn and his allies, there has been no far-left takeover of the Labour party or its governing National Executive Committee. It's true that, this week, Corbyn supporters came to control the majority of the NEC, completing their command of the party apparatus. But they see this as getting rid of the last of the right-wingers and enabling — for the first time — the Labour party to dedicate itself to the interests of the working class. It's not the triumph of a fringe, they say, but the expulsion of a fringe. The Corbynite agenda of government expansion, mass nationalisation of rail-ways, utilities and more, can now be pursued.

Those still laughing at all that have not been paying attention. Mr Corbyn was quite correct, in his party conference speech, to say that his proposals are mainstream. When pollsters ask, they find clear majority support for the renationalisation of water, electricity and gas. Even among Tory voters, a majority support rail nationalisation. What about the privatisation of other services? A good case against that is being made by the collapse of Carillion, which ran everything from school canteens to the security at military bases. Its insolvency will soon be used as prima facie evidence of private sector incompetence.

Sir Keith Joseph, born 100 years ago this week, famously drew a distinction between the 'centre ground' of Westminster — the consensus among MPs — and the 'middle ground' that a party ought to share with the public. His words are often quoted by Tories to remind themselves that concern about European Union membership and immigration was quite widespread even if sneered at in London. But it is Labour that has learned Joseph's lesson. Jeremy Corbyn's argument is that his ideas, dismissed as fringe in West-

minster, were not populist but popular. The last general election proved his point.

It's hard for a political party to go from obscurity to power, as the Westminster voting system tends to protect incumbents. Momentum, a group that did not exist four years ago, has instead succeeded in taking over a party: the leadership and the membership. The NEC changes mean Momentum's reverse takeover of the Labour party is now complete, and Labour MPs are now its hostages. MPs who complain about hard-left takeover will be told that this is not 'entryism' but simple democracy — which it is. Momentum found and inspired thousands to join the Labour party and call the shots. It deserves its victory.

Corbyn is entitled to remake the Labour party in his image, just as Tony Blair once did

In the general election, Corbyn increased his party's share of the vote more than any other leader of any other postwar party. He is now entitled to remake the Labour party in his image, just as Tony Blair once did. Just where this leaves Labour moderates remains to be seen. Now that the Corbynites have control of the National Executive Committee, they can force all MPs to be re-selected by their local party members — rather different members, given the Corbynite influx. Their only hope is that Corbyn keeps them on the grounds that a purge would be a distraction and that he already has the terms of their intellectual surrender.

Of course, it's not impossible that the Labour moderates will discover the backbone they've been missing since the start of all this debacle. Some might resign the whip for reasons of principle. Hugh Gaitskill once

spoke about the need to 'fight, fight and fight again' for the party that you love — but it's far from clear that anyone loved the post-Gordon Brown Labour party enough to fight for it. There has been serious talk about Labour moderates going elsewhere. Whether this evolves past talk remains to be seen.

At first, such talk delighted Conservatives. Now, it terrifies them — or ought to. For years, they have been dismissing Corbynism on the same logic as the Labour moderates: that it is the agenda of a bunch of obsessives with no national support. Blairites would argue that Britain is fundamentally a capitalist country — but this is untrue. It's neither capitalist nor socialist, but a nation with plenty of support for both. Victory tends to go to the party that makes its case best.

This is why Carillion matters to the Tories. It collapsed because several of its projects became a lot more expensive. When a government project suddenly becomes unexpectedly costly or is extremely delayed — see HS2 or the Hinkley Point C nuclear generator — the taxpayer picks up the bill automatically. In the private sector, there is (or ought to be) no bailout. Failure is not just more likely; it is also more visible.

Under Corbyn, though, it would not be private contractors going bust, it would be the state itself. The bill for his renationalisations would never be covered by revenue, as he pretends. They would be a calamity, but the Conservatives seem reluctant to make that point. First, because they thought it was obvious. Now, because they don't know how.

At first, Labour moderates saw Corbyn as a harmless crank. Now, they cannot find an answer to him. This is what happens when politicians forget how to make an argument and rally people to their cause. The Conservatives should take note.



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The next Game of Thrones? p45



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The warm feeling I get from tossing an empty bottle of sparkling water into our recycling is undermined by a voice in my head whispering that the exercise is a farce.
Lionel Shriver, p13

Carrie Gracie has resigned but still works full-time for the BBC in alternative employment, which is a bit like showing your displeasure at the food served in a restaurant by moving to a different table.
Rod Liddle, p17

To grant or withhold liberty on the basis of speculations, inevitably inaccurate, about what people might or might not do in the future is to reinstitute what amounts to a star chamber
Theodore Dalrymple, p27

CONTRIBUTORS

Colin Freeman, who writes about Christian missionaries to Africa on p16, is a journalist and the author of *Kidnapped: life as a Somali pirate hostage*.

Rose Prince, a food writer and cook, examines the lives of six women and the food they ate on p32. Her latest book is *Dinner & Party: Gatherings, Suppers, Feasts*.

Alan Judd writes about women in the Royal Navy on p38. He is a former soldier and diplomat and won the Guardian Fiction Award for his book *The Devil's Own Work*.

Norman Lebrecht, who reveals conductors' dirty secrets on p40, is a critic and the author of the Slipped Disc blog on classical music.

Ian Thomson is best known for his biography of Primo Levi. On p21, he writes about his love of all-male Turkish baths.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

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Home

Carillion, the construction and service-provider with 20,000 employees and many contracts for the public sector, went into liquidation with debts of £1.5 billion, owing 30,000 businesses £1 billion. The government said it would pay employees and small businesses working on Carillion's public contracts 'to keep vital public services running rather than to provide a bailout on the failure of a commercial company', as David Lidington, the minister for the Cabinet Office, told Parliament. Greg Clark, the Business Secretary, asked the Official Receiver to investigate the conduct of its directors; 'Any evidence of misconduct will be taken very seriously,' he said. The annual rate of inflation fell back a smidgen to 3 per cent in December, from 3.1 per cent the month before, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index; but, measured by the Retail Prices Index, it continued to rise, to 4.1 from 3.9 per cent. The Office for National Statistics prefers the CPIH (with H for housing), which fell to 2.7 from 2.8 per cent. There were outbreaks of measles in five areas.

Henry Bolton, aged 54, the leader of Ukip, dumped his 25-year-old girlfriend Jo Marney (for whom he had left his wife, who had given birth to their second child at St Pancras station in 2016), declaring: 'As of last night the romantic side of our relationship is ended.' The *Mail on Sunday* had published messages Ms Marney had sent saying Meghan Markle would 'taint' the royal family 'with her seed'. Jon Lansman, the founder of the

Momentum group, which supports Jeremy Corbyn, was voted on to the Labour Party National Executive Committee, along with two other Momentum candidates.

Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, said that the sum advertised before the EU referendum on the side of a bus was too small. It had said: 'We send the EU £350 million a week — let's fund our NHS instead,' but the amount would rise to £438 million by the end of the post-Brexit transition period, he said. The Crown Prosecution Service offered no evidence in court against Samson Makele, who had been charged in July 2017 with raping a woman after the Notting Hill Carnival in August 2016; it emerged that photographs on his phone showed the couple cuddling in bed. Ben Stokes, the England cricketer, was charged with affray; there had been a fight outside a Bristol nightclub on 25 September.

Abroad

President Donald Trump of the United States was reported by Senator Dick Durbin to have asked: 'Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?' People in Hawaii received a message on their mobile phones at 8.07 on Saturday morning saying: 'Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.' No correction was made for 38 minutes. In Turkey an aeroplane with 168 passengers left the runway at Trabzon (the ancient Trebizond) on the Black Sea and dropped down a muddy cliff, up which everyone climbed without much injury.

The EU sought to tighten conditions applying to Britain during its transitional period, up to the end of 2020, so that freedom of movement would continue, but Britain would need EU permission to continue current international trade agreements with non-EU countries. Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, said that Britain would be welcome to stay in the EU if it changed its mind about Brexit; 'Our hearts are still open for you,' he suggested. In California, police found 13 children captive in their parents' house, some chained to beds. More than 1,000 young people in Denmark were charged with using Facebook Messenger to distribute indecent video clips of two 15-year-olds having sex. In Moscow, the sun was found to have shone for only six minutes during December.

Burma agreed to accept back 1,500 Rohingya refugees each week from Bangladesh. The Nigerian army released 244 people suspected of following Boko Haram who, it said, had been rehabilitated. Turkey, Russia and Syria objected to the United States training Kurdish forces to defend the border between Syria and Turkey. Turkish forces shelled the Kurdish enclave of Afrin. Oliver Ivanovic, a Serb party leader in Kosovo, was shot dead. The floor literally fell out of the Jakarta stock market when the mezzanine floor at the Indonesia Stock Exchange, built in 1997, collapsed, injuring 70 people. President Emmanuel Macron of France came to London, offering the loan of the Bayeux Tapestry and demanding that Britain should admit more asylum seekers. CSH

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DIARY

Justin Webb

My friend John Humphrys has managed to get on to the front pages again. We first met in the 1980s when I was a very junior bod on *Today* and he had just arrived to present. He was the same then as he is now: argumentative, hostile to authority of any kind, gimlet-focused on what people said (on and off air) but quick to smile too, and quick to laugh at himself. He was also uninterested in his own seniority at a time when the BBC was still as conscious of rank as the department store bosses in *Are You Being Served?* I don't think Brian Redhead or John Timpson ever addressed a word to me but this new presenter would talk to anyone about anything. He still does: the other day, at four in the morning, he offered to show me his exercise regime. I had to hide in the loo.

John doesn't do Twitter. Which, let's face it, is wise. If it weren't for Twitter I would have written an Important Novel. Instead, I find myself constructing rapier-sharp put-downs to online attacks. Which can take hours. And I never post them anyway because: BBC and all that. Anyway, I am quite fond of several regular critics. Among the band are 'Thought for The Day' fanatics, a sociologist from a Welsh university, the boss of a literary festival who says I should be demoted to newsreader (what an exquisite and telling sense of hierarchy that is!) and, my favourite by far, the astrology columnist of *The Lady*. This is not your bog-standard green ink.

Tipsy on the CNN presenter Christiane Amanpour's champagne, I discover that the 'leaving party' she is throwing for her husband is not celebrating that kind of leaving (pew) but an ever-upwards and still conjoined success. Jamie Rubin, late of the Bill Clinton State Department, is going to lobby in Washington but still be here in London as well. Where's Concorde when you need it? Jamie still harbours, I think, a desire to be part of another Democratic administration. I am



sceptical. The next US presidential election might well be between Donald Trump and Oprah Winfrey. What's missing from this picture: political parties. Under Trump, the Republicans are tottering. Under Winfrey, the Democrats too would give up the ghost. If Jamie wants to get ahead, he should become a producer on *Oprah*, not a hack in DC.

I have admired Christiane since the day I met her. The Bosnian war was raging and a peculiar array of people — desperado battle photographers festooned with lenses, nervy spectacle-wearing types from the *Economist* or the *Telegraph*, Paddy Ashdown (I can't remember why), and Christiane with her CNN team — were trying to elbow their way on to a battered Soviet era military helicopter that was going to take us to the Bosnian Serb HQ in Pale near Sarajevo. We struggled on and hugged the interior webbing as it tried to take off. But it was too heavy. We got as far as the treetops (which feels a long way in a helicopter) but returned to earth. The Russian pilots said someone had to get off. I was about to volunteer when I heard Christiane giving the Bosnian Serbs hell: 'I am staying on this fucking chopper unless you drag me off.' And so she did. And so did I, my very limited courage fortified by hers. Now Christiane is terribly grand: when she guest-presented the *Today* programme recently, she came with a helper who carried her jacket to the studio. But she's still sharp and funny and humane and braver than me.

As is Matt Banahan, the Bath and England rugby winger who is moving his 6'8 heavily tattooed frame from Bath to Gloucester, much to the upset of all of us Bath fanatics. Matt is a lovely man — a proper sports hero — and I will miss seeing him around the city and at the ground. I don't think he's a regular *Today* listener, but after a match this month he asked if he should call me 'Your Royal Highness'. Like almost everyone in the world, he had heard that Prince Harry had guest-edited the programme. Only Jim Naughtie's mishap with Jeremy Hunt's surname has travelled further. How will our editor, Sarah Sands, top this publicity coup? Of course, one man knows already: the astrology columnist of *The Lady*. C'mon Mr Stargazey, let's be friends.

Justin Webb is a presenter on the *Today* programme.



You can't beat Corbyn with Miliband

Tuition fees have all but killed the Liberal Democrats. The breach of their manifesto pledge to abolish the charges, compounded by them voting for a fees increase, broke the party. Even the opportunities presented by Brexit have not revived them. In their defence, they can plead that tuition fees make fools of all parties. The Conservatives opposed them at first, then raised them to £9,000 a year. The Labour party introduced them, yet now campaigns to abolish them.

In 2018, we seem to be in for another bout of tuition-fees silliness. No. 10 is clear that Jo Johnson was moved from the universities brief in the reshuffle because he was obstructing a review of the current policy. Downing Street and the Department for Education have been at loggerheads over the issue since the party conference, when both Johnson and Justine Greening, who was pushed out in the shuffle, made clear that they didn't think much of either the freeze in tuition fees or the plans for a review.

The official line from No. 10 is that it is committed to a review of higher education and more details will be announced soon. The expectation is that with a new ministerial team in place Downing Street will get its review. But a lengthy examination of student finance would be a mistake in political and policy terms.

Politically, you can't get better than free. Fiddling around with the fee level or the repayment threshold isn't going to be able to compete with Jeremy Corbyn's commitment to junk fees altogether. A review would only help Labour by raising the salience of the issue. What No. 10 hasn't grasped is that you can't beat Corbyn with Miliband. Any version of the ex-Labour leader's 2015 pledge to reduce fees won't appeal to those seduced by Corbyn's pledge to scrap them.

This rule applies to more issues than just tuition fees. Corbyn wants to overturn the British economic model. The difficult thing for the Tories to accept is that public opinion is with him on several issues. But the response should not be to offer Corbyn-lite. The Tories must come up with their own distinctive approach. For instance, the best way to deal with excessive executive pay is to find a way to have the true owners of the company vote on the issue. Modern technology now makes it far easier for all those who hold shares in a company via, say, pension

funds to be balloted on how much its management is paid. Binding votes based on this franchise would, I suspect, bring pay into line with performance pretty quickly. By the same token, Carillion going into liquidation would be far less of a political issue if the Tories had broken up what amounts to an outsourcing oligopoly — a market dominated by a small number of players.

Tuition fees, in terms of policy, are the least worst option. They ensure that the people who benefit from a university degree contribute to the cost of it. The old system, where the taxpayer picked up the tab, was deeply unfair. After all, the average Oxbridge graduate will make £1.8 million over his or her working life. Those who leave schools without A-levels will earn more than

The Tories cannot compete with Labour's commitment to junk student fees altogether

a million less. It is hardly fair to expect them to pay for the high flyer's advantages.

Fees have also ensured that more money has gone to universities: resources per student per degree are up by a quarter on their 2010 levels. Because the government doesn't need to cap the number of students any more, there are now more people in university from disadvantaged backgrounds. The English system is far more progressive than Scotland's no-fees approach: 18-year olds from a deprived background in England are more than 50 per cent more likely to go to university than their Scots contemporaries.

The current system is not perfect — far from it. The 6.1 per cent interest rate being charged is far too high. And replacing maintenance grants with loans was a mistake; it

means that those from the most deprived backgrounds will leave university with more debt than everyone else, which is hardly fair.

Also, the government should introduce a mechanism to ensure that universities bear some of the costs if their alumni default on their loans. Under the current system, there is a perverse incentive to get students on £9,000-a-year courses that are cheap to teach but which might do little for the graduate's future earnings potential. If universities had to pick up some of the tab when students can't pay back their loans, they would think more carefully about which courses would be best for their long-term prospects. Equally, it would be better to have a greater diversity of provision in the higher-education sector. A three-year residential degree isn't right for everyone.

I understand that the new team at the Department for Education — the Secretary of State Damian Hinds and the Universities Minister Sam Gyimah — are both 'open minded' on fees. But they don't want to see any reduction in the amount of money going to universities. At No. 10, I am told, a range of opinions exists on the fees question, ranging from those who want a 'surgical strike' on living costs for students to those who share Theresa May's former chief of staff Nick Timothy's view — that the current system is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme.

When it comes to universities, the government should tread carefully. Britain's top-performing universities are a huge advantage to this country; according to the *Times Higher Education* the best two universities in the world are Oxford and Cambridge, with Imperial College London also in the top ten. A successful economy after Brexit will, in part, be built on having a world-class university sector. Politicians should think twice before doing anything that could undermine that.

Labour winning 40 per cent of the general election vote under Jeremy Corbyn was a profound shock to the Tory psyche. But the answer is not for the Conservatives to offer voters a watered-down version of his prospectus. Rather, they should come up with their own solutions to the issues that are so vexing voters.



'He has a 25-year plan to reform.'

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

James Forsyth and Louis Coiffait on the student fees dilemma.

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

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The BBC programme *The Coronation*, on Sunday evening, was extremely interesting, principally, of course, because of the Queen's appearance on it. But what was left out was notable. The programme gave a careful narrative, and some explanation, of the stages of the service and of the jewels and regalia (the Queen's main supporting actors in the show). It never explained or even mentioned that the ceremony in which the anointing and the putting on of the crown were framed was the communion. It told us that, in 1953, the anointing had been considered too sacred a moment for the cameras to film. It did not tell us that the same rule applied to the Queen taking communion. This omission from the documentary meant that the shape of the service could not be understood. I wonder why it was left out. Perhaps it was because the wholly Christian (and specifically Anglican) nature of the entire thing was considered a slightly tricky subject. Perhaps it was just because there were no special telegenic communion jewels to be displayed and (for reasons stated above) no archive footage. Either way, the manner in which the service managed to embody virtually the entire political and religious history of England — I mean England more than Britain — was partially lost. I feel that what we did not see in the programme gives clues to what will be quietly dropped when the coronation of our next monarch finally arrives.

I was about to go and see the film *Darkest Hour*, when somebody who had just done so told me about a key scene. On 4 June 1940, Churchill leaves Downing Street for the House of Commons to make his 'We shall fight on the beaches' speech without knowing what he will say. Powerful persons are pushing him to try to make peace with Germany. He jumps out of his official car and gets the tube from St James's Park to Westminster. On this one-stop journey, he quotes Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome' to a lovely black man, who caps the quotation. Dear, patriotic citizens weepily beg Churchill to declare that we will fight on, so he decides that is what he



will say in Parliament. Obviously, in drama, one must not succumb to 'the tyranny of fact', but if you know that Churchill did not travel by tube, that he had thoroughly decided what he would say, that he always prepared his parliamentary speeches pretty much word for word, and that only a madman would go from Downing Street via St James's Park station to get to Westminster, you cannot suspend your disbelief. If the film's suggestion that his mind was so malleable is correct, it would have gone ill with our island story if he had happened to find himself strap-hanging with a whole load of appeasers (who would not, by the way, have been difficult to find). I don't think I'll get to the cinema.

A phrase I see very often in emails is 'Last few tickets remaining'. It is a rather touching example of fake news. It almost always means that there are really quite a lot of tickets remaining.

The Fundraising Regulator was set up because some charities were using questionable methods to get money out of the public — 'chugging', for example, and aggressive letters which bully the elderly into contributing. In its zeal, however, the regulator is now writing letters to all charities demanding that they send it money to assist its service and demonstrate compliance with its diktats. Charities which do not answer the letters are named and shamed in a list published by the regulator and are therefore interrogated by the media. I am told by friends in the charity sector who have received these letters that their tone is pseudo-legal and threatening. This is oppressive. A great many small charities do not raise funds from direct mail and suchlike methods at all, so they have no need of what the regulator calls

its 'interventions' and see no reason why they should pay for its irrelevant services. Some resist; others cough up in the interests of a quiet life. This situation is piquant. The Fundraising Regulator is using the sort of strong-arm methods it was set up to stop.

I gather that one way in which the persecution of the Rohingya people was first advanced was by a decision of the Burmese government in the 1950s to insist on ethnicity being registered on official identity documents. This helped identify minorities to persecute them. Something similar happened in Rwanda in the days of Belgian colonial rule, when it was laid down that identity cards must state whether someone was a Hutu or a Tutsi. Such distinctions were, of course, part of the structure of the apartheid state in South Africa. It amazes me that we nowadays ask the ethnic question in our own census and other official records without thinking about this. Obviously our motives in collating the data are the opposite of the regimes I have mentioned, but history surely teaches that the formal, legal classification of citizens by ethnicity is a dangerous weapon for the state to possess.

A hazard of writing columns in a publication like *The Spectator* is that one's readers understand the English language better than one does oneself. Some write to point out errors, and are usually correct. The usage which currently most exercises them is when people say 'I am sat' (or 'I am stood'), where it should be 'I am seated' (or 'I am standing'). I am not personally guilty of this sin, and so have been able smugly to agree (note the unsplit infinitive) with readers who lament it, but I am beginning to doubt whether it is a sin at all. One can say, 'I sat him down and told him what I thought of him.' Why, exactly, can one not be sat (or stood) oneself? Is it just a matter of usage, or does it break a rule of grammar? Or is it rather that being sat (or stood) has a different meaning than being seated (or standing), since it implies that others did it to one?

The great plastic panic

Packaging from petrochemicals is bad but what if the alternatives are worse?

ROSS CLARK

Has an albatross ever wielded so much influence? The bewildered chick who regurgitated a plastic bag in front of Sir David Attenborough's camera crew — fed to him by his mother after she had scooped it from the sea — has caused one of those regular ructions in public opinion. The supermarket chain Iceland has announced it would phase out all plastic packaging from its own-brand foods. The compulsory 5p charge on supermarket plastic bags is to be extended to all shops in England and a 25p 'latte levy' may be put on coffee cups containing plastic. Plastic 'microbeads' have been banned from cosmetic products.

Such initiatives are largely a reflection of a sudden and violent public concern over plastic. It has become the bogeyman among concerned citizens who previously rushed out to buy water butts and composters, or who forsook Tesco for farmers' markets in order to buy locally sourced food. Just as shoppers now like to be seen going shopping with hessian bags, ministers now carry their coffee around in reusable bamboo cups. These were given them as a present, it transpires, by environment secretary Michael Gove. It will not be long before people who walk down the street clutching a plastic bag begin to attract disapproving stares. Once, government was content with encouraging recycling of plastic. Now, especially as China has banned imports of waste plastic from Britain and elsewhere, plastic must now be edited out of our lives for good. The supermarkets have eagerly joined in. Tesco has phased out single-use plastic bags from its stores altogether. Marks and Spencer have announced that they'll discontinue plastic-wrapped £2 'cauliflower steaks' after they caused an outrage on Twitter. Retailers sense the sharp turn in the public mood and are scrabbling to respond.

It's not hard to see why everyone's worried about plastic. The seas are unquestionably heavily polluted with plastic, as are some rivers and streams. Frans Timmermans, vice-president of the European Commission, this week declared war on 'single-use plastics that take five seconds to produce, are used

for five minutes, then take 500 years to break down again.' It's utterly depressing to think that plastic bags, yoghurt pots and disposable cups will be the chief archaeological relics of our age.

But when public opinion is so much in agreement on an issue, we should all be on our guard. It's exactly when everyone agrees about an issue that bad decisions are made, some with awful and far-reaching unintended consequences.

The trouble with the new plastic obsession is the same trouble we had with carbon



emissions 20 years ago. Environmental policy becomes so focused on one specific, fashionable problem that no one notices that the proposed solutions are, in other ways, making matters worse. In the case of carbon emissions, the Blair government (along with the European Commission) became so fixated in cutting the amount of CO₂ that they encouraged motorists to switch to diesel — inadvertently sanctioning an increase in deadly nitrogen oxide emissions.

This is the risk we now face with the war on plastic. If supermarkets follow through on their recent promises, it's a struggle to see how they will keep fruit and veg fresh

for long. The very people we've tried so hard to encourage to eat well will revert back to Turkey Twizzlers. It is easy now to forget what shopping was like before supermarkets transformed the British diet in the 1970s, before chiller cabinets and the revolution in food packaging. The choice in the village shop where I then lived was between shrivelled carrots and tinned peas. That the traditional seasonal shortage of fresh vegetables was eliminated owes a lot to plastic packaging. How long now before we start reading: 'Doctors warn of decreasing consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables'?

You're only really entitled to feel virtuous about eschewing plastic if you look carefully into the effect on the environment of your chosen alternative. Take Gove's coffee cup. There have already been rumblings about overharvesting of bamboo in China's Sichuan Province. There is more general concern, too, about the wide-scale use of plant-based alternatives to oil-derived plastics. It's the same as the argument about biofuels — they take over vast amounts of arable land, which might otherwise be used to grow food. As long as bioplastic (already used by some supermarkets for organic food) remains a niche product for concerned middle classes, the land issue isn't important. If bioplastics are adopted across industry, it will be a genuine cause for concern.

According to a report on the environmental impact of bioplastics published by the government in 2010, it takes 1.7 square metres of arable land to grow each kg of PLA, one of the main bioplastics, which can be used as a substitute for many types of food packaging. Europe consumes almost 60 million tonnes of plastic a year. If all this packaging were instead grown in fields, it would take up 40,000 square miles — nearly a tenth of all arable land currently under cultivation in Europe. And what about the carbon emissions from biodegradable plastics? They tend to decompose straight to methane, a greenhouse gas measured to have 20 times the potency of CO₂. If our main concern is climate change, then we're actually better off using plastic made from petrochem-

icals — either recycling or burning them once they have outlived their useful lives.

What is remarkable about the war against plastics is that hostilities were first started a decade and a half ago, but were stopped in their tracks by some powerful evidence. The plastic bag tax was first tried in Ireland in 2002, when a 15 cent charge per bag was similarly found to cut bag use by 90 per cent. If shoppers are doing what I sometimes do — going without any kind of bag and trying to balance numerous items in their hands — that can be counted as an environmental gain. But if they have switched to other types of bag then the benefits are harder to discern. When a plastic bag tax was proposed in Scotland, the devolved government launched a two-year assessment comparing the ‘life-cycle analysis’ of single-use plastic bags against paper bags. In 2005, it came to the surprising conclusion that a ‘paper bag has a more adverse impact than a plastic bag for most of the environmental issues considered’.

Six years later, Defra compared the environmental impact of plastic bags with its rivals. That study came to the remarkable conclusion that a cotton shopping bag would

If bioplastics are adopted across industry, it will be a genuine cause for concern

have to be used 173 times before it became responsible for fewer carbon emissions than a plastic bag — cotton being a very intensive crop requiring large amounts of water and fertiliser.

The study also considered the effect of bags on resource depletion, acid rain, pollution of rivers with algae, toxicity on humans, toxicity on freshwater plants and creatures, marine life, land ecology and the production of smog. Even assuming that shoppers do use their cotton bags 173 times, they still came out worse than single-use plastic bags on all but two environmental measures, including the effect on marine life. A cotton bag might not cause sea creatures the problems filmed in *Blue Planet*, but the run-off of fertilisers used in cotton production was measured to have worse effect overall.

Single-use plastic bags also performed better environmentally than paper bags and biodegradable plastic bags and plastic ‘bags for life’. And this was assuming that ‘single-use’ plastic bags are just that — when of course they are often used for other purposes, such as bin liners. When Wales introduced its own 5p plastic bag levy seven years ago, it led to a 25 per cent surge in the sales of pedal bin liners — to replace the supermarket bags that people had previously been using. Moreover, the plastic bag levy has done nothing to counter the wasteful packing being used in online sales — such as the enormous cardboard box delivered to my house last week containing two flannels.

The Award

Some of us may remember
Those Awards
Where after the taxis and the lavatories
And the ritual uniforms
After the acrobats or was it seals
Came the President of the United States of America
The one who was assassinated
By Meryl Streep
A couple of years ago.
He was speaking from behind
A bulletproof plinth saying
How honoured he was to give Tracey Pugh this award
And now the lights are all on Tracey
She comes down the aisle
Comes down the aisle
At the Awards
Towards the President of the United States of America
Tracey Pugh
‘A wonderful representation of a female thug’
One critic said of her role
In *Girl Gangs of America*.
She was unforthcoming in the corridors after
Smiling shyly at those
Who had cheered her
Which was ‘not what you would have expected
Of someone like that’,
People remarked at the time.

— T.G. Thomas

Surely, if we were going to have levies on bags, the evidence suggests that it ought to apply to all kinds of bags and all kinds of packaging. Yet the plastic bag levy went ahead anyway, as if no research had been conducted into the issue. It’s just not in the interest of government to look into the full environmental impact of a widely popular plastic tax. We consumers care but we’re busy. We just don’t really want to be told — as Lionel Shriver explains on page 13 — that our careful measures are actually counter-productive.



We must do something to stop plastic bags, bottles and beads clogging up the sea. A better idea might be a waste disposal deposit on all such goods, a surcharge which could then be returned to whoever presented it for recycling. That would give all waste a value, providing an incentive for people to collect it. Would beaches be littered with plastic bags if enterprising children were picking them up in order to claim a deposit, just as in my youth kids used to do with lemonade bottles? The government is consulting on a deposit scheme for plastic bottles. But why stop there?

Policymaking does not always follow logic. On the environment in particular it tends to dart between fashionable issues, ignoring complexities. For aesthetic reasons, it’s hard to like plastic. That gives the drive to banish it from modern life its particular momentum. But I suspect it won’t be long before we feel the need to reinvent it.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Fraser Nelson and Jonathan Bartley on the plastic challenge.



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I recycle – and lie to myself



‘I just want to say one word to you, just one word. Are you listening? Plastics.’ That iconic punch line from *The Graduate*, when a businessman gives Dustin Hoffman career advice at a cocktail party, has been circling my head ever since China announced that, as of 2018, it will no longer act as the West’s giant blue wheelie bin. Back in 1968, that businessman was righter than he could have known: ‘There’s a great future in plastics.’ We’re in that future — with dire consequences for aquatic life.

Let’s review: what is recycling for? To reduce landfill, whose toxins can leach into groundwater. To diminish litter. To create a circular manufacturing system, rather than constantly mining fresh raw materials — in order not only to prevent the exhaustion of natural resources, but to improve efficiency. Primarily, then, recycling is meant to decrease the amount of energy we expend on producing consumables. The energy saved should translate into less pollution and moderated global warming.

A successful recycling system is economically self-sustaining. Ideally, the re-use of materials is incentivised not merely by punitive laws, but by profit. Instinct dictates that it should be cheaper to repurpose glass, metals, paper, and plastic that are already glass, metals, paper, and plastic, rather than to mine more sand and ore, cut more trees, and extract more oil.

By that standard, we flunk. For I ask you: why should the UK plunge into such a crisis when suddenly unable to ship off tons of plastic waste to China, if Britain’s recycling is economically viable? (FYI, the previous schlepping of all that waste so far east would have been even more patently absurd in terms of energy efficiency, if it weren’t for the fact that ships full of imported products from China would otherwise go back practically empty — a devastating indictment of a one-way trade relationship.) If recycling adds up economically, then companies should be springing up all over the UK, eager to take advantage of a vast untapped market. And empty ships or no, it would still make more environmental sense to recycle at home.

I’ve not spent hours on the phone with specialists to investigate the economic feasibility of recycling plastic in the UK. I simply

submit that a priori, given the scale of the demand, enterprising start-ups should be springing up all over the country if it were remotely doable to make money at it.

My bet is that it isn’t doable, because energy in Britain is too expensive. And what is a driving reason energy is so expensive? Because of successive governments’ renewable, low-carbon energy policies. The irony is comical. We can’t recycle in-house because we’re too obsessed with wind farms.

Look. I like recycling. I recycle like a motherfucker. Re-using finished materials not only seems to make industrial sense, but appeals on a moral and emotional level. The practice is especially chuffed-making for people like me. I may be an atheist, but cul-

Nothing makes the middle class angrier than telling them that filling their recycling bins is a false religion

turally my very bones are Protestant. Thus I have a deep-seated distaste for waste — not for rubbish, but in the dictionary sense of ‘expending something carelessly, extravagantly, or to no purpose’. Many Brits my age were also raised with the same make-do-and-mend sensibility inherited from thrifty post-war parents.

Indeed, my own parents were early adopters, so that one of my chores in the early 1970s was to wash out containers for recycling every fortnight. A keen memory from adolescence is literally gagging over mayonnaise jars smeared with spoiled, reconstituted muck. (You’ve got to wonder why my parents couldn’t simply rinse those stupid jars when the mayo scrapings were still fresh — but my terrible tales of child abuse will wait for another column.)



‘I’ll certainly pass on your concerns about plastic packaging, Sir.’

Yet the warm and fuzzy feeling I get from tossing another empty bottle of Tesco Value sparkling water into our recycling basket in London is constantly undermined by a little voice in my head whispering that this exercise is a farce. Sure, I love imagining that I’m not really pitching all this ugly, poisonous polyethylene terephthalate into the universe, but participating in a sound, sustainable circle of virtue. But I’m lying to myself, and so are a lot of people.

Plenty of UK councils send a massive whack of their so-called recycling to landfill. Worse, from what I’ve read, whether recycling costs less or more energy than using raw materials is perched on a knife-edge. As a rule, only paper reliably requires less energy to recycle than to produce from scratch, and only paper recycling is consistently profitable — though not by much. For tin, aluminium, glass and plastic, it’s either a wash or a loss. Even rinsing containers at home, especially with hot water, will generally tip this entire self-congratulatory exercise into the worse-than-pointless. Yet nothing makes the middle class angrier than telling householders that their faithful filling of blue wheelie bins is the sacrament of a false religion.

I still fancy recycling as an idea, but in practice we need a massive rethink. I feel like an idiot tossing a wine bottle in our basket, when I know it will take ridiculous amounts of energy to melt its glass down. Why do we melt it down? Believe me, Shriver is bound to buy more wine. So why not sterilise it and fill it with more wine?

We don’t need to find another benighted country where we can mound our waste out of sight, the better to continue to kid ourselves. We don’t need a steep bottle deposit, so long as those bottles would still join a system that is economically and environmentally self-deceiving. We need to design standardised containers for our food and drink that themselves get re-used, like milk bottles of yore. Now, that was real recycling: you drank the milk, returned the container, and bought more milk in the same container.

This brand of thinking big needn’t be pie-in-the-sky. Why, even commercial pie in the sky could be baked in sturdy returnable aluminium pans, the better to bake more pie.

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A DUTY *to* DELIGHT

SINCE 1849

Red sunset, red dawn

Communism, Corbyn and the far left's generation gap

TOM BALL

Last year, more than 15,000 communists gathered in the Russian seaside town of Sochi for a week-long commemoration of the centenary of Lenin's revolution. Nearly every nation was represented. Stalls manned by party members from Zimbabwe, Greece, Cuba and India lined the narrow concourse of the event's main piazza.

Under the eye of the Russian police, celebrants staged rallies, meetings and marathon seminars. The daughter of Che Guevara was there. After giving a lecture on the legacy of her father, she received a standing ovation that lasted more than five minutes. 'It feels like 1959 again,' someone said when the cheering had finally died down.

Along with a few thousand other non-comms, I found myself at the centenary, sold to us as a 'Youth Festival' by virtue of a Kremlin scheme designed to dilute the political charge of the event. I roomed with two members of the Young Communist League — the youth wing of the Communist Party of Britain.

The festival programme was a hastily hashed-together roster of advertising ploys for Russian businesses and lectures that never seemed to happen. I spent most of my time with the YCL — a gang of six who'd come from all parts of the UK — helping them run the stall, tagging along at delegation meetings and more than once becoming an accomplice in the ongoing war of provocation against a rival British group.

In the kingdom of the post-Soviet world, Cuba is king, and at night the Cubans' accommodation block was the place to be. Two enormous flags emblazoned with the faces of Castro and Guevara were draped from the hotel windows and beneath them hundreds gathered on the beaches until the early morning. 'This is like the Marxists' version of "Football's Coming Home",' a communist from Portugal told me one night as we sipped cold lagers. 'This is true revolutionary fervour.'

I'm not much of a communist or a football fan, but even I could see what he meant. It was exciting. As I boarded my plane back home at the end of the week I had snatches of 'The Internationale' playing over in my ears and a desire to know more.

Back in London, I was invited a couple of months later to the CPB Christmas social by

my Sochi roommates. I said I thought communists didn't believe in Christmas. 'Only the hardliners,' was the response. Things kicked off with a screening of Margaret Thatcher's funeral, which then flowed into a poetry recital from a *Morning Star* regular, a few four-chord protest songs, then speeches and a raffle; the main prize was a hammer-and-sickle Christmas cake. Unlike Sochi, this get-together attracted all ages: members of both the main party and the youth wing. What was most noticeable was the age gap between the two. To be a YCL-er you have to be below 27; for the rest it seems to be an unwritten requirement to be over 55.

The Christmas social kicked off with a screening of Margaret Thatcher's funeral

Few were in between. It isn't surprising that the age graph spikes around 60 — Marxism hasn't been popular in the UK since the early 1970s, when most of the current party members would have been in their formative years; what's more surprising is the number of members in their mid-twenties.

It's particularly surprising because the circumstances which pushed their elders towards communism have long gone. In the 1960s and 1970s, Marxism had both intel-

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Bolshevik mischief

From 'The Bolshevik negotiations with Germany', 19 January 1918: We think that the fact is fairly emerging from the negotiations that the Bolsheviks are not, as some people supposed, the pliable tools or even the agents of Germany, but are idealists genuinely inspired by their mania. Of course, a great deal of harm may be done by a mania, however intellectually sincere it may be, and we can set no precise limits to the mischief that may be done by the Bolshevik leaders before they have finished. The habit of preferring the shadow to the substance, and rating the sound of words as more important than the realities implied by words, commonly ends in a terrible disillusionment.

lectual and cultural cachet; British universities were dominated by Marxist professors and communism was a byword for youthful rebellion. How differently we think of it now: at best, a quaint antique in the history of human thought; at worst, a psychotic experiment in civilisation and an ideology which sank with the Soviet Union.

What, then, is its continuing attraction for young people? 'People don't realise how wrong things have gone,' one member told me. 'We've exhausted all the options within the democratic system. What we need is serious change. The current mainstream left cannot achieve that, because it is preoccupied with the politics of identity and culture. Communists are the only ones really committed to the true leftist cause — the rights of the workers.'

The rise of traditional leftists Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders has brought about a sea change. At last year's general election the CPB announced that for the first time since its formation in 1920 it would not field any candidates in order to give Labour the best possible shot at government. 'If Corbyn is elected, things will be moving in the right direction,' said one older member, who has been in the party since the late 1970s. 'It's a matter of priming the ground.'

Primed ground or not, the aim of a communist party operating within a social democracy is revolution. But as I sat passing round slices of sickle thick with marzipan, I couldn't help thinking that among the older types the revolutionary lustre I'd seen in Sochi two months earlier had been dulled by time. Down from 60,000 in the 1950s, the membership of the CPB is now less than a thousand, and dwindling. It seemed to me that for the older generation the party is a kind of club, a cherished link to a fond past. For the younger delegates, however, there is a sense of both renewal and community. The numbers may not be huge, but the YCL claims around an 80 per cent activity rate among members. If true, this is far higher than for any other political organisation.

Political momentum has shifted in their favour. A resurgent Labour party has as its shadow chancellor a man who described Marx, Engels and Lenin as his 'most significant' intellectual inspirations. And leftist politics is beginning to recoup the cultural cachet among the under-thirties that it lost in the intervening decades. They are increasingly social media savvy, too. In the same way that Momentum in Britain and the alt-right in the US use memes and social video to promote their cause, so does YCL. The technology has helped them to organise and make the most of their small membership base.

This isn't likely to translate into a revolution any time soon, but young communists are in it for the long haul. 'I'm not kidding myself,' said one. 'I don't expect things to change overnight. It's not easy, but they don't call it "class struggle" for nothing.'

Amazing grace

In the darkest corners of the world, Christian missionaries are still saving lives

COLIN FREEMAN

Last week, Peregbakumo Oyawerikumo, aka ‘The Master’, was finally caught and shot by the Nigerian army. Oyawerikumo and his Egbesu Boys had styled themselves as local Robin Hoods, taking riches from oil companies in the Niger Delta, but they won’t be much missed. In the remote swamp town of Enekorogha, their demise will be celebrated, because this was the scene of their most notorious crime.

It was here, last October, that the Egbesu Boys kidnapped Ian Squire, an optician from Surrey who was working at a clinic, and three fellow Britons: Cambridgeshire GP David Donovan and his wife Shirley, and optometrist Alanna Carson, from Northern Ireland.

On their first day in captivity, the Master’s men unexpectedly handed Mr Squire the acoustic guitar they had taken from his lodgings. Squire played ‘Amazing Grace’, which cheered his co-hostages, but apparently rattled one of the more trigger-happy gunmen, who fired in the group’s direction as a warning to quieten down. Mr Squire, 57, was hit and killed.

So ended the life of a man who had brought both courage and innovation to his charity work. Mr Squire had invented a solar-powered lens-grinding machine so that his eye clinic could make spectacles on the spot — a Vision Express for the developing world. It used glasses donated from lost property at Heathrow airport, not far from his high-street practice in the commuter town of Shepperton.

Squire and co. however, had not come to the lawless Delta region on behalf of some frontline aid agency such as Médecins Sans Frontières. Instead, they were foot soldiers of a less fashionable and largely forgotten wing of aid work — Christian missionaries.

I met the Donovans at their Cambridgeshire home late last year, not long after their release from their 22-day ordeal. They were keen to pay tribute to their fallen colleague, whose charity, Mission for Vision, had joined forces with the Donovans’ clinical charity, New Foundations. As the couple served up soup over their kitchen table, it struck me that these were people of a sort I’d never encountered in two decades report-

ing on Africa and the Middle East. Here were white Christian missionaries, talking unapologetically about God.

I’d assumed such a species was long extinct, deprived of habitat by a professional aid sector that is uncomfortable with anything so easily associated with Britain’s colonial past. I was wrong. According to Ray Porter, chairman of Global Connections, an association of evangelical mission agencies, there are ‘several thousand’ British missionaries working through various church organisations worldwide today.

True, Christian Aid, one of Britain’s biggest aid organisations, still counts itself as a faith-based outfit. The difference, though, is that Christian Aid wears its religious col-

Witch doctors, at first hostile to the missionaries’ clinic, ended up seeking treatment there themselves

ours very lightly. When its press officers do ‘advocacy’ these days, it is more likely to be on climate change or ‘tax justice’. Evangelising, in other words, is fine — as long as it’s not about God. As David Donovan points out, in the increasingly liberal theology of the West, ‘the Gospel, ironically, is often the first casualty in Mission’.

‘Missionaries do suffer from a certain post-colonial legacy that says everything in Empire was bad,’ says Paul Thaxton, of the Church Mission Society, whose past missionary work includes drug rehab work in Pakistan and working with south London gangs.



‘But these days, we’re not there to “sort people out”, we’re there to work with them.’

Most of the unease about faith and aid work going hand-in-hand is a ‘particular expression of western secularism,’ adds Mr Thaxton’s colleague Colin Smith, the society’s Dean of Mission. ‘That unease is seldom shared by the communities where missionaries are working.’ Certainly, for the Donovans, an unshakeable faith was all but essential in Enekorogha, whose name translates roughly as ‘The Place You Cannot Stay’.

David suffered a previous kidnapping attempt in Enekorogha in 2009. Shirley once caught a potentially deadly form of malaria. They were robbed of their boats twice. Humidity destroyed most electrical equipment, and rats ate their walkie-talkies. Even the grizzled Scottish oil workers down the road in Port Harcourt thought they were mad. Had they been any regular NGO, their ‘risk assessment’ officer would probably have shut them down.

Dangerous as it was, though, the work that the Donovans and their companions did in Enekorogha made a difference. Prior to their arrival, the village had a child mortality rate of around 45 per cent. When measles and cholera cases spiked, as they did at certain times of year, the resultant infant death toll was known locally as ‘the harvest’.

The missionaries helped reduce mortality to around 2 per cent — a fact not lost on the local witch doctors, who had been hostile to the clinic when it first opened, but who ended up seeking treatment there themselves. The village idol keeper, a burly figure from whom local militants would ask for blessings, told the Donovans ‘the god you serve is greater than the god I serve’, and asked them round to read the Bible.

You might think ‘So what?’ But as Shirley points out, these days, fighting witchcraft isn’t such an obsolete cause. As Britain’s Anti-Slavery Commissioner has highlighted, witch doctors are sought out by Nigerian sex-trafficking gangs, who use the fear they inspire to terrify women into working as obedient sex slaves in British brothels. As a method of intimidation, it can be just as effective as deploying a violent pimp.

Indeed, the barbarities inflicted by superstition were something Shirley’s celebrated predecessor Mary Slessor had no truck with either. One practice she stamped out in Calabar was a tradition of killing newborn twins, on the basis that one or other sibling was always born evil. Such work was why, more than 80 years after her death from malarial fever, she became the first woman ever to appear on a Scottish banknote.

Whether her modern-day missionary successors will ever be similarly honoured remains to be seen. But in Enekorogha, where the Donovans’ clinic finally reopened again last week, locals have already named several newborn babies ‘Ian’ in memory of the late Mr Squire.

Women's pay could bankrupt the BBC



I hope you are enjoying the BBC drama series *Hard Sun*. It is described as pre-apocalyptic science fiction, set in the present day UK. The head of MI5 is a Nigerian woman and everybody else in it lives in a mixed-race family — so, if you are a racist, you might well query that aforementioned description pre-apocalyptic: it's upon us! The rest of us will simply think it's ludicrous and bears no relation to the country in which we live, and might become irritated by the BBC forcing this PC social engineering down our throats at every possible opportunity. Although we may already have filled up our beakers of irritation on the leaden, portentous dialogue, the sadistic revelling in violence, the grim and annoying characters and the imbecilic plot.

Hard Sun presages an earth which will be destroyed by a solar cataclysm five years from now. I suspect there is an element of schadenfreude on the BBC's part here: it will surely have lost its licence by then. These are hard times for Auntie: it staggers like a dog with a broken back from one self-imposed catastrophe to the next, urged on its fervent quest for extinction by those who are its enemies for either commercial or ideological reasons. The latest crisis is women's pay, where it has dug itself a very deep hole and is currently calling for more shovels to continue the job.

This spat was launched by the BBC's China editor, Carrie Gracie — an excellent journalist who has, of late, been borne away into the ether on the furiously flapping wings of her own self-importance. In a very principled manner she has resigned from her post but is continuing to work full-time for the BBC in alternative employment, which is a bit like showing your displeasure at the food served in a restaurant by moving to a different table. Carrie was angry that she wasn't paid as much as the other BBC foreign editors, such as Jon Sopel, who runs the US bureau. But since when were editors paid the same salary? Does the editor of the *Times* get the same as the editor of the *Hartlepool Mail*? Or the editor of the *Today* programme receive the same as the editor of *Newsbeat*? Of course not. The USA team is on the major news programmes every day,

without fail. The China editor, what ... once a week? But not only that. If you were to write a job description for the post of BBC China editor, what would be one of the first things you'd jot down? I think 'Must live in China' would be near the top. Jon Sopel lives in Washington, and not the one near Sunderland. Carrie Gracie lives in London. It may well be that she orders the occasional takeaway from Wong Kei, but it's not, in my opinion, quite the same thing.

But Carrie's plaintive squeals and denunciation of her bosses as liars and criminals has been taken up by 'BBC Women', a loose alliance of female journos and superannuated gobs on sticks who think they are being

Carrie Gracie has been borne away on the furiously flapping wings of her own self-importance

mistreated by Da Man. Most recently they were discomfited to hear the *Today* presenter John Humphrys joking rather acidly about Carrie Gracie's campaign in a private conversation with his friend Jon Sopel. All Humphrys did was express a degree of astonishment that Gracie was trying to have the salaries of male journalists reduced. But BBC Women demanded that he be sacked and were 'appalled' that he could have held those views.

Listen, very stupid BBC Women: simply because you believe something, it doesn't make it the truth. Other people are still allowed opinions, even if they dare to counter your own. My view about people who work for a news organisation yet have a totalitari-

an approach to diverse opinions is that they should be sacked immediately. That probably includes one of the leading lights of BBC Women, Jane Garvey. It is fine for Ms Gravy to subject the nation to the outdated, boring, misandrist, middle-class moanfest of *Woman's Hour* (which she does on those days when her domestic schedule allows), but heaven forefend if someone challenges the tendentious victimhood rot her show puts out every day. Sack him!

The BBC, to its credit, has refused to sanction Humphrys, although one apparatchik said his views were 'ill-advised'. My own view is that they were 'well-advised' and that in any case they were private. How about you sack the malicious little toad who leaked them?

But the BBC wimmin problem goes deeper and may end up bankrupting the corporation, for two reasons. First, in an attempt to ensure gender equality throughout the BBC, they have promoted an awful lot of women into senior positions recently. But as they are finding, this is not enough. Now those women want the same money the men are getting, even if they have been doing their jobs for far less time and thus have less seniority. And second — and this applies only to television — there are literally hundreds of women who were appointed to presenting jobs for purely sexist reasons, i.e. they were considered as fit as a butcher's dog, but who are also utter dimbos. The years pass, and the women are now, frankly, minging and they have not noticeably sharpened their IQs. But they cannot be discarded for reasons of ageism and sexism and must be kept on in the same roles, with increased salaries, probably for ever, wittering witlessly at the camera in some horrible parody of their former selves.

All this, then, without getting into the subject of the gender pay gap and whether or not it is a myth. I think we shall have to get into that ticklish subject very soon, preferably before some awful solar event suddenly extinguishes all human life, quite regardless of what chromosomes they possess.



'I'm afraid we missed our target to see you within four hours.'

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



So much to do, so much time.



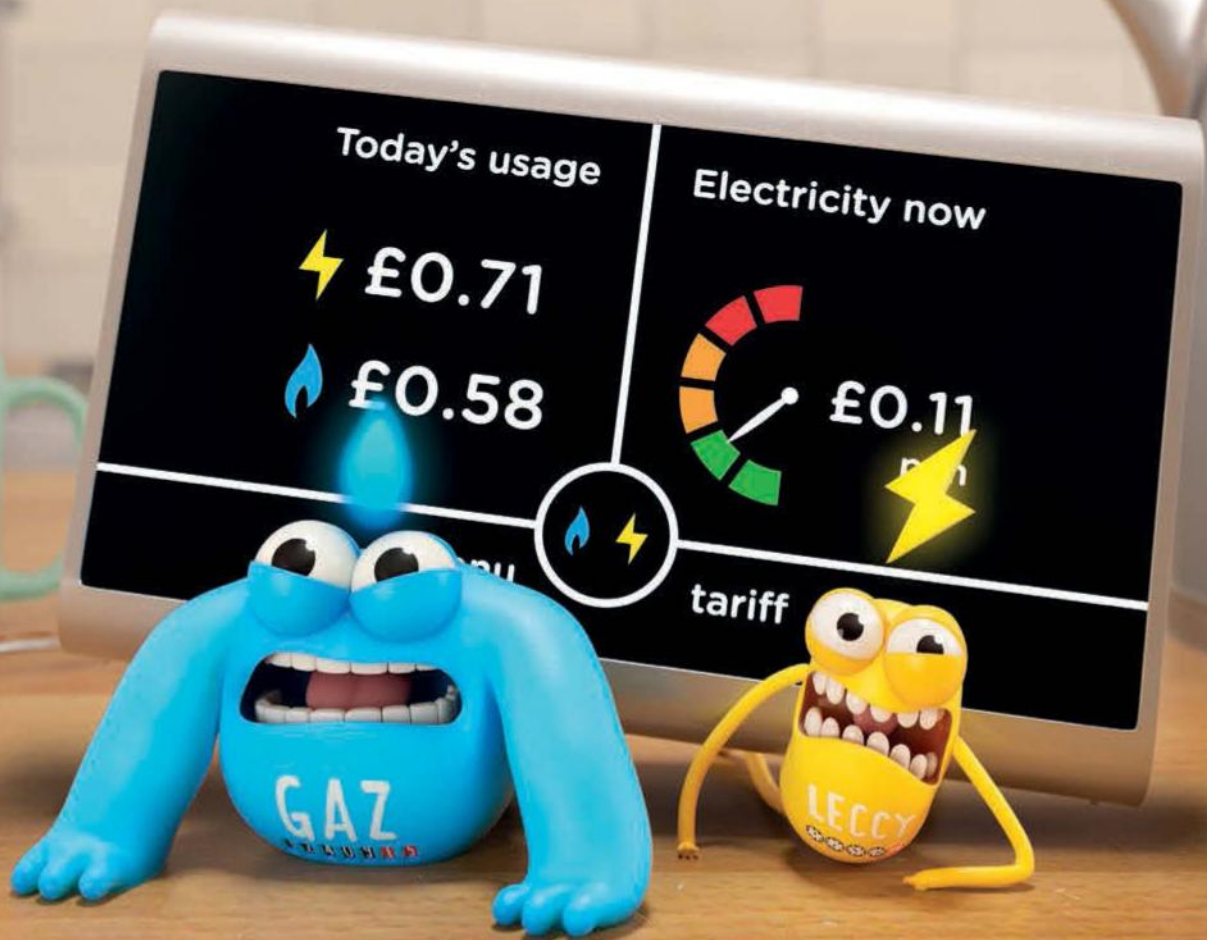
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BAROMETER

Big losers

Construction company Carillion collapsed with debts of £1.5 billion. How does that compare with other UK corporate failures?

Overend Gurney & Co, a bank, collapsed in 1866 with £4 million in liabilities (£400 million at today's prices).

Polly Peck failed after a fraud probe with £100 million in debts (£217 million).

Barings Bank failed in 1995 after rogue trader Nick Leeson ran up £827 million of losses (£1.55 billion).

MG Rover failed in 2005, leaving behind £1.4 billion of debt (£2 billion).

Northern Rock was saved in 2007 after the government provided emergency loans to the tune of £27 billion (£35.7 billion).

Rough areas

A petition called for homeless people not to be removed from the streets of Windsor for the royal wedding in May. Which areas have the most recorded rough sleepers?

LOCAL AUTHORITY	NUMBER
Westminster.....	260
Brighton and Hove.....	144
Cornwall.....	99
Manchester.....	78
Luton.....	76
Bristol.....	74

Forest of statistics

Plans to plant a 62,000-hectare forest across the north of England were announced.

How do we compare with Europe for trees?

UK FOREST COVER	
Overall.....	13%
England.....	10%
Scotland.....	18%
Wales.....	15%
Northern Ireland.....	8%

EUROPE'S MOST DENSELY FORESTED

Finland.....	73%
Sweden.....	68%
Spain.....	37%
Germany.....	33%
Italy.....	32%
France.....	31%

Women on top

Which organisations have a 'reverse' pay gap — they pay men less than women?

EMPLOYER	MALE/FEMALE DIFFERENTIAL
Yellow Dot Ltd.....	-80.6%
Arnold Clark Finance.....	-15%
Campbells Prime Meat Ltd.....	-13.1%
Hambleton District Council.....	-12.1%
Diageo GB Ltd.....	-9.8%
Commission for Equality and Human Rights.....	-8.2%
Biffa Environmental Municipal Services.....	-5.7%
SSE Energy Supply Ltd.....	-3.8%

Steamy encounters

There's nothing to beat a session at an all-male Turkish bath

IAN THOMSON

With my friend Maurice, I have long frequented the Ironmonger Row baths behind Moorfields Eye Hospital. As married men, we appreciated the circumspect and respectful behaviour; for a few quid one felt properly laved and rejuvenated. Nakedness is a great leveller. City traders mingled with taxi drivers; a High Court judge might 'testiculate' (talk bollocks) with Maurice, a Labour peer. Afterwards in our robes we relaxed in the cooling-room over cups of tea; the steam induced a state of blissful lassitude.

In 2012, after an ill-spent £16 million refurbishment, the baths were reopened as the Old Street Spa Experience. At a stroke, the local community was priced out: only transient businessmen and affluent Islingtonians can afford the exorbitant entry fee. The art-deco baths, once so atmospheric, have lost their character. Islington council recommends that customers now wear swimwear, which is not only prissy, but unhygienic. The whole point of the Turkish bath — in Yiddish, *shvitz* — is to enable the body to perspire profusely. Anthony Trollope, in his short story 'The Turkish Bath', commended the clothes-free 'sudation' as a thing of beauty. He was writing in the aftermath of the Public Baths and Wash-Houses Acts of 1846 and 1847, which enabled local authorities to build sanitary facilities where the poor could wash both their laundry and themselves. Brick Lane, east London's most mythologised street, was dense with Turkish and Russian vapour baths. Orthodox Hasidim had settled in the area in the 1880s following the pogroms in Russia; *shvitz* signs were in both Yiddish and English.

By the mid-1970s, most commercial baths in Britain had closed. As more homes came equipped with running water, the need for public washing diminished. Painkillers served to alleviate the rheumatoid tensions and distempers previously put right by a hammam. Today hardly any public baths survive. The Porchester baths, a Grade II-listed building with Islamic arches and star-pierced domes, will close this April for a £750,000 Westminster council facelift. Once re-opened, the emphasis apparently will be on 'mixed gender' sessions. Very inclusive, but mixed sessions discriminate against Muslim women,

Orthodox Jewish women and Orthodox Jewish men, who are not allowed to mingle naked. Sexual separatism is essential in the bathhouse, where men are unable to relax unselfconsciously in the presence of women.

I had almost given up hope when I discovered the New Docklands Steam Baths. Situated in a Canning Town industrial estate, the baths are of no architectural account; wonderfully, there is no piped birdsong or treatment room. This is the real thing. All around are car-crushers' yards, vehicle hire outlets ('The Mutt's Nuts') and the Durham Arms, once a notorious villains' pub.

In this overlooked part of England, the Canning Town *shvitz* stands triumphantly above our emptier, more money-conscious times. It is east London's last authentic bath house. The Jewish purification ritual known as *schmeissing*, where men take turns to slap each other with well-soaped besoms made of sea grass, is still practised. East Europeans, Russians, old-time Yiddish cockneys, retired boxers and cabbies sit on marble benches downstairs amid a picnic of watermelons, black bread and lemon tea. (You can take your own food.) Talk is loud, swears and aggressively homosocial. In the Russian baths, the men wear pointed felt pixie hats, and pummel each other with fistfuls of oak leaves.

There is a weekly Jewish night for frummers or Hasidim, as well as a monthly Muslim night. The Jewish night begins at 10.30 p.m. on a Thursday and ends at 3 a.m. the next day. The Stamford Hill rabbi comes in advance to purge the premises of mobile phones, credit cards, newspapers and other trappings of 'Babylon'. After repeated submersions in the plunge pool, the Hasidim sleep until the dawn light of pre-Sabbath Friday.

Most days, rubdowns are administered by an official masseur, but regulars sometimes offer a free kneading in return for a meal in the café upstairs. 'The massages are safe and enjoyable,' says Wayne Gruba, a trustee and founder member. 'Any suspect predator is sent off site immediately.' Maurice and I took turns to be *schmeissed* by Wayne, who flailed us expertly. In today's mass uni-culture dominated by unisex lavatories, internet porn and Facebook, the New Docklands Steam Baths offer a rare steam spirit.

A star is born

Young Brits are flocking to hear a Canadian psychology professor speak about morality. Why?

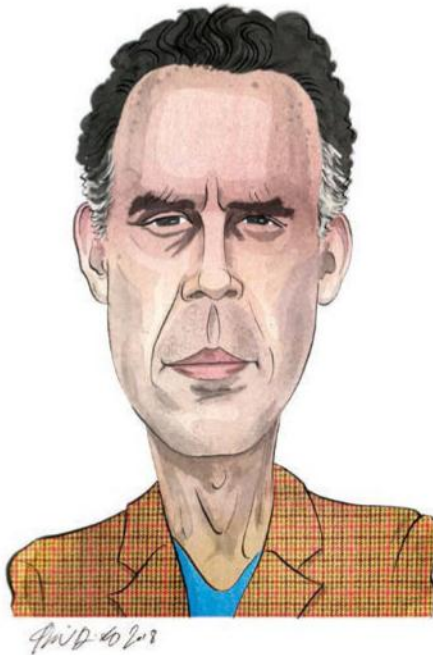
DOUGLAS MURRAY

Last Sunday night a capacity crowd of mainly young people packed into the Emmanuel Centre in London. Those who couldn't find a seat stood at the back of the hall. When the speaker entered, the entire hall rose to its feet. It was his second lecture that day, the fourth across three days of sold-out London events. For an hour and a half the audience listened to a rambling, quirky, but fascinating tour of evolutionary biology, myth, religion, psychology, dictators and Dostoyevsky. Occasionally a line would get its own burst of applause. One of the loudest came after the speaker's appeal for the sanctity of marriage and child-rearing.

Yet this was not a Christian revivalist meeting. At least not explicitly or intended so. It was a lecture by a 55-year-old, grey-haired, dark-browed Canadian academic who until 18 months ago was little known outside his professional field of psychology. Today, for at least one generation, Professor Jordan Peterson of the University of Toronto has become a mixture of philosopher, life-coach, educator and guru. He has the kind of passionate, youthful, pedagogical draw that the organised churches can only dream of. Anybody interested in our current culture wars, not to mention the ongoing place of religion, should head to YouTube, where his classes have been viewed by millions.

YouTube arguably made Peterson. That and an uncommon reluctance to genuflect before the hastily assembled dogmas of our time. In 2016 he made a stand against the Canadian government's introduction of a law that aimed to make it a crime not to address people by their preferred gender pronouns (regardless of chromosomes). The issue of 'gender pronouns' may sound a strange springboard to international attention. But Peterson did something a decreasing number of people in our societies are willing to do: he stuck his head above the parapet. He politely but firmly objected to officials telling him or anyone else what words to use or to define for him what the meanings of words should be. There was an outcry. His classes were

disrupted by often riotous protests. There were serious efforts to force him out of his university position. For a moment, it looked as though the social justice mounties might get their man. But for once it didn't work. In fact it badly backfired. Not only did a lot more people discover a counter-cultural (or counter-counter-cultural) hero who was willing to say what almost everybody else thought. They also discovered someone with not only humanity and humour, but serious depth and substance.



Peterson was in London to promote his new book (his second) *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. This does what it says and then some, providing a practical life lesson in every chapter, each one explored through Peterson's deep learning and insight. Chapters circle around rules such as 'Stand up straight with your shoulders back', 'Make friends with people who want the best for you' and 'Be precise in your speech'.

Others are slightly more leftfield ('Do not bother children when they are skateboarding'). But all get to truths which

anyone with an eye to tradition will recognise: 'Tell the truth — or, at least, don't lie'; 'Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)'. Although he roams across traditions and cultures, on subjects like this last one the foundations are clear.

And Peterson does not shy away from making them so. He sees the vacuum left not just by the withdrawal of the Christian tradition, but by the moral relativism and self-abnegation that have flooded across the West in its wake. Furthermore he recognises — from his experience as a practising psychologist and as a teacher — that people crave principles and certainties. He sees a generation being urged to waste their lives waving placards about imaginary problem, or problems far beyond their (or anyone's control) and urges them instead to cut through the lies, recognise the tragic and uncomfortable position we are in as humans and consider afresh what we might actually achieve with our lives.

On Sunday he repeatedly referred back to biblical sources. Apologising that he had already given one structured talk that morning, he announced that he wanted to be more freewheeling. Crisscrossing the stage, holding his brow and engaging the audience like his own students, he asked why dragons appear as mythological beings in cultures across the planet and what the evolutionary reasons for that might be.

Going back to the time when we lived in trees and feared fire and snakes, he explored the psychological and mythical reasons why the snakiest of all snakes might have lodged itself in each culture as the representation of evil. And from there we went to Eden and the Gulag via the Judeo-Christian tradition's discovery that even if we chase down every snake in the land we cannot fully destroy the one inside ourselves. Motes, beams and eyes were discussed in relation to his advice to a generation hooked on public displays of morality: 'Set your house in perfect order before you criticise the world.'

The following night, in a talk that was live-streamed, he went back to a more struc-

tured — but still freewheeling — talk with frequent dashes of humour. He answered a young woman who complained that her friends didn't listen when she spoke. He referred to the wisdom of the verse about 'pearls before swine'. This was not in jest. It was a sincere recommendation that she should find friends who would value both her and her thoughts. Towards the end, this self-declared but far from didactic Christian mentioned in passing that 'the central figure of western culture is Christ'. And in closing (after being asked which of his own rules he falls short of observing), he described how 'until the entire world is redeemed, we all fall short'. Certainly, Peterson has found a huge audience by telling uncomfortable truths. But he also tells them what should be comfortable truths too.

Of course, on their own, such statements might be a turn-off to young people. But Peterson's other qualities prevent that happening. The first is he is unafraid to investigate the highest realms of learning (including the latest discoveries in science and psychology) and to turn them to practical use. In doing so he recognises that people — particularly young people, and young men most of all — are badly in need of help.

From his teaching, speeches, writing and interviews, it is clear that Peterson has made one of the most unpopular but vital reali-

sations of our time: that we are creating a generation of men who (especially if they don't belong to any 'minority' group) are without hope, foundation or purpose. Everything in the culture insists that they are terrible: proto-rapists when they are not rapists; proto-racists when they are not racists; condemned for their 'privilege' even when they are failures and their every success dismissed as undeserved.

This is destined to produce societal resentment and disengagement on a gen-

There is a burning sincerity to the man which only the most withered cynic could suspect

erational scale. Female politicians, among others, scoff, and most men run scared or duck. Peterson is one of the very few to take this problem seriously and to help young people to navigate towards lives of meaning and purpose. On Sunday night, one young woman asked what advice Peterson would give to a student like her. He told her to ignore those professors who aimed to wither the souls of their students. Instead he urged her to use her student years to cultivate the greatest possible friendships. Many of these friendships would be with people who — as Peterson put it — were dead; people whose

feet the deconstructionists and resentment-cultivators of modern academia were not worthy of touching.

This is another part of Peterson's appeal. While he grounds his deep learning unabashedly within the western tradition, he also shows vast respect towards (and frequently cites ideas from) innumerable other traditions. He has a truly cosmopolitan and omnivorous intellect, but one that recognises that things need grounding in a home if they are ever going to be meaningfully grasped.

Finally, as well as being funny, there is a burning sincerity to the man which only the most withered cynic could suspect. At several points on Sunday evening his voice wavered. At one point, overwhelmed by the response of the audience and its ecstatic reaction to him and his wife (who was in the audience) he broke into tears. It is an education in itself to see a grown man show such unaffected emotion in public. Certainly, he demonstrated to a young audience trying to order their own lives that an emotional person need not be a wreck and that a man with a heart can also have a spine.

'What was that?' asked an old friend I bumped into on the way out. Hundreds of young people were still queueing to get books signed. Others stood around buzzing with the thrill of what we had heard. I still don't have an answer. But it was wonderful.

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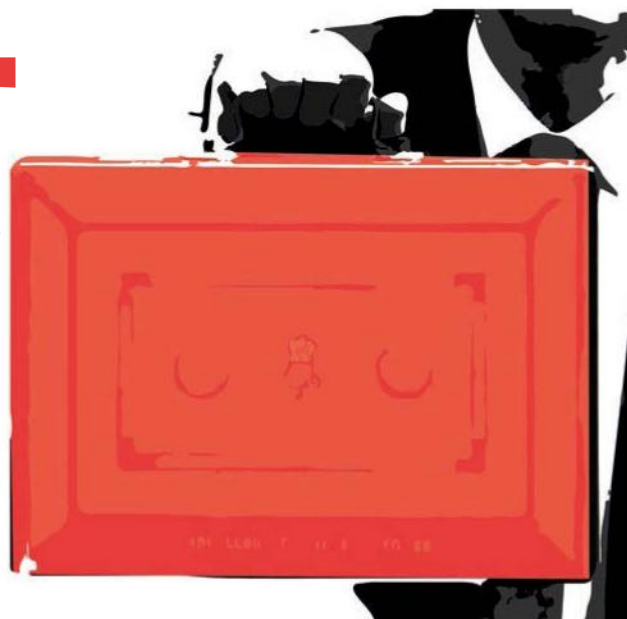
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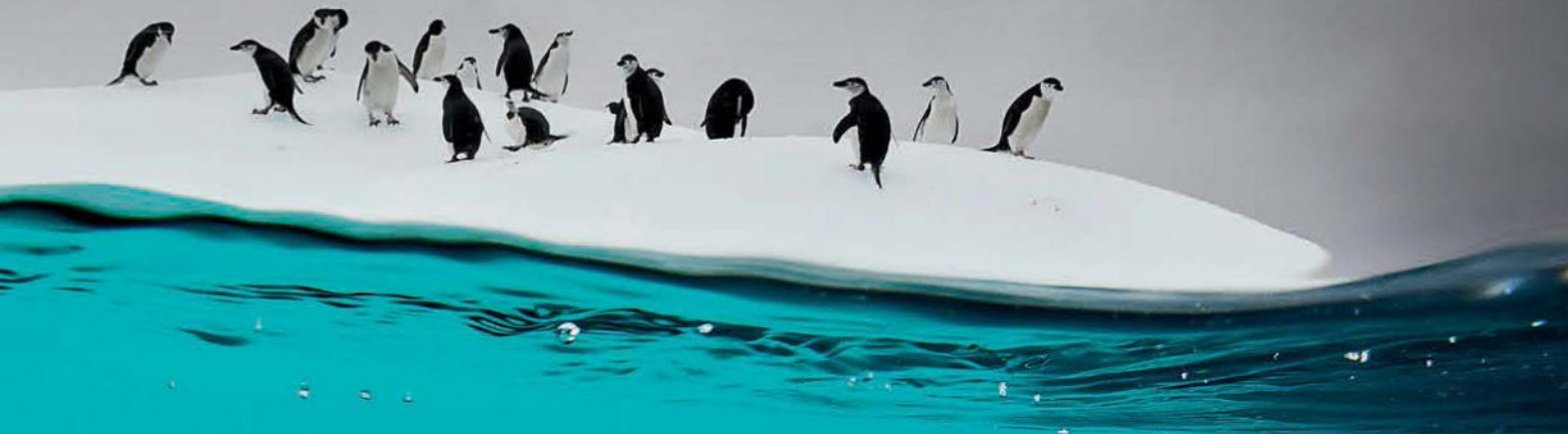
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Holy lands

The Church of England has always been hard-nosed about property

HARRY MOUNT

Holy smoke! The sleepy old Church of England is a greedy, money-grubbing property tycoon. This month, it emerged that since 2010 the church has laid claim to minerals under 585,000 acres of land, including territory it doesn't actually own. Its current holdings amount to only 105,000 acres, but it retains the underground mineral rights to vast areas that used to belong to the church.

And it's making damn sure it retains those rights. The church has sent letters to thousands of people, telling them they don't own the gilt-edged minerals below its land. In its defence, the church says it's just doing its statutory duty in registering the rights. But all the same, it's the latest in 1,400 years of buccaneering property ventures for the English church, going back to 597 AD, when St Augustine built Canterbury Cathedral on a prime piece of Kent real estate. St Paul's Cathedral, founded in 604 AD, followed soon afterwards. Over the next 900 years, the church built almshouses, nunneries, monasteries, abbeys, bishops' palaces, schools, hospitals, and thousands of churches and cathedrals, scooping up millions of acres. Just before the Reformation, the church owned a third of the land in England.

You can still see the ghost of the great Catholic pre-Reformation landholdings across the country today: 99 per cent of surviving pre-Reformation buildings are churches, cathedrals or monasteries. Parish churches, usually built before the Reformation, often remain the largest buildings in an English village and their spires tend to be the tallest structures.

That massive property portfolio was ransacked by Henry VIII in the biggest single property transfer in British history. He smashed up the monasteries and handed over chunks of land to his noble pals. Many aristocratic estates today were owned by the church before the Reformation. Woburn Abbey, the Duke of Bedford's seat, was a Cistercian abbey given by Henry VIII to the duke's ancestor, the first Earl of Bedford, in 1547. Downton Abbey, were it real, would have been a church property before the Earl of Grantham got his hands on it. Henry VIII nabbed the juiciest church land and buildings for himself. He took Hampton Court and York Place (later Whitehall

Palace) from Cardinal Wolsey. Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and Regent's Park had belonged to Westminster Abbey and Barking Abbey. Henry made them his personal hunting parks.

But even he couldn't take everything from the newly created Church of England. As recently as 1873, the church still owned 2.13 million acres. Over the last 150 years, it has sold thousands of parsonages, rectories and vicarages and more than two million acres, usually at rock-bottom prices.

The church momentarily got its act together after the war thanks to the late Lord Rayne, a property developer married to Lady Jane Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Lady Annabel Goldsmith's sister and one of the Queen's 1953 Coronation maids of honour. In 1956, the church was about to sell 65 acres

Thousands of people have been told they don't own the gilt-edged minerals below church land

of prime central London near Paddington Station — part of the 500-acre Hyde Park Estate, in church hands since the Middle Ages. Max Rayne stepped in to stop the sale, arguing that the church would be better off developing the land with him. He was quite right. In 1985, the church sold the three-block row of office buildings it had developed for £12 million, 30 times its estimated auction value in 1956.

In a 1958 joint property deal between Rayne and the Church Commissioners (who look after the Church of England's property), they bought 5.5 acres on Tottenham Court Road. They sold them in 1966 for £11 million, earning a £7 million profit. The church eventually got into hot water for doing so

well out of the Hyde Park Estate, particularly when the area became gentrified and the working classes could no longer afford to live in the newly developed properties.

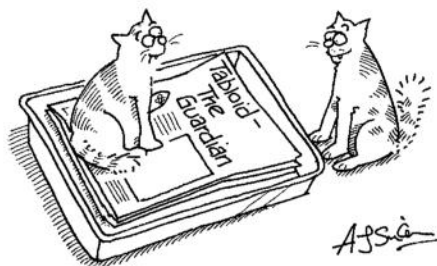
To be fair to the church, it has to walk a difficult tightrope between sweating its assets and providing reasonably priced housing for its parishioners. And it has to pay its employees and their pensions out of its own portfolio. Few vicars can rely on the collection plate alone to pay a living wage.

The Church Commissioners managed to pay vicars' stipends out of income until the early 1990s, when they made a series of disastrous property deals. In 1992, they lost £800 million of their £3 billion portfolio. They had taken out vast borrowings to finance speculative property developments. Those borrowings rose from £4.7 million in 1987 to £518 million in 1990 as interest rates soared. For the first time in history, the Commissioners' expenditure on vicars' stipends and pensions exceeded their portfolio income. The church took another hit in the 2008 financial crash and these losses meant they had to raise the retirement age for the clergy.

Over the past decade, though, as property and equities have soared in value, the Church of England's bank balance has swollen again. In 2014, it sold its share of the Pollen Estate in Mayfair — land around Savile Row and Cork Street that the church had owned for centuries — for £381 million.

Today, it has nearly £8 billion in assets. It runs 4,700 schools and owns 16,000 churches in England, along with tracts of land in cathedral cities such as Canterbury, Ely, Peterborough and York. In 2014, it bought 50 acres in Peterborough, 121 acres in Carlisle, 765 acres in Kent and 17,000 acres of forests in Wales and Scotland. Its tentacles spread abroad, too: in 2014, the church bought retail and residential land in Michigan and California, 27,000 acres of forest in Virginia, and land for sandalwood plantations in Australia's Northern Territory.

Nearly half a millennium after Henry VIII asset-stripped the English church, it remains a mighty property tycoon, both underground and overground.



'I prefer the Daily Mail...'

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

How the Rat sniffed out £15,000 down the back of my virtual sofa



It must be about 25 years since the Rat first made an appearance in *The Spectator*. He started out as my girlfriend's six-year-old boy, then became my stepson and featured here quite often over the years because, being a scaly-tailed creature of evil, he was always good for some copy. This new year, with his agreement, I upgraded him to full son status. Let me explain why in a way that I hope you'll find charming, rather than one that makes you want to throw up.

The first reason is purely mercenary. During Christmas, while over with his wife Chloe from Hong Kong, the Rat managed to find about £10,000 down the back of my virtual sofa, in the form of seven Bitcoin Cash that I thought I'd lost forever. Then he found another half a Bitcoin (BTC) which I also thought I'd lost, bringing the total free money found to well over £15,000.

How can I possibly have lost such large sums of money? Very easily, as any technologically illiterate cryptocurrency owner (we do exist) could tell you. The digital wallets where you keep your BTC and so on are not the most secure or stable places, especially if, as in my case, you got yours several years ago when Bitcoin weren't so valuable, then more or less forgot about them and failed to upgrade.

Multibit, the wallet I stored my BTC in, was so old it was no longer supported. The people who'd invented it had given up and moved on. This wasn't good news if you held BTC in it in September last year, because that was one of the moments when the cryptocurrency 'forked'. That is, the currency had a kind of scrip dividend and for every BTC you owned you were also allocated some of a new breakaway currency called Bitcoin Cash.

Unfortunately, because Multibit was so old, it didn't automatically give you your Bitcoin Cash as other more modern wallets did. When I discovered this I tried not to think about it too hard, especially when I noticed Bitcoin Cash going up and up in value. It's never a good feeling when you realise that, through a mix of inertia and incompetence,

you've managed to cheat yourself out of thousands of quids' worth of free dosh.

But I didn't give up hope altogether. The first thing I did was a bit of Googling to see if there were any other losers in my predicament. Yes: it turned out there was a way to reclaim our Bitcoin Cash. We simply had to load our Multibit wallets on to a more modern wallet using our private keys.

Wait. 'What the hell is a private key?' I wondered. And found, to my horror, that this was the sequence of 12 random words — a unique, uncrackable code combination — which I was supposedly given when I first

Not being cursed with any of my genetic make-up, he possesses certain special qualities that I lack

got my Multibit wallet four years ago. Except I never remembered seeing them, let alone writing them down. Just in case, I spent days ransacking all the drawers and notebooks and computer files where I might conceivably have jotted down the code. No dice.

By the time the Rat and Chloe arrived, I'd had it to the teeth with cryptos. Apart from the misery caused by my vanished Bitcoin Cash treasure hoard, I'd also lost many thousands of pounds more — on paper, anyway — because of that sudden pre-Christmas crash which, at one point,

saw my meagre BTC holding halve in value. And I'd been unable to ask the Rat what to do because, with perfect timing, he was on the plane when the crash happened. I'd tried to sell one of my BTC, before it lost all its value, but the exchange I used was so sclerotic that I couldn't even give the wretched thing away...

Once the Rat arrived, however, order was restored. Not being cursed with any of my genetic make-up, he possesses certain special qualities that I lack; one of them being slow, methodical patience, especially where technology is concerned. Where my response to any computer-related problem that cannot be solved instinctively in seconds is to panic, then scream, then despair, Rat's is to download the instructions, read them carefully and make things better.

Which is exactly what he did in the case of my Bitcoin Cash and also with that bonus half-BTC. Don't ask me how he managed it. All I know is that the Rat's electronic tinkering gave us an extra-specially happy Christmas this year. It more than made up for last year's yuletide fiasco when the Fawn spent the entire ten days vomiting, and when the Rat and his brother cost me £1,200 by burning out the clutch on the Land Rover while practising in the field.

Also, having the Rat back at home reminded me, not for the first time, how very lucky I am that he came into my life. At first I wasn't sure of this. I was 28 when we met and at that age — this may sound harsh, but fellow early step-parents will understand — the last thing you feel like doing is taking responsibility for someone else's kid when you could still be roaming free.

Rat brought this up during one of our many boysy chats, invariably involving cryptos, on which he has become quite an expert. 'You realise I'm now older than the age you were back then. And you know what? If I'd been in your shoes then there's no bloody way I would have taken on an evil brat like me. But I'm glad you did.'

Me too, Rat. And I think I might still say that even without the Bitcoin Cash.



ANCIENT AND MODERN

The soldiering life



Advertisements encouraging men and women to join the army emphasise that their religious beliefs, sexual orientation and emotional needs will be no barrier to making a career. Very nice too, but what sort of come-on is that? Is there no positive reason for joining up in the first place?

In the ancient world, war was a constant, and men had to be ready to die in battle for the very survival of their country, wives and children. So the motivation was very powerful — self-preservation. There were also rewards: the prospect of booty and honours. We hear of one Spurius Ligustinus, an ordinary foot-soldier from a one-acre farm who ‘four times within a few years held the rank of chief centurion; 34 times I was honoured by my commanders with rewards for bravery. I have received six civic crowns. I have fulfilled 22 years of service in the army...’ — and now at 50 he wanted to sign on again. Soldiers like that made the Roman army what it was.

When the Roman army was professionalised under the Emperor Augustus in the 1st century BC, selection became a big issue. The military analyst discussed preferences for recruits — age (from 16), background (countrymen preferred to city-dwellers, men from cooler climates rather than hotter), trade (no pastry cooks or weavers, plenty of blacksmiths and stonemasons) and physical stature. What was in it for them was a 20-year career, with five more optional, regular pay, proper health care and a pension in land or cash; and pride in being part of an army whose training, morale and track record were second to none, both protecting and expanding Roman power. As in all successful armies, ‘looking after your mates’ was at the root of it. Differences disappeared in the heat of battle.

The question that the advertising outfit has to answer is whether there is hard evidence that the issues which they headline are the ones that matter to enough of the (surely) tiny target cohort to persuade them to sign on. And what will any other potential cohort make of it?

— Peter Jones

Let's abolish parole

The system is unfair and unworkable

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

The furore over the parole granted to John Worboys, the rapist taxi driver, misses the point entirely — that the system of parole is disgraceful in theory and irredeemably unworkable in practice. The only thing that it is good for is the employment of large numbers of officials engaged in pointless or fatuous tasks who might otherwise be unemployed.

The system is predicated on the ability of experts to predict the future conduct of convicted prisoners. Will they or will they not repeat their crimes if let out early?

It is true that, using a few simple statistical measures, such as numbers of past convictions and age, you can predict this with an accuracy somewhat better than chance. But all further efforts to refine prediction actually reduce, not increase, accuracy. The problem of false positives and false negatives is inescapable — some people will be predicted to commit further crimes who will not, and some will be predicted to go straight who will break the law again.

The earnest fatuity is typical of modern maladministration, where procedures are mistaken for outcomes. Even though it has been known for years, since the 1980s at least, that the various courses run in prisons to change offender behaviour do not work, they still continue. The system is more recidivist than the criminals.

The courses ‘to address offender behaviour’ and to give them ‘better thinking skills’ are nothing but rites of passage on the way to early release, which has been more or less decreed in advance by government policy. The courses are obligatory, as are confessions of guilt and declarations of remorse. But they are rightly viewed with contempt by those who complete them: nothing could be more demeaning of a human being than to suggest that he steals things or is violent to others because he cannot think straight. And nothing is more stupid than to think that this might be the case.

The time-consuming shallowness of the whole procedure is staggering. Documents before the parole board about prisoners are often hundreds of pages long, but are largely meaningless. Take as an example the question of remorse: it is in effect a demand to

be lied to by people whose commitment to the truth was probably never very great in the first place. Nothing is easier to act than remorse, unless it be depression.

Moreover, the link between remorse and re-offending is uncertain, to put it mildly. It must be within the experience of almost everyone to have felt genuine remorse for having given in yet again to one of his bad habits, while being far from certain that he will not repeat.

Those released on parole can continue to offend with impunity: this is because most offences go unpunished. This, again, is an insoluble problem. No system of surveillance, even if properly carried out (which is beyond our capacity), can follow a man for more than a tiny proportion of his time.

An illustration of the inevitable failure of surveillance is the case of Theodore Johnson. He killed two women in fairly quick succession — his thinking skills were not up to realising that if you push a woman from the ninth floor or strangle her with a belt she is likely to die — and then released on condition that he tell the authorities of any relationship with a woman. This he failed to do for 20 years: the first those authorities heard of the relationship was the woman's death by claw hammer.

But none of this is the main objection: it is rather that the parole system is completely inimical to the rule of law. To grant or withhold liberty on the basis of speculations, inevitably inaccurate, about what people might or might not do in the future is to reinstitute what amounts to a star chamber.

A man is to be punished for what he has done beyond reasonable doubt, not for what some questionnaire or bogus calculation says he has a 70 per cent chance of doing at some time in the future.

In order that this gross arbitrariness be avoided, all sentences should be of a fixed length. If they are too short, so be it: they should be lengthened in future for similar crimes. Justice should not be handed over to psychologists, social workers, or psychiatrists, who are, ex officio, incompetent.

Theodore Dalrymple is a former prison doctor and psychiatrist.

Investing in farming

Sir: Martin Vander Weyer (Any other business, 13 January) says, unhelpfully and inaccurately, that subsidies ‘absurdly’ favour bigger farms. As we look towards life after Brexit, instead of debating the merits of small vs large, the government should incentivise good rather than bad.

My family’s farming business, Beeswax Dyson Farming, farms 33,000 acres directly and has invested £75 million in technology, training, soil improvement and environmental stewardship over the past five years. These are hardly the acts of a mere ‘wealthy landowner’, in his dismissive parlance. Subsidies we receive go directly into the activities that they are designed to support but are dwarfed by our own investments. Farmers in the EU receive substantial subsidies. Unsurprisingly, British supermarkets source roughly a third of their supplies from cheaper, subsidised EU farms.

If Britain wants an internationally competitive agricultural sector, rather than a domestic theme park, we must encourage investment in innovation and stewardship. Removing subsidies from efficient farms simply because they are large would remove their incentive to invest at scale. This will hurt the farming industry and the British economy as we become increasingly uncompetitive against our EU counterparts. Large, well-run farming businesses are good for consumers, for jobs and for the countryside; they should be encouraged just as much as smaller farms.

*Sir James Dyson
Malmesbury, Wiltshire*

The short life of robots

Sir: Diego Zuluaga is surely wrong to believe that robots will make us richer and healthier, but won’t require support in their old age (Letters, 13 January). They will require continuous support all their working life — maintenance, energising, programming, software updates, hacking protection — a life which is likely to be very short because of rapid advances in technology. This obsession with new technology is one of the causes of the NHS’s woes. No sooner is new IT and equipment introduced than it is out of date, requiring staff retraining, specialist support and costly maintenance.

*Terence Weston
Swannington, Norfolk*

Toby’s passion for education

Sir: I am a former secondary head teacher and long-time reader of Toby Young’s

column. I have always been impressed by his passion for education and obvious desire to see the system work well for all pupils and their families. None of us is perfect (even head teachers have a past), and his resignation from the OfS means the loss of a voice that would have stimulated healthy challenge and debate. We could do with someone like Toby to stir up the system here in Scotland, where the shaky implementation of the so-called Curriculum for Excellence in secondary schools and the self-satisfaction of some in the education establishment would benefit from exactly his kind of constructive challenge. In a better world, the wisdom or not of his appointment would have been allowed to depend on his performance as a member of the committee rather than his voice being prematurely silenced by the ill-informed screechings of his critics.

*Eric Sinclair
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire*

Eastern promise?

Sir: In your leading article (‘What’s going right’, 13 January) you argue that ‘Once freed from the parochial, protectionist

instincts of the EU, Britain should be in an excellent position to take advantage [of the growing economies of countries such as China and India]’. Those instincts do not seem to have done German exports much harm. In 2016 German exports to China amounted to \$85 billion (OECD). By contrast British exports amounted to \$18 billion (ONS). Is it not possible that there are other reasons for the UK’s relatively modest performance?

*Frank Mattison
Hessle, East Yorkshire*

Superslow broadband

Sir: I loved the optimism of Boris Johnson’s piece about the state of the world and the benefits of educating girls (‘Girl power’, 13 January). It was spot on except for this line: ‘We have the continuous ocular stimulation of machines enabled by an internet whose pace and convenience accelerates everywhere, even in rural England.’ Not in this part of rural England! Despite being a mere 12 miles from Milton Keynes, our village has endured years of broken promises and let-downs since funding to deliver superfast broadband was secured and announced with great fanfare in 2014. Nearly four years later, here we are, stuck in the slow lane, with emails crawling back and forth between MP John Bercow, local councils, BT, Openreach and organisations that rejoice in such joke names as ‘Connected Counties’ and ‘Bucks Business First’, but with little progress. Come on Great Britain!

*Alison Walsh
Lillingstone Lovell, Buckingham*

A new word

Sir: I would like to thank *The Spectator* yet again for providing a boost to my vocabulary. No, not from Mind Your Language, as you might expect (excellent as Ms Wordsworth is), but from Rod Liddle (‘The power of the 0.1 per cent’, 13 January). ‘Wankpuffin’ — what a wonderful term for describing the social media fundamentalists. I look forward to dropping it into future conversations.

*Nathan Cooper
Staffordshire*

Just say no

Sir: I was quite surprised that Toby Young can’t wean his kids off the screen without the help of technology (‘Screen-addicted kids?’, 13 January). As someone who’s a bit of a champ in the area of education, I would have thought that he would know that a ‘no’ to kids is the start of good

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parenting, which in turn is the start of good education. As parents we need to unite against the smartphone and tablet invasion. If we stick together then the ‘everyone’s got one’ line simply won’t work. When your kids are pariahs at school for not having the latest technology, it makes it harder to do the right thing. Only the seriously bloody-minded (ahem, there are some of us left) will just say ‘no’ and get them a little Nokia for emergencies instead.

*Lyndsey Simpson
Leyland, Lancs*

Smash the box

Sir: Toby Young bemoans the fact that there’s no app with which to silence his television set. But there is: it’s called a 2lb lump hammer, available from all good hardware stores. I applied this upgrade to my own set 15 years ago. The whole family has been the happier for it ever since.

*Mark Ribbands
Tibenhams, Norfolk*

What’s going on?

Sir: Within hours of each other, Nigel Farage calls for a second Brexit referendum, and Matthew Parris (13 January) ponders reconsidering his enthusiasm for the same. Has something been added to the water?

*Alan Doyle
Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex*

Pecking order

Sir: Congratulations to Melissa Kite (‘A bird-brained scheme’, 13 January) for bringing to public attention the millions of pounds which many authorities are being obliged to raise by a levy on new housing in their area in order to protect three types of bird species (Dartford warbler, woodlark, nightjar). This tax — around £7,000 per home — was proposed by Natural England, which claims that ‘urban development and local residents’ have been the cause of their decline. The funds are to be spent developing alternative Areas of Natural Green Space.

Councils were misled by their officers in approving this policy in 2005 as we were told that it was an EU directive, which it was not, but nevertheless it is now government policy. The benefits to the birds are virtually nil, as the cause of their decline (which was temporary) has now been confirmed by Natural England to have been bad weather. Bird numbers have now recovered to their 1998/9 numbers in the districts involved. My own district, Guildford, has only 22 nests in its two main protected areas, yet has raised £6 million so

far. If our proposed housing target of 12,500 is met, the total raised would be around £81 million. Multiply this by the many other districts, and Kite’s figure of over £1 billion is not crazy. All this waste reduces funds for affordable housing. Why should birds get priority over humans? I urge Dominic Raab, the new Housing Minister, to insist that this policy be reviewed, and that Michael Gove introduces an obligatory cost benefit analysis for environmental policies.

*The Hon Alderman Gordon Bridger
Guildford, Surrey*

Delingpole on plastic

Sir: In James Delingpole’s ‘Nine reasons to be cheerful this year’ (6 January) he writes, in protest against concerns highlighted in *Blue Planet II*: ‘This idea that we humans are the problem is a construct of the guilt-ridden liberal elite.’ Mr Delingpole’s views on climate change are well known. But even for him, it’s a bit much to claim that mankind isn’t somehow at fault for the proliferation of plastic (the major concern highlighted by *Blue Planet II*). I have been to a few places and am yet to see plastic reproducing in the wild.

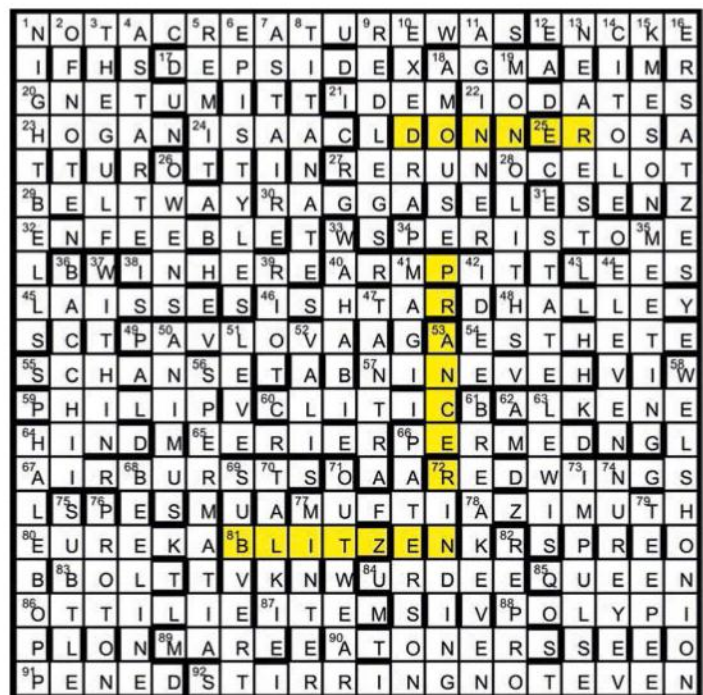
*Patrick Massey
London SW11*

The glue that binds

Sir: One cannot fail to be impressed by Angela Rayner’s recent meteoric political ascent given the account of her own family background (‘Why isn’t Angela Rayner a Tory?’, 6 January). The possibility of a future education secretary without GCSEs, let alone a university qualification, is certainly a refreshing prospect. It is sad to hear of her mother’s childhood and lack of parental care, but would more government intervention have been a solution? Our western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic societies suffer from an inexorable decline in the authority of, respect for and loyalty to local and nationwide communities. Strong communities have supported and shaped families. The glue that binds communities and families has historically been provided by religions and other established moral and ethical belief systems. Such glue is in short supply in today’s societies. It is not clear how Ms Rayner’s government interventions would help this situation — and it is not clear how any current political thinking, whether from left or right, is addressing this problem.

*Peter Cutts
Biddenden, Kent*

CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD SOLUTION



A BEASTLY BUSINESS

The quote is 1A/92/18D from the poem ‘A Visit from St Nicholas’. The theme was the names of the eight reindeer in the poem. Three were highlighted whilst the others each suggested three unclued lights: Dasher (26, 63 and 83 — sprinters); Comet (12, 48 and 64 — astronomers’ names given to comets); Dancer (7, 49 and 74); Vixen (64A, 85 and 89 — female animals); Cupid (4, 25 and 46 — love deities).

Carillion's crash is not a parable of the evil of outsourcing



Carillion is a disaster on all fronts, but my sympathies go first to the fallen contracting giant's sub-contractors. Upwards of 30,000 smaller firms were already facing 120-day payment delays and may now have to fight court battles to get paid at all, driving many hard-pressed entrepreneurs to bankruptcy. But the political spotlight won't help them, because Labour spokesmen who despise small business as well as large will merely use the case to attack the concept of outsourcing public services for private-sector profit.

And that debate will continue to miss the central point that Carillion has not crashed because it held too many school-meal contracts, but because of delays and cost overruns in civil engineering projects such as the Aberdeen bypass and big new hospitals in Birmingham and Liverpool. Civil engineering businesses traditionally tend to be undercapitalised, relying on debt to manage the hair-raising cashflows of their project portfolios. Carillion was formed from many such businesses — starting in 1999 with the construction arms of Tarmac and Wimpey and adding Mowlem, McAlpine and others — but instead of gaining strength through amalgamation, it multiplied risk.

Carillion's catastrophe is not a parable of the evils of outsourcing, which remains the best value-for-money mechanism for many kinds of service delivery in both public and private sectors. Rather it's a cautionary tale of lax financial control in over-expanded conglomerates. The best outcome now for some of its constituent firms would be to re-emerge from the rubble as independent operators — offering government a wider, safer range of contractors from which to choose.

Hard nose needed

Lib Dem leader Sir Vince Cable — who has appointed himself unofficial shadow business secretary in the absence of anyone credible on the Labour benches — says ministers should block a potential takeover of GKN by the mini-conglomerate Melrose. The former

is a venerable British engineering business with a global reputation. The latter, founded in 2003 on the model of Hanson Trust from the 1980s, is an exponent of what this column has called 'a hard-nosed, finance-driven form of capitalism, but one that creates efficiency and value' by buying underperforming industrial companies, improving them, selling them and returning cash to grateful investors.

Melrose claims to have outperformed GKN 18 times over in 'total shareholder return' since 2003 and that it can 're-energise and re-purpose' GKN far more effectively than the GKN board's own hasty plan to demerge its automotive and aerospace component arms. Cable says Melrose are short-termists whereas GKN 'stands for long-term investment in advanced manufacturing'. In the current mood of distrust for hard-nosed capitalists, his sentiments may strike a chord. But I think he's wrong. Melrose is a focused small-team venture working to a proven turnaround template. GKN — which dumped its newly appointed chief executive after a profits warning in the autumn — needs a shake-up. Other canny bidders may enter the fray alongside Melrose. It's the way of the world, and the valuable businesses within GKN will emerge all the better for it.

This winter's NHS tale

Is the NHS catastrophically under-resourced and overstretched, through no fault of its own; or is it a mismanaged monster that could reduce many of its problems if only it adopted more models from consumer-facing companies? Here's a seasonal anecdote...

Scene One: a flagship hospital in the north of England, Sunday morning. Elderly Patient in A&E cubicle: 'Can I have a drink of water?'. Nurse: 'Sorry, love, no plastic cups, they forgot to order any.' Next of Kin (your columnist): 'Why are you writing my details on a paper towel?' Nurse: 'I'll put them in the computer when I've got time.' NoK: 'Well at least they ordered paper towels.' Passing cleaner, in the manner of WW2 black-marketeer: 'Psst! You wanna plastic cup?'

NoK, a long time later: 'Is something going to happen soon?' Nurse: 'Haven't you been watching the news, love? This is the NHS. Our target's four hours to be treated or admitted. This patient's close to that now so I expect we'll move her to a ward as soon as there's a bed.'

Scene Two: Sunday afternoon, in an 'assessment' ward. EP: 'Can I have some paracetamol for a headache?' Healthcare assistant: 'Sorry, love, there's no one here authorised to dispense them.' NoK: 'Shouldn't she at least take the regular pills she brought in with her, which no one's bothered to look at yet?' Nurse: 'Oh yes, she could do that.'

Scene Three: Monday afternoon, at Costa Coffee in the hospital concourse. NoK: 'Well at least at Costa they've still got cups — and staff who smile.' EP, confused and exhausted: 'Have they told us anything we didn't know before I came in?' 'No.' 'Have they given me any new medication?' 'No.' 'Do I have to go back to that terrible ward?' 'No. Let's run for it. The longer you stay the worse you'll feel. I just have to pay the car-park ticket — but there's only one machine and it only takes coins, so there's an enormous queue...'

Bitcoin winners

I invited readers to justify following the example of New York banker Jamie Dimon's daughter, who is a buyer of Bitcoin, over the advice of her father, who says it's a crash waiting to happen. 'Lionel Shriver's column, 6 Jan' was a good answer but too short to win the competition. Runner-up is 14-year-old Larissa Isaacs, who says she respects her father but as a 'forceful modern woman', doesn't feel she has to do what he says. Joint winners are Bernard Kerrison, quoted last week, and Matthew Quirk's Kipling pastiche: 'If you can see how markets move the many,/ And how the many move the markets in return...' Meanwhile, the hot news is that Russia plans to legalise cryptocurrency trading in the hope of grabbing a big slice of this fast-growing global market. Sounds like *McMafia* to me.

BOOKS & ARTS

Alan Judd traces the role of women at sea from the Crusades to the present

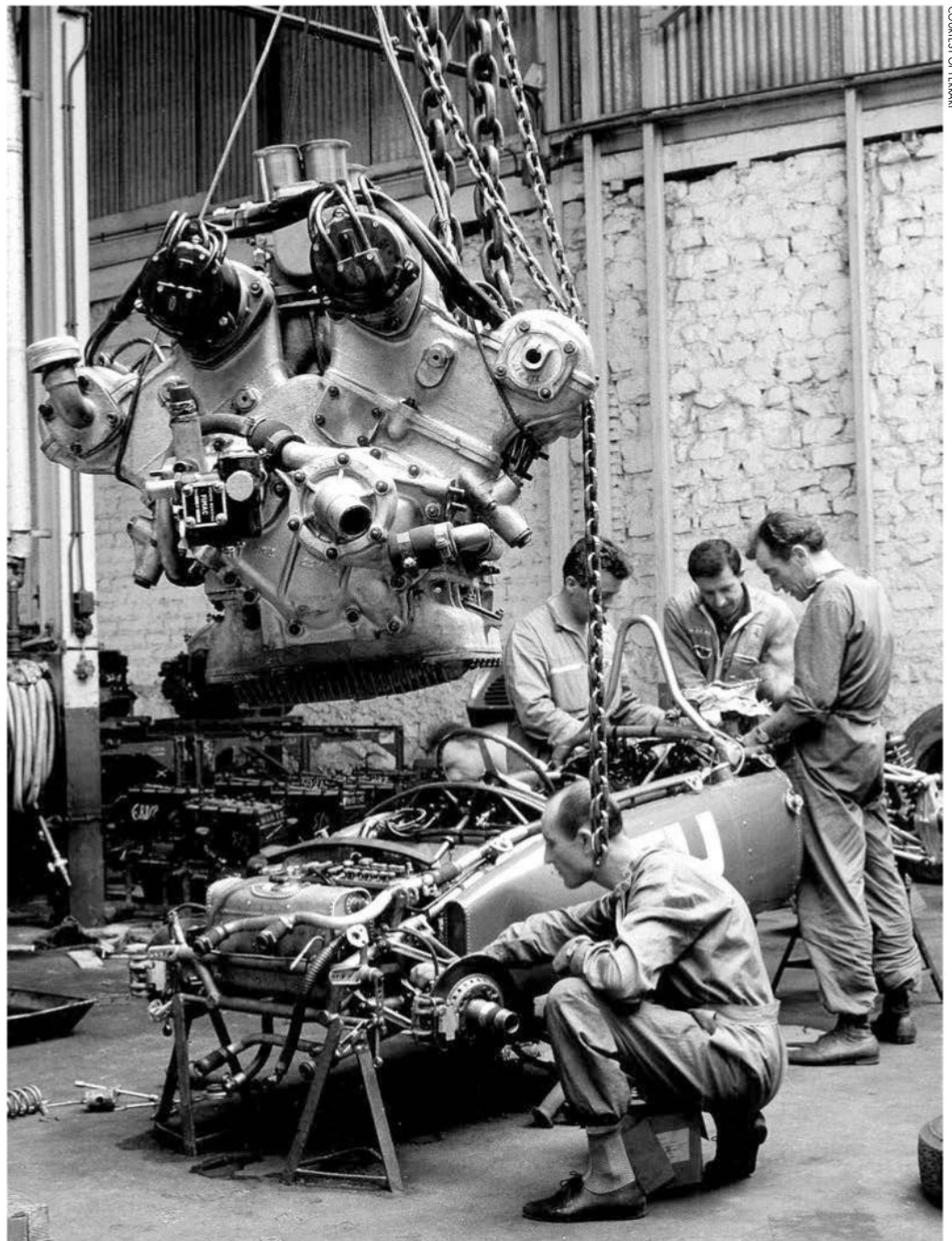
Kate Webb admires a novel way of tackling the migrant problem

Horatio Clare discovers a toxic black sap oozing in Borneo's rainforest 'Eden'

James Delingpole ticks off Jez Butterworth's *Britannia* for topographical infelicities

Norman Lebrecht examines the sordid underbelly of conducting where sex is considered a perk of the job

Stephen Bayley wonders whether there's ever been a more beautiful machine than the Ferrari



COURTESY OF FERRARI

*The Ferrari 156 FI, no. 50.
The engine hanging in the
foreground is a V6
Stephen Bayley — p42*

BOOKS

Fast or feast

The women whose 'food stories' Laura Shapiro chooses to tell are an odd bunch. *Rose Prince* wouldn't want all six round her own table

What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food that Tells Their Stories

by Laura Shapiro

4th Estate, £12.99, pp. 307

'Tell me what you eat and I shall tell you what you are.' The best known adage in food literature, penned by the French politician and gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, divides all of us generally: the gourmands from the picky, the greedy from the careful, one nation from another, one culture from the next.

Laura Shapiro's book about six famous women and their 'food stories' made me want to re-read a few biographies for those food moments. Shapiro claims that food in life stories is undervalued as a subject, considering how much time people spend eating. Their tastes, loves, hates, phobias, habits and cravings can tell us as much about people as the more 'essential' topics within their stories; their politics, vision, power and, not least, their sex life.

Past biographers and scholars saw food as a tough sell, says Shapiro:

These issues and more can be brought to bear on the making of dinner — but back then the great minds, not to mention most of their graduate students, were reluctant to descend to the frivolous realm of the kitchen.

For Shapiro, a food journalist who wants a person's whole story, food is the entry point to her subjects' lives.

At first look Shapiro has assembled a weird cast of characters. I would certainly not want all six round my table as fantasy guests, and they have not necessarily been chosen for an outcome that will make the reader hungry. But it's a successful approach. *What She Ate* is truly original and fascinating; a new and clever form of food writing. Sensuality, sympathy, snobbery, humour and horror — all are here.

'It turns out that our food stories don't always honour what's smartest and most dignified about us. More often they

go straight to what's neediest.' Shapiro's first subject is Dorothy Wordsworth, William's devoted sister. She is followed by the hotelier-cook Rosa Lewis, better known to millions of 1970s' TV viewers as the Duchess of Duke Street. Third is Eleanor Roosevelt — be very afraid of her food. Then comes Hitler's secret *hausfrau*, Eva Braun — an account summoning uncomfortably chilling images. Next, Shapiro rediscovers the postwar novelist Barbara Pym, who turns out to be the sort of heroine she herself could have created. And, finally, there is the emaciated inventor of the dysfunctional food editorial, *Cosmopolitan* editor and author Helen Gurley Brown. What a bunch.

Shapiro likens her research to standing in a supermarket queue, peering into other people's trolleys. It's not easy to picture Dorothy Wordsworth in Tesco (though I enjoyed trying), but the references to food found in her Grasmere journals take you straight into the kitchen of Dove Cottage, with freshly shelled peas, gingerbread and gooseberry tart on the table. Her diaries were written in the happy period before her brother's marriage and her inevitable usurpation, when Dorothy played devoted surrogate wife to William and hostess to his friends. There are numerous mentions of food: growing it, preparing it and the meals themselves, often left out by Dorothy's previous biographers.

Here they are feasted upon by Shapiro, who believes that Dorothy recorded these details as a reminder to herself that everything at Dove Cottage mattered, and that she was 'intent on keeping a written record of how she fed William and their guests, as if to shore up her right to a role she wouldn't dream of claiming openly'. So sad and big-hearted — and short-lived. Soon, Dorothy's changing life, as told through her appetite, ignites a great sense of injustice. That she was much loved, to the end, helps.

Rosa Lewis, Eastender, *chef-patronne* of a famous hotel, social striver, royal favour-

ite and possible liar, achieved the extraordinary. She emulated, and was respected by, the French chefs who then ruled London's kitchens. And she bought and ran the Cavendish Hotel on Jermyn Street, making it a home for noblemen on visits to London who wanted to escape their wives.

Stories about Rosa, both true and unverified, are legion. I have been told that she used to launder the drinks bills among her guests, getting American visitors and what she called the 'boughten nobility' to pay for the champagne drunk by her beloved British aristocracy. Her food story is a little obvious, because food was her career. But it is a tale of hard graft and — as so often in class-riven Britain — closing doors. Most endearing was her refusal to drop her cockney accent. She called Jeroboams 'cherrybums'. I shall borrow that, given the opportunity.

Martha Gellhorn, accompanying Ernest Hemingway to stay with the Roosevelts at the White House in 1937, stopped to eat three sandwiches. That the food at the White House was revolting was known by all Washington, she explained. Hemingway remembered 'rainwater soup followed by rubber squab'. It was, he told his mother-in-





Eva Braun dieted obsessively, but didn't hold back on the pilfered champagne

law, the worst meal he had ever eaten. Actually, by the then White House standards, this menu sounds bearable. The problem was that FDR's love of rich food clashed with his First Lady's politics — rightly sensitive during the Depression — creating a culinary cold war at home. Fatally, she also delegated responsibility for the White House kitchen to a trusted former servant.

That servant, Mrs Nesbitt, was a martinet with an olfactory bypass who, when she was not experimenting with scary modern recipes of the time ('Ham Hawaiian,' 'Seafood Surprise,' 'Jellied Bouillon Salad'), implemented Eleanor's passion for home economics. The First Lady was a great supporter of the new science of housewifery. Unfortunately, home economics's good intentions forgot the palate. Raw vegetable salads and stewed mutton were nutritious and cheap. Eleanor approved. But later there is intriguing evidence that a happier Eleanor began to relish good food.

Put Eva Braun into a book about lives with food and a chill descends over the pages. Eva had two obsessions: her adoration of Hitler and her own persona, starring in her fantasy as the lady of the Führer's house, chiefly his mountain retreat, the

Berghof. She seems at first an unwise choice for Shapiro, but in her hidden life is a story of excessive feasting among the Nazi top brass. She dieted obsessively to keep slim, though did not hold back on pilfered champagne, the number one tippable of the Reich. Beside her at sunny summer lunch parties, Hitler ate vegetarian food off a special tray,

It was well known in Washington that Eleanor Roosevelt's food at the White House was revolting

while his circle gorged on heaps of nourishing traditional country fare. Shapiro's detailed research reveals a horror story of disparities between the starving and sated, and Eva's deranged obliviousness.

The lives of the last two featured women are set in the years after the war. Both relate a theme of having what is needed, not wanted. The novelist Barbara Pym would have known only too well about food shortages. Her very English, quiet novels about spinsters and social life among the clergy are packed with references to food — often excellent food — and are truthful. 'Perhaps it was because Barbara was

neither a gastronome nor a sensualist that whatever she said about eating tends to slip quietly off the page.' She used food not only as a prop (comfort, comedy or longing) for her characters, but also for herself, in a difficult period over which she eventually triumphed.

Helen Gurley Brown, however, knew only success, as the author of *Sex and the Single Girl* and the editor of *Cosmopolitan*. Being famously thin, she considered fattening foods the enemy. 'Skinny to me is sacred' was one of her sillier lines. She nevertheless published endless advice on a girl's kitchen. Always have the makings of a hearty breakfast on hand, she tells the liberated single girl, 'since you don't always know the night before whether you're going to have a guest in the morning'. You get the picture with Gurley Brown. 'Food is sexy!' Enough of her.

Shapiro pulls off her idea well. Take a character — any — and find out what they ate. There's a series here. Margaret Thatcher, Marilyn Monroe, the Queen Mother? You will see them in a different place to the usual offices, red carpets or palaces. You're heading for the kitchen, where many secrets are hidden.



Four million bats stream from the Deer Cave every evening in Gunung Mulu National Park

Poison in Paradise

Horatio Clare

Finding Eden: A Journey into the Heart of Borneo

by Robin Hanbury-Tenison

I.B. Tauris, £17.99, pp. 269

Eton turns out prime ministers of various stripes and patches, but it also forges fine explorers. It seems to prepare its alumni perfectly for flying snakes, scorpions so large you can put leads on them and leeches in waving battalions; titanic drinking and dancing ceremonies (our explorer, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, suffers repeated blistering on the dance floor); the friendship of head-hunters; and for the exacting business of leading world-protecting, people-nurturing expeditions into the planet's wild and vulnerable regions. In the school's natural history museum, pupils can now see a parang, presented to Hanbury-Tenison by his tribal friends, its handle shaped like a hornbill, its razor-sharp edge responsible for hacking off more than 100 heads.

The Eden of this book's title is the Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak, Borneo, which had only just been gazetted when the author heard of it. It's the story of his 1977 expedition, which he has written about before (most recently for a small press in 2004); but here is the blockbuster version, a compendium of diaries and recollections. *Finding Eden* is a fount of marvels, wisdom and replicable successes. Indigenous

people are the best protectors of their environment, Hanbury-Tenison insists, referring to tribes saving and conserving land they have been granted in Brazil and in Papua as well as in Borneo. The protection of the Borneo rainforest and its Penan people has not been a huge success, logging and palm-oil production having been the scourge of both, but both are better off for the efforts and commitment of Hanbury-Tenison and his teams, for the environmental projects they helped inaugurate.

A founder of Survival International, Hanbury-Tenison is a delightful and driven man. Leadership, he decided, meant taking full responsibility for everything. And Borneo is the sort of place where things go colourfully wrong, daily:

Found about 30 huge cockroaches in my boxes and put down mothballs. Also met an 18 cm centipede which I chopped in half with my parang. Both ends went on wiggling and fighting until they were pushed down between the floorboards.

There are the poisons, including the *Anacardiaceae* trees, which ooze a black sap so toxic it causes paralysis. And then there are the demands of the scientists:

Sue fed her leeches, and we all dutifully stuck them on our arms and legs. If they were tiger leeches we hopped about to begin with from the pain. John and I are the only three tiger-leech men. As they dropped off we all bled, looking as though the camp had been bombed.

The project team was astonishing, composed of indefatigable, fearless and eminent scientists. They found themselves surrounded by new species, living among gigantic unex-

plored caves adjacent to impenetrable valleys and limestone sinkholes where no human had ever been. Gathorne Medway (later Earl of Cranbrook) finds a bat he believes must be a species new to science. Hanbury-Tenison wonders excitedly which institution might verify this. The Smithsonian? The Natural History Museum? 'No, Robin,' says Gathorne, the author of *Mammals of Borneo*. 'You misunderstand me. If I think it is a new species of bat, it is a new species of bat.'

Hanbury-Tenison concerns himself with the forest's residents — 'sincere and amiable' people, as he puts it, who identify him as a piece of historic good luck, and a champion. Of his friend Nyapun, he writes: 'He was the most complete man I have ever known. He understood and managed everything about him: his family, his daily life.'

Hanbury-Tenison's writing and thinking about the Penan is the core of the book, couched like a philosophical enquiry in the middle of an *Indiana Jones* film. 'Jesus would have loved these people,' he writes.

There is no cant, bigotry or hypocrisy about them, the human faults which angered Him most. These Penan people are not ashamed, nor are they proud. They simply are. They are, to a quite shattering degree, self-sufficient, and that is something the modern mind finds impossible to grasp. Surely they must want something from me...

Finding Eden is a record of a pristine world at the moment of its discovery, a loving portrait of a people and a place, a superb primer on leadership, and a call to arms, demanding that we relish and protect what is left of the wild world. I absolutely recommend it.

In times of trouble

William Rees

Turning for Home

by Barney Norris

Doubleday, £14.99, pp. 272

'People live in the space between the realities of their lives and the hopes they have for them,' muses the octogenarian Robert at the start of *Turning for Home*, helpfully establishing the novel's major theme. Little ventriloquised cogitations like this cover Barney Norris's second novel like fingerprints, giving the game away.

Robert is a newly widowed retired civil servant, who, after a life of patriarchal and political responsibilities, is haunted by his newfound obsolescence. This ghost also haunts the novel's other protagonist, Robert's 25-year-old granddaughter Kate; a year lost to anorexia has left her estranged from a life that has only just begun ('I would look at my phone and see only the echoes of the life I'd lost').

Turning for Home unfolds over the day of Robert's 80th birthday party — a family affair neither character looks forward to. Robert misses his wife; Kate dreads the familiar chill of her mother. In alternating monologues, each tries and tries again to tell a life story that will satisfy the incompatible desires to tell the truth and to flatter the teller. Can one succeed, the novel asks, or will one tear oneself apart in the struggle?

Turning for Home shows some glimmers of greatness. Kate's anorexia and slow convalescence are carefully and sensitively handled, and Norris is often an astute psychologist. However, for a novel written by a playwright, there is strangely scant attention paid to voice; separated, in Kate's words, by 'too much life', Robert and his granddaughter sound surprisingly alike (which is to say, like a sermonising writer in search of *bons mots*).

More troublesome still, Norris has an obsession with order — one which, like most, creates a lot of disarray. During his career, we learn, Robert played a key role in the Northern Ireland peace process. By the time Kate was born the Troubles were drawing to a close, but that's not to say that she hasn't had 'troubles' of her own. This is a conceit from which Norris is determined to get rich returns; and as the novel progresses things become overly schematic — Kate's personal traumas becoming an allegory for the political traumas of Robert's generation. 'Your troubles come with you wherever you travel, and in the end... peace has to be made.' Kate mimes the words, but the voice is unmistakably the author's.

Massacre of the innocents

Jonathan Steinberg

Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town called Buczacz

by Omer Bartov

Simon & Schuster, £25, pp. 480

I thought I knew the history of the years 1914 to 1945: the first world war and the terrible casualties in the trenches; the second world war and the German conquest of Europe; day and night bombing; Stalingrad and the Holocaust. But I'm embarrassed to say that I knew nothing about the tragedy in Galicia in Eastern Europe. Unlike the Nazi genocide, much of the killing took place between neighbour and neighbour: Jews, Poles and Ukrainians destroyed each other with increasing ferocity and brutality between 1914 and the 1940s. The beautiful city of Buczacz in Eastern Galicia, with its Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Jewish shrines, ended as a gigantic ruin.

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the Israeli novelist, dedicated his last book, *The City Whole*, published posthumously in 1973, to his home town Buczacz:

I closed my eyes, so that I would not see my brothers, my fellow townsmen, because of my bad habit to see my city and its slain. And so I closed my eyes and called my city to stand before me with all its inhabitants, with all its houses of prayer.

Omer Bartov, the distinguished military historian, came from a family that had lived in Buczacz but emigrated to Israel. One day, he asked his mother about her life there. This conversation caught Bartov's imagination. *Anatomy of a Genocide* emerged from the gradual collection of evidence over two decades, in three continents and nine countries. Much still existed in archives, and survivors of the genocide emerged to talk. The result is breathtaking, painful and astonishing, written partly by the participants in their various languages.

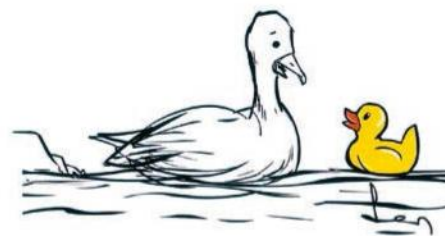
Bartov begins by explaining that

the Jews did not live segregated from the Christian population; the entire notion of a *shtetl* existing in some sort of splendid (or sordid) isolation is merely a figment of Jewish literary and folkloristic imagination. Integration was what made the existence of such towns possible. It was also what made the genocide there, when it occurred, a communal event, both cruel and intimate, filled with gratuitous violence and betrayal as well as flashes of altruism and kindness.

Buczacz had enjoyed the good will of the great Potocki lords, who extended the privileges for the Jews and allowed them protection and a 'fortress synagogue on the Strypa River'. In 1867, Jews were granted full citizenship under the new Austro-Hungarian constitution. But by 1914, unrest and nationalism had begun to sever the easy ties among the ethnic groups.

Antoni Siewinski, the Polish principal of the boys' school before the first world war, kept a private diary. His school taught all three nationalities: 'Prewar Buczacz was dominated by Jews who owned all the handsome stone houses in the city centre with their numerous well-stocked stores.'

The Eastern Front turned into a catastrophic charnel house. Russian forces



*Blimey, how much plastic have
you been ingesting?*

turned on civilians and random violence among the ethnic groups led to the cruel and chaotic treatment of the Jews — and finally the creation of a ghetto. Siewinski recorded in his diary: 'The Jews were herded together like sardines in a can... they now lived in extremely filthy and crowded conditions. Every day numerous corpses were carried to the Jewish cemetery and buried there.'

A Russian regiment returning in February 1915 from the Carpathians destroyed the school. As Siewinski wrote:

Within a few days the beautiful school was unrecognisable, because the soldiers destroyed everything, plundered the bookcases and bookshelves, burned the school files in the oven, threw the school benches into the yard, where they were taken apart and also burnt in the oven... and answered nature's call straight out of the window. Eight hundred wounded Russians died in the school corridors crying 'Mama! Mama!' This was a terrifying sight.

The League of Nations failed in its promise to grant the Ukrainians self-determination, and in 1923 passed sovereignty over the whole area to Poland.

In 1930, Poles represented only a third of eligible voters. Ukrainian children were forced into non-state schools, but the Polish state claimed — falsely — that relations between Poles and Ukrainians were good. By 1938, Ukrainian nationalists had turned to Nazi Germany.

After the defeat of Poland, on 19 September 1939, the Red Army occupied Buczacz under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Jews greeted them with enthusiasm, 'rejoicing that Hitler had not come to the city'. Jewish communists took over city jobs, to the fury of the Poles.

The Soviets, according to Father Ludwik Rutyna, relied on Jews to identify whom to arrest:

I saw how they threw their captives like cattle into the truck and sat on top of them with their rifles and took them away. These were teachers, people from the administration whom they unfortunately all later slowly murdered.

Polish citizens were deported to Kazakhstan, Siberia and the far north of the USSR, 'all within a space of 21 months'.

On 22 June 1941, the Wehrmacht crossed the Soviet frontier and caught the Red Army and Air Force unprepared. On the night of 4-5 July 1941 Ukrainians seized control in Buczacz and murdered any Russians, Jews or Poles they caught. Blue and yellow flags were hoisted and an independent Ukrainian state proclaimed. A national parade was staged on 20 July, watched by the Nazis on the tribune.

German occupiers introduced pit-killings of Jews and Poles:

The normalisation of murder, the removal of Jews as part of a day's work, as entertain-

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ment, as background noise to drinking bouts or amorous relationships, along with puzzlement at the Jews' conduct, mixed with anger at making it so easy to kill them — they were part and parcel of the German experience of genocide, rarely reflected in post-war ruminations, let alone historiography.

The massacres which now unfolded defy the imagination. Jewish babies, children and the old were murdered randomly in huge numbers by the local German police, not the *Sicherheitsdienst* as protocol demanded. People who knew the victims often did the killing.

Dozens of inhabitants recorded what they saw in diaries or photographs. Omer Bartov has, like Agnon, preserved their stories and pictures.

The maker and the monster

Elaine Showalter

In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl Who Wrote *Frankenstein*

by Fiona Sampson

Profile, £18.99, pp. 320

There are few more seductive figures for biographers than Mary Shelley. The daughter of the radical philosopher and novelist William Godwin and the great feminist thinker Mary Wollstonecraft (who died a few days after giving birth to her), she ran away with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley at 16; wandered through Europe with him; bore their four children; married him; became the friend and companion of the other Young Romantics and their lovers; and at 18 wrote the classic Gothic novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Scholars, writers and biographers from Muriel Spark to Miranda Seymour have been drawn to her story, and to the moment when, in the summer of 1816, at a villa on Lake Geneva, Byron challenged Mary, Percy and their friend, the painter Polidori, to write competing ghost stories.

Frankenstein was conceived then, but delivered two years later, and published anonymously on New Year's Day 1818. Mary would write a revised and expanded version in 1831, plus five other novels and many stories; but none was as innovative, archetypal and aesthetically influential as *Frankenstein*. Its bicentennial this year is the occasion for an explosion of conferences, annotated editions, plays, TV adaptations, films and books, including this new biography by the poet Fiona Sampson.

The book opens with an engaging description of the 1931 film of *Frankenstein* as a 'mixture of hilarity and horror', especially at the moment the scientist sees his



Mary Shelley: a major writer, with a heartbreakingly difficult life

creature begin to move: 'It's alive, it's moving. It's alive! It's alive, it's alive, it's alive! It's ALIVE!' In the book, Sampson points out, the moment of creation is more private and less exultant. Dr Frankenstein beholds his creature with anxiety, and 'the novel gives us a scene not of success but of failure'. Feminist critics have generally interpreted *Frankenstein* as a 'birth myth', in the words of Ellen Moers, in *Literary Women* (1963): a tale reflecting maternal fears, dangers and literary affiliations. But Sampson tacitly allies it instead with tragic and promethean horror stories, in which men of science attempt to create and perfect life, but can only produce monstrosity and death.

Sampson declares that her interest in Mary Shelley lies chiefly in the 'real person, full of living contradictions'. She wants to know how this 'unmarried teenage mother' became a major writer instead of a silent muse; how she drew on 'extraordinary resources' at the start of 'a sometimes heartbreakingly difficult life' to create 'two of our culture's most enduring archetypes' — the maker and the monster. Her bold and ambitious goal, she announces in her introduction, is 'to bring Mary closer to us, and closer again, until she's hugely enlarged in close-up'. Sampson achieves her close-up by magnifying the details of Shelley's journals and letters, plus the composition notebooks of *Frankenstein*, and subjecting them to minute interrogation and surmise.

She also, however, seeks to create an

illusion of immediacy and intimacy by writing in the present tense throughout, a device which quickly becomes awkward; and by heavy dependence on psychological speculation and too many large rhetorical questions. The words 'probably', 'possibly' and 'presumably' are frequent, along with phrases such as 'it's reasonable to assume', 'it's hard not to suspect' and 'it would be nice to think'. Sampson does not limit her conjecture to Mary alone, but to the inner lives and unconscious motivations of all the players in her life.

Sometimes these interruptions and digressions are illuminating. Did Mary realise, for example, that to leave England at her husband's insistence, just as her novel was getting serious critical attention, was to sacrifice her chance of being accepted in her own right as an artist and intellectual? Or was she simply naive about how literary reputations are made? But more often the blow-ups are distractions from the complicated narrative, and would be less confusing if they were presented as interpretations, rather than as guesses about intention.

Sampson emphasises the drama of Mary's dazzling girlhood, and her determination to educate herself as a serious writer and intellectual, but she is especially effective describing her womanhood and widowhood. While her husband was alive, Mary moved constantly, holding the family together during his multiple affairs and as his literary career ascended and hers declined. By the spring of 1820, having lost three children, and still nursing Percy Florence, the son who would survive to adulthood, Mary had to face the disintegration of her domestic life and the difficulties of living with an 'increasingly successful fellow author'.

In July 1822, at the peak of his fame as a poet, Shelley drowned in a reckless sailing adventure in Italy, and Mary spent the rest of her life unsupported by his family, exploited by her own, memorialising and editing her husband's work, earning money to enable their son to become a solid conventional citizen, and lamenting the failure of her hopes 'to be something great and good'.

In Sampson's eyes, however, she was 'a great survivor'; and while her biography will not be the last word on the real Mary Shelley, it is a passionate demonstration of the elements that have kept her story vibrant for 200 years. It is moving, it is alive, it is a success.



A recruiting poster from 1917, establishing the Wrens

The call of the Wren

Alan Judd

A History of the Royal Navy: Women and the Royal Navy

by Jo Stanley

I.B. Tauris, £20, pp. 264

This book is a thoroughly researched account of the parts played by women in the service of the Royal Navy from the Middle Ages to the present. What it lacks in anecdotes and personal accounts it makes up for in its comprehensive documentation of official attitudes and measures.

Women have served in — or, more accurately, with — the Royal Navy for longer than we might think. There are medieval references to women accompanying their husbands on voyages, including the Crusades, and to women serving as laundresses, cooks, nurses and prostitutes (possibly all four). Ladies of the Cinque Ports — Hastings, Dover, Sandwich, Romney and Hythe — were the most likely to sail. One source claimed that older women ‘washed the clothes and heads [of the sailors].... Women were as good as monkeys at getting rid of the fleas’.

Three are known to have camouflaged themselves as men or boys in the 1690s, helped by loose and rarely changed clothing and darkness below decks. They used horns as funnels for peeing. But, disguised or not, the numbers who served as crew were tiny: a mere 20 are recorded aboard RN ships between 1690 and 1899, and about 29 in merchant ships.

More commonly, especially in the 18th century, women and children would sail with their warrant officer or marine husbands, working as laundresses or in other supporting roles. As many as 75 could have been aboard the 33 ships at Trafalgar, though there were probably fewer, as non-essential personnel of both genders were disembarked before sailing. Nevertheless, Daniel Maclise’s 1859–64 painting ‘The Death of Nelson’ depicts women nursing the wounded on the *Victory*.

Formalised roles for women in the Navy, primarily nursing, developed from the end of the 17th century. The naval hospital at Greenwich was built in 1694 and by 1697 there were six hospital ships deploying around 60 women. This capacity grew during the next two centuries, despite intermissions, culminating in the creation of the Naval Nursing Service in 1884, a year after the Army had formed its equivalent and 30 years after the example set by Mrs. Eliza Mackenzie, the Navy’s answer to Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War. This became the Queen Alexandra’s Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS) which grew through two world wars and is with us still.

As in so many other fields, it took the brutal necessities of war to engender major change. What we know as the Wrens were established in 1917 as the Women’s Royal Naval Service, mainly to perform shore-based jobs that would free men to go to sea (whether they wanted to or not — quite often they didn’t). Under the redoubtable leadership of their first director, Katharine Furze, they willingly adopted the motto ‘Never at Sea’, and with equal willingness expanded their remit from domestic and clerical roles to include codes and communications, priming depth charges, maintaining searchlights, repairing hydro-

phones, despatch riding, driving, welding and lathe operating — anything, in fact, that the changing assumptions and values of the time permitted. As befitted the Senior Service, Wrens were usually seen as socially smarter and as more desirable assets than their Army and (later) RAF equivalents — albeit that the other services were often ahead of the Navy in female deployments.

Swingeing post-war cuts, however, put an end to the Wrens until 1939, when they were re-formed and allocated an even wider range of tasks, including at Bletchley Park and its intercept outstations. (An ex-Wren I knew — a charming and aristocratic lady — accidentally set light to one of the Bletchley huts. ‘Frightful fuss about it,’ she recalled.)

The second world war increased the overseas deployment of Wrens, paving the way for their continuing post-war existence and their modern sea-going roles. ‘Although progress was uneven, there were, from the 1970s, political and naval voices calling for Wrens to be fully absorbed into the Navy and subject to the Naval Discipline Act.’

This culminated with the 1989 West Report, which recommended that women should go to sea from 1990 and that the WRNS should merge with the Royal Navy one year later. It was contentious not only within the Navy but in the WRNS itself,

As many as 75 women could have been aboard the ships that fought at Trafalgar

where some preferred to remain a shore-based separate service. ‘It also meant spending scarce money on modifying ships. But it happened.’ By 2016 there were 2,740 serving women, representing 9 per cent of the Navy. They are fully combatant, some are in senior positions and all are now able (if qualified) to serve in submarines.

Jo Stanley sees her subject through a feminist prism, unsurprisingly, and is prone to a certain shade of received opinion: Eton is ‘arguably the most powerful institution on the planet’, and the UK is a ‘hypersexualised society’. However, she is fair-minded in her accounts of those stalwart older Wrens who did not agree that the modern Navy’s manifesto ‘embracing diversity and inclusion... maximises the operational effectiveness of the naval service’.

In the light of the disgraceful 2007 seizure of RN craft and personnel by Iranian gunboats, we might wonder whether the modern Navy is more concerned with diversity and inclusion than with the fighting spirit that made it feared and formidable for 200-plus years — but that’s another book.

A friend in need

Kate Webb

Go Went Gone

by Jenny Erpenbeck, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky
Portobello, £14.99, pp. 304

The title of Jenny Erpenbeck's *Go Went Gone*, and the autumnal tone of its beginning — a classics professor retires, leaving him at home raking leaves, mulling over memories of his wife and wondering about the body in a nearby lake — suggests that this will be a book of endings, something akin to Anita Brookner's stories of self-absorbed people in the twilight of their lives.

But Richard, now professor emeritus, proves to be a more unpredictable character. Unlike many of Brookner's loners, there is the strong force of history in him. A precarious beginning under fascism and war, then a life shaped by the GDR and its abrupt cessation in 1989, has left him and his circle of friends adrift in the new Germany. They have only memories of their vanished country and some sense that the place in which they now find themselves, with its advertised values of reason and law, is not all it's cracked up to be. For a start, Richard's pension is smaller than that of his West German compatriots. Not that he's complaining. As a child versed in 'proletarian internationalism', he's fully aware that, compared with many on the planet, he's well off: 'Richard knows he's one of the very few people in this world who are in a position to take their pick of realities.'

The question of what constitutes reality lies at the heart of Erpenbeck's writing. In *Go Went Gone* she is at pains to show that what is often taken to be universal can be tendentious or dogmatically insisted upon, despite what ought to be glaring limitations. The body submerged in the lake and Richard's interest in underground systems (escape routes from the Nazis, tunnels from the Middle Ages) suggest that beneath the 'vener' of reality, much in life is hidden or suppressed.

When Richard watches a news programme about a protest tent city built by refugees in the middle of Berlin's Oranienplatz, he realises that he has walked through the square without noticing this challenge to everyday life. As an academic, the recognition of his trammelled view, with its implicit lack of curiosity, rankles him. So with nothing else to do, he embarks on a project to discover where the refugees come from and what it is that they want.

At first he sits on a bench in the square and takes notes. Then the authorities make an agreement with the refugees to dismantle the camp. Some are relocated to an unused block in a nursing home near Richard, where he finds men on mattresses four or five to

Seagulls, Italian-style

[where engineering meets design] their creams and tans
a conscious colour statement, a finer, flashier glide,
a bigger entrance and a bigger entrancement,
volplaning wardrobes always newly back from the cleaners,

neither 'scroungers of the empyrean' nor 'nibblers of edible stars'
their minds on higher things (or lower things),
cashmere sleeves dangle-draped over their shoulders,
annulments in their man bags, foulard, eyewear, metal bangles.

—Michael Hofmann

a room, many depressed and sleeping in the middle of the day. But some are awake and — like Richard, with little to do and no way forward in their lives, since they are forbidden to work — they agree to be interviewed. Richard's questions seem detailed but beside the point — as if, rather than facing the immediate crisis in their lives, he's testing for humanity: 'Do people have pets?' 'What kind of place did you like to hide in as a child?'

These conversations produce a gentle comedy of cultural difference and, for Richard, a series of realisations. The first is how little, for all his classical education, he knows about the world the refugees come from, even though, as he reacquaints himself with the story of Black Athena, he is reminded that the roots of Western civilisation lie in North Africa. As he walked through the square without seeing the refugees, so he knew of these facts but never assimilated them. Only now, through his new friendships, does the knowledge become meaningful. That he is unaware of where many African countries are on the map, unfamiliar with their capitals and languages is, of course, an indictment not just of Richard but of Western ignorance in general: 'The American vice-president recently referred to Africa as a country.'

He becomes closer to the refugees, inviting them to his house, sharing meals and taking them to appointments with the authorities, during which he starts to understand how the law is stacked against them. The Dublin II treaty prevents the men from applying for asylum (Germany is not the first European country they arrived in), and the Berlin authorities retract their agreement.

Richard's dawning awareness brings to mind Ted Hughes's epiphany, the fruit of his engagement with East European dissidents, about the 'spoilt brats of Western civilisation... deprived of the revelations of necessity'. Erpenbeck's tone is not so dramatic: her clear, unshowy

prose never draws attention to itself, and at times her novel even reads like a primer, reflecting the way Richard learns, like a child, through reading and friendship, about how the world beyond him has shaped his own.

Yet this is a highly sophisticated work, about how blatant injustice (however disregarded) exists together with forces that lurk beneath the surface. At a birthday party for Richard, celebrated with old and new comrades, the light fades and everyone gathers round the fire. There are stories shared by all about guilt, regret and loss; memories that usually remain submerged, too unbearable to think about, but which surface here in the company of friends. This perhaps is the common ground which earlier socialist writers were intent upon, and the scene is relayed by Erpenbeck with extraordinary emotional power, her analytical skill now matched by a tenderness to human beings that remains utterly un sentimental.

At an earlier moment, Richard bemoans the fact that the loss of the GDR has meant the loss of grand ideas about humanity: now only individual action is possible. It is a sentiment that the East German writer to whom Erpenbeck seems most indebted, Christa Wolf, also expressed, saying she no longer believed in ideology, and after the fall of the Wall progress would only occur through pushes made at ground level. A cruel ending looms for the refugees, and they rise once more from their beds to organise another protest, remembering the dignity they found in the Oranienplatz resistance. They know their rooftop protest will not succeed, but as Angela Carter once observed, we organise to keep our spirits up.

The verdict on the refugees' case finally arrives and the question for Richard remains the old one: what is to be done? His answer, and the way he draws his old German friends in to help, suggests some reconciliation of the grand idea with individual action, a new kind of solidarity and a way forward.

Sex, lies and conductors

Norman Lebrecht on classical music's dirty secret

I once knew a great conductor who claimed that he never boarded a plane to a new orchestra without a tube of lube in his pocket. Just in case he got lucky (which he often did).

Conductors are migratory birds who fly where their agents point them, hopping from one hotel bed to the next. There is no shortage of bright young things on an orchestra's staff and besotted fans backstage who are open to a wink and the whisper of a room number. A maestro is never alone for very long.

Sex is one of the perks of conducting. Mostly, it's consensual. My middle-aged maestro would sit up half the night reading poetry to a young woman before he made anything so crass as a lunge. Down the years, there have been few complaints about maestro sex. Seduction techniques vary. An opera conductor I know makes eye contact at the first rehearsal with younger members of the chorus, one by one, until someone stares right back.

Inevitably, in so gregarious an activity as opera, everyone knows. They have always known. They knew that Wilhelm Furtwängler's secretary would bring a woman to his dressing room before a concert. They knew that Georg Solti was a Lothario at Covent Garden (he told me so himself). They knew that certain Italian maestros were too free with their hands, that Leonard Bernstein preferred young males, that an early music master was a philanderer.

They also knew that there were certain conductors with whom you did not go alone into a room. Interns were warned about them. Not always in time.

All this has tended to be seen in the musical world as a joke. And this has, on many occasions, given cover to greater abuses, which are only now coming to light.

The most serious case I know of is the soloist in her late teens who was summoned to the conductor's room in one of Europe's most famous halls an hour or so before a concert to discuss a few points in the score. She emerged a while later, sobbing uncontrollably. She had been raped, and she still had to go on stage, perform a concerto, and take a bow with her rapist. I have tried to persuade her to speak out, but she — understandably — wants to get on with her life and is probably still more than a little afraid that

the man who raped her can, after all these years, still damage her career. Several music insiders saw her come out of that green room. Nobody confronted the aggressor.

Because sex is taken for granted as a conductor's prerogative. Never an act of love, it is a raw and explicit expression of power. The deal is: sleep with the maestro, or you'll never work again.

And the threat is very real. A French soprano, Anne-Sophie Schmidt, has recently disclosed that, after she refused the persistent advances of Swiss conductor Charles Dutoit in the mid-1990s, work in her diary dried up for the next year. She is convinced that the conductor blacklisted her.

Dutoit, 81, was suspended from conducting last month after multiple allegations of sexual harassment dating from the 1980s to the past decade. The incidents, which his accusers allege took place in all sorts of

*There were certain conductors
with whom you did not go alone
into a room*

places including Dutoit's dressing room, a hotel elevator, a car, involve several cases of the conductor forcing himself on musicians. In one case, he 'shoved' his tongue down a singer's throat. In another rape is alleged. He has denied the reports, consulted his lawyers and vowed to clear his name. His former orchestras have promised independent investigations. Whatever the outcome of these inquiries, no one doubts that a conductor of Dutoit's rank — former music director in Montreal, Philadelphia and London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra — has executive power. To give one inoffensive example: in 1990, Dutoit installed his girlfriend Chantal Juillet — later his fourth wife — as concertmaster of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal. Such promotions are in the music director's gift.

Far more pervasive is the power of silence. An American administrator contacted me recently to report that, while he was a twentysomething music staffer at the Metropolitan Opera, the Met's long-serving music director James Levine approached him and 'stuck his hand down my pants'. The young man indicated that he was not interested.

From that day on, the young staffer was shut out of all music activity in the building.

No one, he says, wanted anything to do with him because Levine — or those around him — had put out word that he was persona non grata to the music director. Like a Premiership footballer who is benched by the manager, all he was ever told was 'you're not good enough'. The ostracised victim in this case had enough sense to get out and make his life far from the maddening Met. Others stay on in a state of demoralisation until they are unfit for work.

Levine was suspended from conducting at the Met last month after claims that he molested young men in Chicago, Boston and New York, which he denies. The allegations have not been tested in a court, and may never be resolved. What is undeniable, however, is that anyone at the Met who did not get on with Levine during the 41 years he was music director had absolutely no future in the place.

Abuses of power are not random or incidental. They are as routine in music as they are in Putin's Russia, where all authority flows from a short man with a little stick. It is rare for that authority to be challenged and rarer still for the challenger to survive.

Classical music conducts its business behind a screen of secrets, lies and euphemisms. A maestro is never absent without leave, only 'indisposed'. No maestro ever gets fired. He becomes Emeritus.

Truth gets buried beneath a dunghheap of flummery. The real reason for the recent departure of at least one classical performer in this country will not be publicly explained, even though it is well known backstage. The code of silence in classical music is as tight as Sicilian *omertà*. Speak out, and you're dead meat.

As the writer who exposed *The Maestro Myth* at book length a quarter of a century ago, I am encouraged that victims of sexual assault have now found the courage to breach the taboo of silence. But the denial is not over. Montreal, unaccountably, has yet to begin its investigation and the Met has made clear it may never publish its findings. Without a commitment to transparency, the likelihood of further abuse remains.

In 2000, when James Levine was named music director of the Verbier Festival Orchestra, whose players are as young as 16, I asked the festival's founder, Martin Engstroem, if he knew the risk he was tak-



Conduct unbecoming: clockwise from top left, Leonard Bernstein, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Charles Dutoit and James Levine

ing. He assured me that special precautions had been put in place. When the accusations against Levine came to light last month, Engstroem professed himself 'disturbed and saddened by these accusations'. Levine's successor at Verbier was none other than Dutoit. Engstroem would have been shocked again.

Now, let it be clear that many conductors lead exemplary and rather boring lives, their heads filled with musical minutiae and cast changes. Some are escorted at all times by closely observing wives. Among the more lascivious maestros, it is widely acknowledged that some are generous and tender-hearted. Solti was always sympathetic to

injustice in any institution where he worked and quietly supported dozens of hard-luck cases. No one ever accused him of taking advantage of women, any more than they did Mick Jagger or Roy Jenkins. I know sing-

The code of silence in classical music is as tight as Sicilian omertà

ers who said no to Solti and went on to work with him happily for years. Not all maestro sex is abusive.

At present, there are two frontline music directors who regard the workplace as their private casting couch without being accused of anything untoward. They may be more

careful in future but the compulsion will not abate because the cause is embedded deep in the maestro psyche.

One podium giant of pre-Viagra times told me he decided to retire from conducting the day his virility wilted. Without a sex drive, he could not face an orchestra. The relation of baton and penis is more powerful than many maestros are prepared to admit. For this to change, we need to see more women on the podium. Once the gender balance shifts, sex should be less of an issue.

Norman Lebrecht is author of The Maestro Myth: Great Conductors in Pursuit of Power.

Design

Hot wheels

Stephen Bayley

Ferrari: Under the Skin

Design Museum, until 15 April

Has a more beautiful machine in all of mankind's fretful material endeavours ever been made than a '60 Ferrari 250 Granturismo? Go to the Design Museum and decide.

I have driven many Ferraris and the experience is always unique. They are alive, demanding, feral, sometimes even violent or truculent. Addictive, too. Once, in Haverfordwest, I arrived sweating and puffing after seven hours in traffic. I parked the 246 GT at the hotel for a moment but then, unable to ignore the hot, seductive car, I got back in and drove up and down the coast road; up and down, up and down. Just because it was there.

Kierkegaard thought that 'the best demonstration of the wretchedness of life is obtained through a consideration of its glory'. Thus, the motor car. Heavy, expensive, wasteful, dangerous, but romantic too. The car is the ultimate analogue experience: the laws of nature made explicit with explosions and exhausts, forces and fears, sculpt-

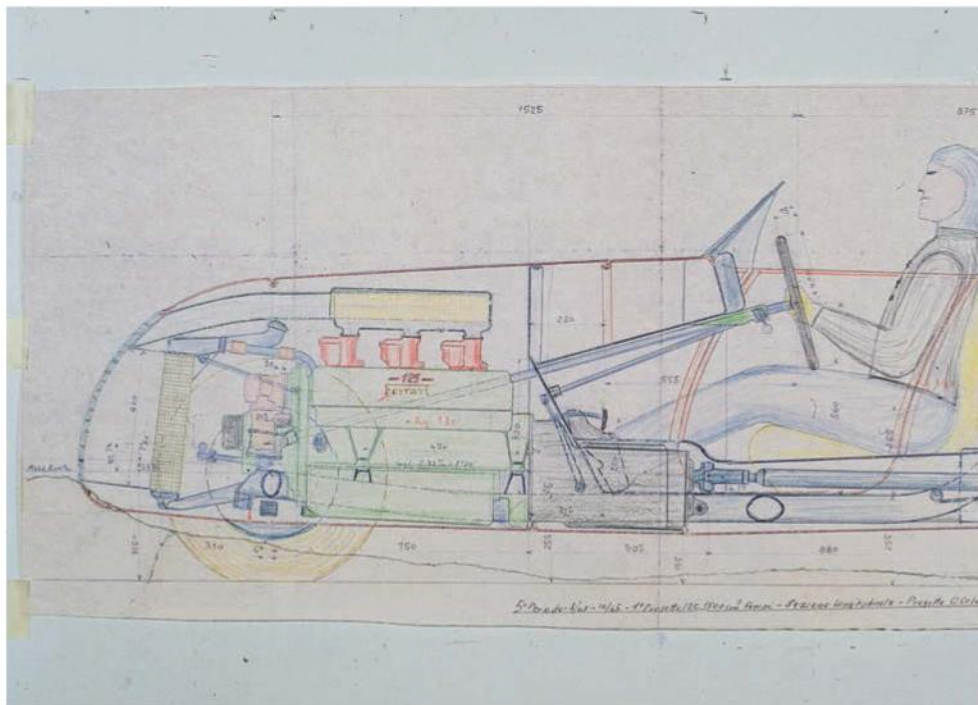
'I am not a designer,' Ferrari once said, 'but an agitator of men'

ed metal. And Ferrari is the ultimate car: a machine-for-driving-in conceived and executed without compromise.

But in this year of its 70th birthday, London, Paris and Oxford have announced plans to ban cars — or at least the oil-burning sort. As petrol cedes to electricity and brute analogue certainties cede to epicene digital abstractions, as driving becomes a gruelling chore, the Design Museum's Ferrari exhibition has an elegiac quality. Or it might have had, if executed a little differently.

What is Ferrari? One answer is: a symbol of Italy's post-war *ricostruzione*. The Vespa scooter and Fiat Cinquecento had similar roles, but were democratic forms of transport to mobilise peasants, women and priests. Ferrari was different: lordly and magnificently detached from the mundane, but nonetheless a superb demonstration of Italy's established national genius in craft and art. The part of Emilia-Romagna that Ferrari calls home has metal-bashing traditions going back to the Etruscans. Indeed, the name 'Ferrari' approximately means 'smith'.

Another answer is that the Ferrari story is a heroic adventure by an individual of singular, even sadistic, will. This was Enzo Ferrari, born in Modena in 1898. He finished fourth in his first motor race, a hill climb at Poggio di Berceto near Parma.



Draft of the first Ferrari car, 125 S, designed by Gioachino Colombo, 1945

Soon he was managing the Alfa Romeo racing team under the auspices of Scuderia Ferrari and the marque of this stable was the *cavallino rampante* (prancing horse) that Ferrari had slyly lifted from a first world war fighter ace. When Alfa Romeo frustrated his ambitions for a new car, he decided to build his own.

At the Ferrari factory in Maranello, they point out the five windows by the factory gate that meant the old man could keep constant interfering watch on the traffic. 'I am not a designer,' Ferrari once said, 'but an agitator of men.' Indeed, he was. He agitated widely. The mystique of Enzo Ferrari — remote, obstinate, forbidding, unsentimental, determined, manipulative — contributed powerfully to the mystique of the cars. Do machines have life? Of course they do.

Competition obsessed him. 'I have no interest in life outside racing cars,' he confessed. His love was machinery, not people. Remote? The racing driver Eugenio Castellotti explained that he was only allowed to meet Enzo himself after buying no fewer than seven of his racing cars. And so many racing drivers were killed in Ferraris that the *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, damned Ferrari as a 'Saturn' for destroying his children.

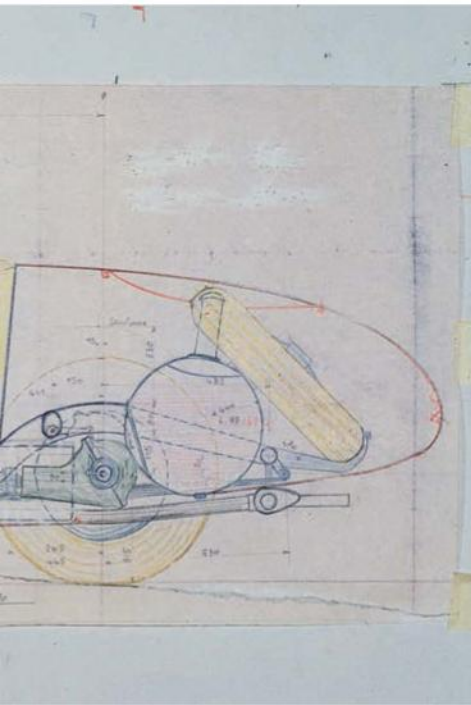
But these victims were always willing. From the beginning, clients were important. Two of the most famous were Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman. They well understood how Eros and Thanatos competed in motor racing. Bergman reconciled herself to Rossellini's dangerous need for speed when

she wrote: 'Forbidden things are always so desirable.' To this end, Rossellini gave Bergman a Ferrari as an anniversary present. She called it 'Growling Baby'. They took delivery in Rome and drove it to Stockholm's Grand Hotel in her native Sweden.

Crucial to the Ferrari story is the relationship with Pininfarina, one of the great *carrozzerie*, or coachbuilders, of Turin. The collaboration began in 1951 when Ferrari realised that his racing cars had to be consumerised for the public in order to pay for his racing through retail sales. A 2.6-litre 212 was shown at the Brussels Salon de l'Automobile in 1951. 'It gave,' according to one observer, 'the youth of the day something to dream about.' Exactly so.

This collaboration made metal sing. Until the 1973 Daytona, the first Ferrari manufactured in large numbers, almost every Ferrari was, sculpturally speaking, a reproduction of a Pininfarina idea: metal bashed over wooden formers by his henchman Sergio Scaglietti, following an original *disegno*, but each panel slightly different from its predecessor. Nowadays, Pininfarina has been sidelined and Ferrari design has been taken in-house under the charge of Flavio Manzoni who, in that curious way of the motor industry, once worked for proletarian Volkswagen and designed the very fine, but modest, Polo.

The design of this birthday exhibition, essentially a reinstallation of one floor of the Ferrari Museum in Maranello, is by Patricia Urquiola, a fashionable Milanese architect. There are superlative cars on display: an '87 replica of the very first 1947



COURTESY OF FERRARI

Radio Prick up your ears Kate Chisholm

On paper and on air, there's nothing to suggest that the Radio 4 series *Across the Red Line* will have sufficient listening power to draw you in so that once you've reached home and need to get out of the car you'll rush straight in to switch on the radio. The billing in *Radio Times* describes it simply as a 45-minute show in which the journalist Anne McElvoy 'invites figures on opposing sides of a political issue to listen to each other'. And that's exactly what it is. A pair of talking heads tossing about a topical football, guided by McElvoy, who has as her sidekick a conflict resolution expert, Gabrielle Rifkind, brought in to moderate the session if things get lively.

It's so spare a format — no music, no soundtrack — the accountants must be pleased (the only overhead being the provision of a studio with big mikes, and in this case, a quartet of armchairs). Yet it makes for riveting listening. In the first programme (still available on iPlayer) Hugh Muir, associate editor at the *Guardian*, was brought together with Charles Moore, of this magazine, to discuss their views on immigration, or more precisely whether it's OK to be wary of people from other backgrounds. Given their opposing circumstances and allegiances (Muir, the child of immigrant Jamaicans, was educated in east London; Moore is straight out of Eton and Oxbridge), there was not much hope of resolution, you might think. But under McElvoy's shrewd guidance (and the scrupulous editing of producer Sarah Shebbeare) this was not so much a series of hammer blows by a pair of contestants determined that their voice should be heard loudest and longest as an inquiry into why people think as they do, what makes them wary of each other, is that wariness justified.

As Rifkind said at one point, 'I don't think you need a conflict mediator.' Each was listening to the other. And for once on a discussion programme this didn't matter. Argument, conflict, tension was not what McElvoy was after. On the contrary, she was hoping to find answers, or at least a degree of understanding. Which is why halfway through the programme she moved her guests from the formality of a table strewn with microphones to those comfy chairs to change the angles of debate. Rifkind suggested that Moore and Muir should question where their arguments came from, what underpinned their thoughts and beliefs. As Muir said about Moore, no one is ever wary of him, makes assumptions about him, 'No one looks at you like that.'

But really this whole exercise was not

about talking so much as listening. 'Listening is very difficult,' Rifkind reminded Muir and Moore. 'We assume we are quite good at it, but listening is a muscle that needs training, and we don't do it that naturally.'

New Year's Day was the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frankenstein, or rather of his monster, created by Mary Shelley and now the epitome of all things we fear about progress and what science can unleash on an unsuspecting world. How Shelley came up with such an extraordinarily complex and far-seeing novel is still the stuff of magic and inspiration. Much is talked about that stormy night in June 1816 when the Shelleys visited their neighbour Byron at the Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva and were challenged by him to come up with a ghost story. Yet nothing quite explains the imaginative brilliance of the teenaged Shelley, or the way she expands her original short story into a three-volume novel of great pathos as well as nightmarish horror.

Frankenstein Lives! on Radio 4 (produced by Jane Long) took us back through the archives to trace the transformation of Shelley's vision into the monster we know today via stage plays, horror films, graphic novels, Boris Karloff, Herman Munster and co. 'I am the new Frankenstein,' announced Dr Christiaan Barnard after he completed the first 'successful' heart transplant oper-

'We assume we are quite good at it, but listening is a muscle that needs training'

ation in 1967, tapping into the unexpected afterlife of what was at first not a bestselling novel. Only when it was transformed into a stage play five years after it first appeared did Mary's monster enter the popular imagination. Its power lies in its 'air of reality', said Professor Sharon Ruston; this really could happen.

Our fears are not always fanciful, as the World Service made clear in *Pandemic* (produced by Ashley Byrne), which took us back to the flu outbreak of 1918–19. The virologist Professor John Oxford has been studying the epidemic for 30 years in the hope of finding out how it started and why it was so particularly devastating. It's calculated now that more than 50 million people died from the illness and that it reached every corner of the globe. Most weirdly, it was often young, fit people in their twenties and thirties who were most at risk; not as you might expect the elderly. It took just ten days for the outbreak to engulf South Africa. There was not enough wood for the coffins; many were buried in mass graves. 'If you heard someone sneeze, it would be spine-chilling.'

There was no better way to persuade us all to have the flu jab.

125 S and that very same '73 365 GTB 4 Daytona, the first Ferrari to be productionised. But there is also a cabinet of curios from the collection of Ronald Stern, including Enzo's own driving licence and the tragic Mike Hawthorn's helmet. Britain's first world champion drove a Ferrari. This confirms, if confirmation were needed, the occultish, jujitsu element of Ferrari worship. Like many aesthetic adventures, like religion, Ferrari is beyond rationality.

Emilia is the centre of Italian food production: Parma ham and Parmesan cheese

Rossellini gave Bergman a Ferrari as an anniversary present. She called it 'Growling Baby'

are headquartered up the road from Ferrari. So suffused is the region with ideas about food that Flavio Manzoni calls his design studio a 'cucina'. Indeed, he says that his latest car is a composition as dense as an egg, with shell and contents all indivisible. As if to prove a point about gastronomic connections, this latest car, the gorbliney LaFerrari Aperta on display in the Design Museum, belongs to Gordon Ramsay. But in egg terms the exhibition is a little underdone.

It is a delicious visual treat, but superficial rather than analytical, no matter what the 'under the skin' subtitle promises. On a recent visit to Maranello, Manzoni, an architect, told me: 'We follow the function, but we are artistic, sculptural and beautiful.' Despite or because of the glories on display, the mystery of beauty remains intact. Perhaps as it should.



Americans in Paris: Imogen Poots as Abby and James Norton as Zack in *Belleville*

Theatre

The price of success

Lloyd Evans

Belleville

Donmar Warehouse, until 3 February

Things I Know to be True

Lyric Hammersmith, until 3 February

A pattern emerges. A hot American playwright, dripping with prestigious awards, is honoured in London with a transfer of their best-known work. And it turns out to be all right. Not bad. Nothing special. The latest wunderkind to wow London is Amy Herzog (five plays performed, six awards received), whose marital bust-up drama *Belleville* is set in a glamorously derelict corner of Paris.

Abby and Zack, both 28, are newlywed Americans trying to shore up the wreckage of their European gap year. Abby wanted to learn French but has stopped attending classes. Instead, she's studying yoga although the lessons are regularly cancelled. And her acting career seems to have stalled. She's still grieving for her deceased mum and fretting about her pregnant sister while indulging in long, needy conversations with her widowed

dad. Her husband, Zack, is a bigger mess. He works for Médecins Sans Frontières but his porn habit and his weed addiction mean that he spends most of his afternoons sprawled across the ethnic scatter cushions in a post-orgasmic daze. He's behind with the rent and saddled with secret debts, and he keeps burning up more and more precious money in the hash pipe that he shares with his landlord. Can such a basket case really hold down a hospital job? And why hasn't Abby spotted the looming disaster?

The script evolves as a series of revelations, of escalating severity, which eventually bring the characters crashing down. It's one of the simplest off-the-peg designs available to a dramatist but it takes a master (like Arthur Miller in *All My Sons*) to prevent the play from slithering into a sequence of predictable shocks and jolts. The actors (James Norton and Imogen Poots) are sophisticated, charming and gorgeous to look at. And Herzog's dialogue is funny and smartly observed, but this is a mid-career piece by a writer who needs to develop her craft in new directions. Alas, her trophy collection has driven her into the university system where she works as a creative writing lecturer. And once you enter the teaching business you quit the learning business. It can't

be helped. Posing as an expert before a class of beginners is bound to feed your sense of omniscience. And with each passing year, as the age gap between novice and guru widens, your estimate of your own brilliance increases. Herzog will find it impossible to explore her talent because she's burdened with prizes that affirm her status as a maestro. These awards and honours never seem to expire. They just keep killing playwrights.

Australian writer Andrew Bovell, co-author of the 1992 movie *Strictly Ballroom*, has written a family melodrama, *Things I Know to be True*, set in an Adelaide suburb. We meet four grown-up children who can't escape the baleful influence of their bullying, small-minded parents. Dad is a retired car mechanic. Mum is a brutally sanctimonious nurse who believes her duty is to make her children cry 'so they understand pain'. She fulfils her responsibilities with sadistic gusto. When her teenage daughter has a fling with a Spanish criminal she torments the poor girl by revealing her humiliation to her siblings. Her eldest daughter wants to quit a loveless marriage and she pounces

These awards and honours never seem to expire. They just keep killing playwrights

venomously: 'Did some guy bored with his wife look twice at you and make you feel you were more than a mouse?' Her son expresses a desire for a sex change and she bans him from the house. 'When you come back as a woman I will look for the son in her face and mourn his loss,' she says nastily. Nor is her anger confined to her kids. 'I'd bash him to death with a back of a shovel,' she says of her husband, 'if I had to spend all day with him. And then I'd kill myself with boredom.' The husband is just as charmless and hysterical. He subjects his son to a tirade for buying a 'European car'. And when he's accused of embezzling money, Dad's response is to beat him up.

The play is staged with artful blandness. A blue-orange lighting scheme, the oldest platitude in the visual lexicon, is achieved with dozens of golden bulbs offset by azure accents. Each scene ends with a graceful dance that offers a welcome break from the ceaseless jabbering of the script. The play expects us to sympathise with all the characters, including the hideous parents, but it feels manipulative and partisan. The parents came of age in the 1970s when the liberalising breakthroughs of the 1960s had begun to reach the general population. It seems inconceivable that that enlightened decade could have produced such a pair of dogmatic neo-Victorian crybabies. It may flatter a younger generation to imagine that their problems — divorce, debt, gender angst — are compounded by the hostility and prejudice of their parents' generation. But it just isn't true.

Television

Mash-up of all mash-ups

James Delingpole

It's a terrible thing for a TV critic to admit but I just don't know what to make of *Britannia*, the new Sky Atlantic drama set during the Roman invasion of Britain, scripted by Jez Butterworth, starring a top-notch cast including David Morrissey, Zoë Wanamaker and Mackenzie Crook, and heavily touted as the next *Game of Thrones*.

Is it really in the *Thrones*'s league? I'd say not. You remember how *Thrones* started, all those seasons ago: the scouting party in the creepy frozen wood; the dead child with milky-blue glowing eyes; the shockingly draconian punishment meted out by Ned Stark to the party's sole survivor. Within the first ten minutes it was all there: the gnawing tension, the 'anyone can die' cruelty and horror. But perhaps most important of all was the absolute seriousness. Here was a swords-and-sorcery epic determined never to sell itself short through flippancy or self-parody.

Britannia, on the other hand, can never stop smirking at its own irreverence, its awkwardness of tone, its defiant inauthenticity. Yes, it begins with an actual historical

invasion led in AD 43 by the general Aulus Plautius, but everything else is up for grabs, including the landscape of southern England. The coastal shots are filmed in Wales, the sylvan interiors — featuring a craggy Celtic fortress built around a lake that's a very un-English shade of blue — were shot in the Czech Republic.

These topographical infelicities aren't a dealbreaker. But they are an odd choice for a series scripted by a writer who, thanks to plays such as *Jerusalem*, has become arguably Albion's greatest, maddest celebrant since William Blake. 'This is us! This is where

Butterworth is arguably Albion's greatest, maddest celebrant since William Blake

we came from! Aren't we mad? Aren't we great?' he seems to be telling us. Yes. So why shoot it somewhere so recognisably not where we came from?

Then there's the language. No one expects the characters to speak in Celtic or Latin — though the Druids have been given a special, weird tongue — but Butterworth is at such pains to make everything so colloquial and modern and kid-friendly that you feel you could almost be watching an episode of *Merlin*. 'Wow!' says the pubescent-girl, Arya Stark-wannabe character. 'I'll get me torque,'

a Britannic princeling says with an almost-knowing-grin to camera. 'Fuck off back to Rome!' his Dad tells an envoy. There's lots of first-class swearing in *Thrones* too, of course, but it's there to make it more earthy and real, not to remind you that this is all a fantastical pastiche and you're not meant to take anything too seriously.

It's harder to fault Butterworth on the Ancient Britons — the Druids especially — because very little is known about them. In fact, of the latter the only eyewitness accounts are by Cicero, who met a single Druid who came to Rome, and Julius Caesar, whose stories about 20-year training courses and human sacrifice may well have been heavily embellished for propaganda purposes.

Butterworth has naturally taken full advantage of this. His Druids are weird, heavily scarred and tattooed — emaciated barely human creatures with huge, acid-head pupils, resembling a cross between Gollum and the crusties at a mid-1990s Goa trance rave. They scamper like baboons between cairns of human skulls and suck on hallucinogenic bongos and have visions and practise arcane rituals.

Meanwhile the Ancient Britons, as luck would have it, are proto-feminists, with a lot of the girls at least as good at war fighting as the men (some with bow skills to match



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Legolas', others capable of beating Roman legionaries in sword fights: imagine!), and are not only hot, with fabulous breasts, but feisty and articulate too with tremendous leadership skills and charisma far greater than that of most of the men. Lots of stupid critics will put a red tick by this with the marginal scrawl: 'Strong female characters.' I'm not complaining; just noting.

No doubt, as the series progresses we'll get so into the characters — the hate triangle between Morrissey's Roman general and the two rival chieftains played by Wanamaker and Kelly Reilly; the light-relief subplot involving the Arya-ish girl and her smelly, God-possessed, outlawed-Druid guardian; Mackenzie Crook channelling pagan demons — that it all becomes part of our weekly entertainment furniture.

Till then, what we've got to keep us going is the mash-up of all mash-ups: *The Eagle of the Ninth* meets *The Wicker Man* meets Sláine (the Celtic barbarian from *2000 AD*) meets *King Lear* meets *Apocalypse Now* and the *Morte d'Arthur* at Woodstock, with Donovan's 'Hurdy Gurdy Man' archly chosen as the soundtrack. As my historian chum Tom Holland rightly notes, this is a drama which, if you want, you could easily watch in a state of fuming pedantry. Or you can do what I plan to do, which is put my critical faculties on hold, fire up the carrot chillum, and enjoy the crazy trip.

Opera

Up the revolution

Richard Bratby

The Return of Ulysses

Royal Opera at the Roundhouse, in rep until 21 January

Curlew River

St Bartholomew the Great

Spoiler alert: the final image of John Fulljames's production of Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses* at the Roundhouse is haunting. Ulysses (Roderick Williams) and Penelope (Christine Rice) stand facing each other at last, arms outstretched. But Penelope is on terra firma. Ulysses stands on the revolving walkway that has served as the stage throughout most of the evening. And though Monteverdi's music has found stillness, the stage continues to revolve, carrying him away from his beloved — boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

Or something. Like many of this production's most striking ideas, it's poetic in the moment, but doesn't really work once you step back. A metaphor for the alienating effect of war and exile? That might explain why Telemachus is huddled nearby,

apparently shell-shocked. But throughout the show, in Samuel Boden's brightly sung performance, he's been the embodiment of sunny assurance, striding about bare-chested in a blond wig as he gives his mother far too much information about Helen of Troy. A community chorus sings with vigour, dressed in headscarves and blankets. Fulljames suggests that they're refugees, and Penelope and Melantho (Francesca Chie-jina) distribute water to huddled masses who moments later are cheerfully dancing with the rapacious suitors. Talk about mixed messages. And of course, there's that final image of estrangement, when everything in the music and the plot pulls towards blissful reunion.

But it's handsomely done, and the Royal Opera has given careful thought to the basically insurmountable problems of opera in the round. As the outer walkway revolves, so the orchestra, placed centrally, turns slowly in the opposite direction. Nods to the venue's circus heritage — balloons representing Eumaeus's sheep burst with a comical bleat, and Minerva (Catherine

As Ulysses Williams managed to look regal even when straddling a bald man in a fat suit

Carby) and Telemachus whizz round on a tandem — nicely pointed up the moments of humour in Monteverdi's light-footed, endlessly shifting emotional continuum. Some singers appeared to be wearing microphones, but they didn't sound like it. The droll mock-heroics of Christopher Cowell's translation ('She stays inscrutable/ Her heart immutable') were mostly audible without recourse to the surtitles, and it's actually quite fun to hear the Northern line rumbling underneath.

The cast is splendid, too: eloquent voices, well-matched to character, whether Chie-jina's sparky Melantho, David Shipley's resonant bass as the suitor Antinous, Mark Milhofer's plaintive Eumaeus or Catherine Carby, radiant with authority as Minerva. Susan Bickley as the servant Eurycleia is pretty much the definition of luxury casting, and the quiet pathos of Stuart Jackson's singing was a discomfiting contrast to his fat-suited buffoonery as Irus. Sadly, Christine Rice was indisposed and unable to sing; she mimed the role of Penelope, while Caitlin Hulcup sang the part with lovely shaded expression from amid the theorbos and cornetts of the orchestra.

More than ever, then, this was Ulysses' show, and Roderick Williams combined clear, often impassioned singing with a charisma that made it plausible that he was a hero beloved of the Gods. Wiry and energetic in action, and aching expressive in his final scenes with Penelope, he managed to look regal even when straddling a bald man in a fat suit. Supported by Christian Curnyn's

lyrical, subtly coloured conducting, his vocal performance at times approached chamber music. This *Return of Ulysses* is about travelling hopefully, rather than arriving. If it's ultimately frustrating, there are still treasures along the way.

It's clearly the season for site-specific operas, though a production of Britten's *Curlew River* in the church of St Bartholomew the Great does at least begin with the advantage that Britten actually intended it to be performed in a church. A slightly damp atmosphere is written into its free-floating melodic lines, and the drama opens and closes with the all-male cast singing the plainchant 'Te lucis ante terminum' while vanishing into the shadows. That's exactly what happened in this debut production by Ante Terminum, a new company who apparently love *Curlew River* so much that they've incorporated it into their name.

They placed the audience on either side of the nave, separated by a milk-white expanse of polythene sheet — the river itself, traversed by the performers over the piece's 70-minute span. The cast wore black robes and pale make-up, and director Peter Thickett moved them deliberately around the space, so that when Richard Robbins's Madwoman broke the pattern, shaking with emotion, the effect was powerful. But then, *Curlew River* is based on Noh theatre. It's meant to be stylised. With fresh young voices, and some refined instrumental playing under Frederick Waxman, the music — and Britten's sense of dramatic pace — did the rest. Well, almost: Ben Bevan's gruff, rich-toned humanity as the Ferryman supplied the grit around which this little pearl of a production coalesced. Atmospheric and sensitively performed, its emotional impact was out of proportion to its scale. It'll be interesting to see what Ante Terminum does next.

Cinema

A woman of substance

Deborah Ross

The Post

12A, Nationwide

Steven Spielberg's *The Post*, which dramatizes the *Washington Post*'s publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, doesn't exactly push at the frontiers of storytelling. It's told straight and in a familiar way. Here are the journalists furtively working through top-secret government papers in a smoke-choked room for the public good. (There were no empty pizza boxes in this instance, but there could have been, if you get my drift.) Here's the government trying to stop them. Here's the newspaper rolling off the press, and everyone clapping. And so on. But



Have they got news for you: Tom Hanks as Ben Bradlee and Meryl Streep as Katharine Graham in The Post

it does star Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep, engaged in a kind of dance as the paper's editor and proprietor, and you just can't argue against Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep. You can try, but it's likely you won't get very far. Plus, it's a bit of a Trojan horse, as it cleverly smuggles in another film; a film about a woman coming into her own, which has to be satisfying. And is.

At the outset, the *Post* is a local paper of not much significance, which doesn't suit ambitious Ben Bradlee (Hanks), who is probably best described as 'a newspaper man'. The biggest story on their books is the upcoming wedding of Nixon's daughter but their style reporter, Judith, has been banned because she attended the wedding of his other daughter, and was catty in print. (We never meet Judith, alas, but I did like the sound of her.) Meanwhile, Katharine Graham (Streep), who had inherited the paper after the suicide of her husband, who in turn had inherited it from Graham's father, has yet to find her feet. She drops papers, knocks over chairs, is easily flustered. She is surrounded by men who won't take her seriously and cut her out of conversations. If death by mansplaining were an actual possibility, she'd have keeled over very early on.

However, life at the paper perks up when the *New York Times* obtains a government report showing that successive US administrations had known that Vietnam was an unwinnable war, but sent young men to their deaths anyhow. They publish on the same day the *Post* leads with the wedding of Nixon's daughter, having obviously dispatched a different reporter

You just can't argue against Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep. You can try, but it's likely you won't get very far

— bring back Judith! — and Bradlee goes crazy because he didn't get the story. But after a court order effectively closes down the *Times*, the *Post* secures its own copy of the report and has to decide whether or not it is too risky to publish.

We know what will happen. Even for those not well versed in the Pentagon Papers specifically, we know what will happen because what happens is what always happens in films of this type. So *The Post* is never especially dramatic or suspenseful, and it is sometimes overly perfunctory — for example, we can tell the papers are 'top secret' because they have 'top secret' written all over them — just as the script

(by Liz Hannah and Josh Singer) is sometimes heavy-handed with its message about the freedom of the press, as timely as that is. But, on the whole, it's solidly handled, the narrative is punctuated by real recordings of Nixon going apoplectic on the phone, which has to be fascinating (and is), and there are some terrific scenes, as when Graham has to betray a friend. There are some nice little touches too. Bradlee's young daughter, for instance, makes a killing selling lemonade to the reporters holed up in that smoke-filled room which isn't strewn with pizza boxes, but could have been. I don't know why this tickled me, but it did.

True, Bradlee does feel rather generic, but Hanks brings warmth, particularly to the central relationship between him and Graham, which evolves as she evolves; as she journeys from a widowed socialite to a person of guts, capable of showing the men what's what. (Especially satisfying.) And Streep is terrific. Her Graham is dithering but never an idiot, commanding even though she's often invisible to those who surround her, and phenomenally relatable. This isn't a film to go absolutely nuts about, but it's sound, does the job, and you can't argue against Streep and Hanks. You just can't.

NOTES ON...

Padel

By Mark Palmer

When we arrived, we discovered that our villa had a padel court. Few of us had seen one before and no one knew the rules, so we invented them as logically as we could and got on with it. Within a couple of sets we were hooked. Some people started to get up early to practise; others began watching matches on YouTube. Specialist websites were consulted to establish the basics, such as how many underarm serves you get (the answer is two) and whether the ball is out if it hits the back wall without bouncing first in the court. (Absolutely).

What a game! It's a cross between real tennis, regular tennis, squash and ping pong. The racquets are solid and stringless and you can play it to a high standard well into your dotage because it's all about strategy and guile rather than muscle and smashing the ball as hard as you can.

Indeed, smash it and the chances are that the ball will bounce off the back or side walls in such a way that your opponent will have all the time in the world to place it just where he wants.

Among the Spanish, padel (known as paddle tennis in North America) is more popular than tennis, despite their adulation of Rafa Nadal. Next year its international federation intends to present a strong case



No strings: padel is played with a solid racquet

for its inclusion as an Olympic sport. Certainly, the rallies are Olympian, with the pros trading 60-80 shots back and forth over the net, and there's none of this bouncing the ball for ages before a serve. We don't have many pros yet in this country. In fact, there are just three, led by our number one player Richard Brooks, 36, who recently signed a sponsorship deal with Adidas.

'Oh, so it's a game for older folk,' is the refrain I hear pinging my way. Well, no, actually. The British female number one is

Tia Norton and she's just 14. The trouble is there are still only 44 courts in Britain. The word is spreading, though. The Harbour Club in London has ditched one of its tennis courts in favour of three padel ones, and over at the posh Hurlingham Club a notice has gone up telling members that it intends to build more courts as a priority because it's a 'sport for our times'.

And it is a sport for our times: more aerobic than normal tennis but far easier on the joints; wonderfully social because you only play doubles; serving is dead easy and courts are nothing like as expensive as those for tennis — one can fit neatly into a corner of a modest garden.

In the 19th century, a version of padel was played on British cruise ships, but it wasn't until the 1960s that a Mexican called Enrique Corcuera invented the game as we know it. Corcuera was friends with Alfonso de Hohenlohe, who was persuaded to build two courts at his famous Marbella Club, and that's how it got started in Spain.

I've just had my first lesson with Britain's number four player, Tom Murray, who is also executive director of British Padel Association. He said my prospects were 'promising', and, with the sport's popularity growing, I'm pleased to be ahead of the game for a change.

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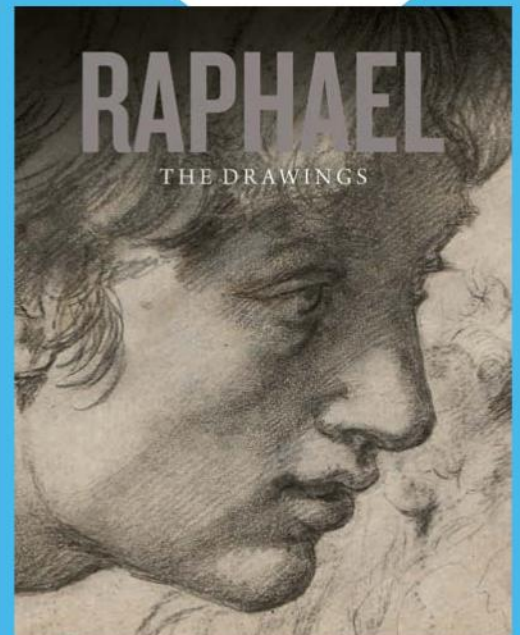


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'We can have an efficient health service or one that no one complains about. We can't have both'
— Rory Sutherland, p61

LIFE

High life Taki



I spent the better part of two sunny days indoors writing about authenticity for a Greek magazine, a strange subject in view of how inauthentic politics are in that Brussels-run south-eastern outpost dotted with islands. Mind you, what is taking place in the West makes Greek politics seem ideal by comparison. The witch hunt is on and it's as phoney as the one that burnt those poor women in Salem long ago. Thank God for the French actress who injected some badly needed truths into Hollywood's bullshit. Catherine Deneuve signed an open letter published in *Le Monde* attacking the wave of 'puritanism' sparked by the allegations against Harvey and co.

It was about 15 years or so ago that I took part in a debate about whether Britain would be better off siding with Paris or Washington where foreign policy was concerned. The egregious George W. Bush was in the White House and Washington's foreign policy was being run by neocons taking direct orders from Tel Aviv. The debate moderator was Peter Jay, as pompous as he was overbearing and taking himself as seriously as his former wife Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame, whom she had an affair with while Jay was our ambassador to DC. When my turn came, I said that London should follow Paris for the simple reason that Paris had Catherine Deneuve, Juliette Binoche and Irène Jacob, whereas America had Hillary Clinton, Shirley MacLaine and Jane Fonda. I think that won it for my side. At a French embassy drinks party afterwards, the ambassador thanked me for bringing up France's women, as well he might. He couldn't very well bring up the country's fighting men in world war two, could he?

Catherine Deneuve has once again come to our rescue. They're going after everyone, even that talented Bruce Weber, the photographer, who took pictures of me way back when I was almost cute for Andy Warhol's *Interview*. When I asked him to empty the room because posing in front of people made me nervous, he did so and nothing

unprofessional happened. Perhaps I wasn't his type. Actually, both Bruce Weber and Mario Testino know whom to pounce on, and they pounce on those who are inclined that way. But try and tell that to the Torquemadas who now run the Inquisition.

It's the hypocrisy that gets me. If those screaming the loudest about women's rights being trampled by ghastly men were looking in the right place, they would be focusing on the alleged behaviour of XXXTentacion, a rapper who is topping the charts with his first album, *17*. XXXTentacion apparently slugged his pregnant girlfriend, which I think would be slightly worse than asking for a massage and a shower, golden or not. He denies the charge, but does that explain the lack of outcry? What about Tay-K, another black hip-hop 'artist' who is facing a pair of murder charges, which he denies? Is Tay-K better than Harvey because he's accused of only two murders whereas Harvey harassed tens of women? And there's always another 'artist', 6ix9ine, who is still working after pleading guilty in 2015 to the use of a child in a sexual performance.

Now I read that the divine Rebecca Hall has announced she will never work with Woody Allen again. Rebecca is not the usual airhead actress, yet she's turned against Woody on the word of his adopted daughter Dylan. My, my, hell hath no fury like Mia Farrow being dumped by Woody for another adopted daughter, who is now Madame Allen. What I don't get is why rappers, who are mostly black, are given a pass by the media, whereas white producers and directors, many of whom are Jewish, are thrown to the lions and their work tethered to the accusations against them? We are already giving rappers the benefit of the doubt by calling them artists. What's more, not only are the criminals among them being signed to lucrative contracts, but the likes of Tay-K who is in jail awaiting trial, has signed a recording contract while in the cooler. Go figure, as no rapper says any longer.

The terrible *New York Times* headlined the crimes of rappers against women as 'Rap's misconduct'. Oh, is that what it is. Simple misconduct. Your loathing for white heterosexual males is showing, you old bag. Just as obvious is the shameless sycophancy on the part of the rest of the media towards those trained seals, which is what I consider most actors to be. Who the hell cares what Meryl Streep thinks? Is her opinion about male oppressors more valid than that of a secretary working in Pakistan, or women in Saudi Arabia in gen-

eral? If these trained seals were campaigning truthfully to change the system, would they be worrying about models making millions in the West or dirt-poor women in Arab countries? Shut the hell up and go back to balancing balls on your snouts, says the arch-feminist Taki.

Oh, for the good old days before Eros was stripped of sex. When everyone flirted and no one took Hollywood seriously except those bums who have always run Hollywood. One day we will speak in a similar manner about the EU. It will be exposed for the undemocratic den of thieves it is, and for the undemocratic way it's run, and this will start when the EU tries to muscle in on the democratically elected Polish government. Poland, Hungary and Austria, hold your ground against the fascist EU, and don't be surprised if Harvey produces a movie starring Kevin and directed by Woody against you three. It will be called *Penance*.

Low life Jeremy Clarke



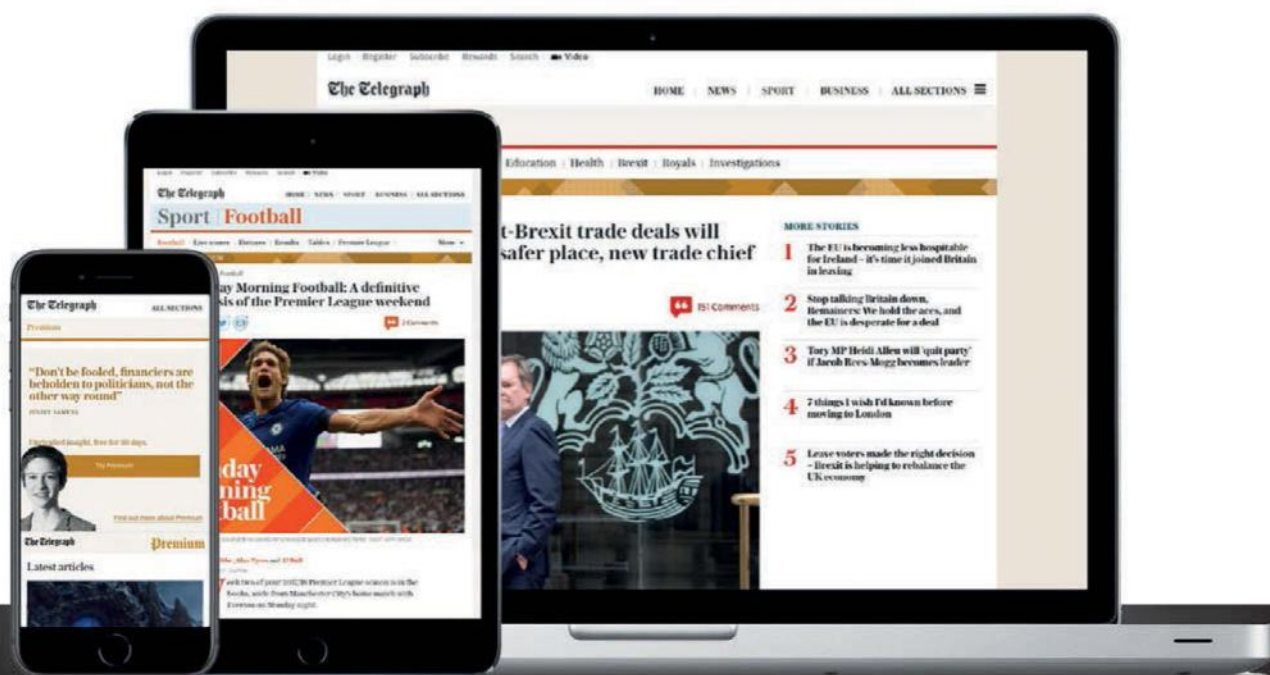
In France, or in Provence at least, polite rule number one is to say hello. You must offer a distinct 'good day' or 'good day, ladies and gentleman', for example, when joining the queue in the baker's or at the post office, or when getting on a bus or entering a bar. A nod or a wink just isn't enough. Neither is a self-effacing silence. 'Bonjour' is the password.

Since I have discovered it, I have been jovially saluting everyone right, left and centre. The inexplicable hostility I used sometimes to encounter in shops has stopped, and moreover the French have revealed themselves, incredibly, to have a fine sense of humour, which is roughly the opposite of my impression before I began to say hello indiscriminately. Admittedly, it can be a strain at times, this courtly republican spirit of acknowledging the existence of one's fellow human beings at all times and under every circumstance, without irony, as though we were all living in a 1950s holiday camp, but it keeps you on your toes.

I have been in conscious possession of the

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magic word for only a few weeks. But I am using it with growing confidence and occasionally with a degree of virtuosity. Most wonderfully, those bars that I previously avoided because the regulars seemed to react angrily to my silent reticence (which I had erroneously imagined to be a form of politeness) now welcome me into the fold with open arms.

This happened again last Sunday. Driving back from a boozy lunch at dusk, we passed through a dripping, deserted medieval hill village. 'Fancy another drink?' I said. She did, she said. The bar was located in a narrow obscure cobbled street. I'd been in once before, in the days before I knew the password. My reception, as I remembered it, had been chilly. A light was on. We went in, bonjouring and bonsoiring like mad to the barman and to the cat. 'Rotten night. Two pastis,' I said to the barman. 'Is that your girlfriend?' he said, looking over at her as he poured. 'I'm still trying,' I said. 'That's good, because I myself am looking for a mistress,' he said. 'With your permission I will also try.' After he'd added water to our drinks, he winked at me and tipped an extra slug of spirit on top of mine because he perceived that I was drunk but in a good way.

Then a fat man of about 40 with broken trainers came in and I bonsoired him half to death. 'I'm an orphan,' this man explained after he'd slumped down on a chair and got his breath back. 'Mother dead. Father dead. I was a small boy,' he added, holding up four tragic fingers. He related the story of his sad life. Unfluent in French, I found most of it incomprehensible. It sounded thoroughly miserable, though. If the barman had heard the story 100 times before, it still gripped him. He hugged himself tightly as he listened.

Then what looked like the village drunk came in — a young woman in a baseball cap with no front teeth. I mitrailled her with greetings. She was from Tahiti, she said, and she had an interesting tattoo on her back. Would I like to see it? Absolutely, I said. She began peeling back the shoulder of her purple puffa jacket. But she had on too many layers and getting them off was too laborious, so she gave up. Then a skinny Arab lad entered, took us all in at a shrewd glance, was visibly amused, ordered coffee, and pulled up a chair beside us. After that he sat with his elbows on his knees looking at the floor, listening to what was being said, and smiling to himself.

I bought more drinks, including the present company in the round. The simple offer of a drink rendered the fat orphan speechless and confused. Recovering slightly, he chose a scotch and coke and offered me his hand for a handclap with a touching vertical forearm. He had tears in his eyes. Then he presented me with his card. It gave his occupation as personal trainer specialising in 'muscultation'. The Tahitian woman was also enormously grateful. She offered up her bemused alcoholic face to be kissed and I kissed it passionately all over. The barman

looked me solemnly in the eye and thumped himself on the heart with his fist.

And so we went on: the orphan explaining to us his presence in the world; the young Muslim smiling down at the floor; the barman bestowing benisons of alcohol and love, and blowing kisses from across the bar at my woman; while from time to time I made a point of going over to the Tahitian alcoholic and kissing her all over her mad face.

Real life Melissa Kite



A vet has accused me of a 'hate crime' for making a joke about vets. On the basis that everything is a hate crime, I am not getting too upset.

But it does seem to be the case that jokes are becoming a liability. The sort of complaints I used to get were from lefty bloggers calling me subversive for daring to mock an organic café in Balham that purported to serve locally foraged ingredients. There were also some poor souls on Twitter who said I had worsened their gluten intolerance by making jokes about wheat.

By and large, though, people have been wonderful and responded to my jokes by saying, 'Oh ha ha, yes, very funny. Some of this is in bad taste, but let's all suspend the capacity to fake hurt that we are being told to cultivate in the age of outrage and treat ourselves to a damn good laugh.'

This vet, however, was so upset at me making a joke about vets in a recent column that he not only wrote in to complain, he rang the switchboard of this and several other publications looking for me, and swore at various people down the phone.

We live in a post-joke world, as a character on *Family Guy* observed.

I don't suppose the equality brigade will turn their noses up at a vet who claims that his bogus right not to be insulted has been violated. They'll leap at the chance to champion any mildly discomforted party who has gone energetically out of their way to take offence at something that was meant to be funny by interpreting it as mind-numbingly literally as possible.

'Oh dear, sir,' they'll say. 'You read a column by a woman in which she made a joke about vets being expensive and, oh crikey me, you are a vet, you say? And you're not expensive? Oh, you *are* expensive. But you're still upset.

'Well, of course. It's awful for you. You've

dedicated yourself to curing animals for large fees and you've had it thrown back in your face. She's insulted your veterinary dignity. How bad do you feel on a scale of one to ten? You don't mind me calling you sir, do you? If you would prefer me to address you as Mrs, Miss, Ms, Om, or perhaps They — if you're multi-gendered — I'm happy to do so. Can you quantify the hurt the joke caused you? Do you feel abused? It's best if you feel abused. Then we can give you a Twitter hashtag.'

I bet the cold callers will catch on to this soon. 'Hello, we understand you've encountered a joke made about a grouping you identify with. Would you like to make a claim? Well, think back. Are you sure you haven't been the butt of a joke recently? Maybe in the past six months? We can go back further if you like.'

This sort of humourless reaction to jokes used to be quite rarefied. But every week, more and more people cross the line to go over to the dark side. Offence is power.

And it's not just the vet. My local GP surgery emailed recently demanding to know whether it was true, as they had heard, that I had made a joke about their waiting times. It was. I had intimated that I was so useless on the computer — that it would cost so much to pay my tech guy to help me crack my forgotten username and password to use the GP booking website — that I ended up going private. The joke was most-

We live in a post-joke world, as a character on Family Guy observed

ly on me, I thought. But a doctor's surgery writes to complain, and what have I got to say for myself? 'Can I have an appointment please?' perhaps.

I think the problem is that in the post-joke era, people increasingly want you to entertain them by making jokes that are in no way connected to them. However, jokes are like the bottle in spin the bottle. Sooner or later it is going to point to you. If we want humour to survive, we all need to be on the wrong end of a joke every now and then, because someone has to be.

I could always explain that in the bit of the column where I said 'my vet is the last good vet on the planet', I was making an ironic statement. I was using exaggeration to pass comment on an inherent truth. But maybe I should get with the times and ditch the irony. Perhaps I could try and tell you about my travails in a literal way. For example:

This week, the kitchen company suddenly started charging me for things for which I thought I had paid. The builder says it is always like this. A spokesman for The Kitchen Manufacturer's Association said: 'It is not always like this, it is like this 87.3 per cent of the time.'

This new non-offensive artistic venture won't be entertaining, but it will be completely fair by boring everyone equally.

The turf

Robin Oakley



I have never been one for system betting but one little piece of guidance returns to my mind at the start of every year: back Nicky Henderson's horses at Kempton in the run-up to the Cheltenham Festival. His runners always do well at the Thameside track, although that is not the only reason why the champion trainer has promised to chain himself to the earthmovers if the Jockey Club perseveres with its shameful plan to sell off the course for housing. Like me he simply cannot see any sense in destroying one of the fairest venues for quality jumping, home of the iconic Boxing Day sporting event the King George VI Chase, won four times by Desert Orchid and five times by Kauto Star. If Kempton Park didn't exist, it would be just the kind of course the Jockey Club should be inventing — a fast-draining level track within easy access of the motorway and an easy rail journey from central London. Should it come to it, I will happily chain myself next to Nicky on those bulldozer blades.

If some were surprised not to see the Lambourn maestro at Kempton on Lanzarote Hurdle Day last Saturday, he did have a pretty good excuse. He was up in Scotland marrying his long-time partner Sophie Waddilove. Congratulations to them, although I hope Nicky wasn't checking his phone. Kempton's clerk of the course Barney Clifford couldn't resist sending him a text that morning which read, 'Since you are safely out of the way, the bulldozers have moved in.'

It was assistant trainer Toby Lawes who presided over a business-as-usual day at Kempton for the Seven Barrows yard. First the powerful Chef Des Obeaux, stepped up to three miles, strode away from his field under Noel Fehily in the three-mile hurdle. He'll surely win another before becoming a classy chaser. Then this season's wunderkind James Bowen, already snapped up at only 16 to join the Seven Barrows team, rode a clever race just a week after his success in the slogathon of the Welsh Grand National on Raz de Maree to take the hotly contested Lanzarote Handicap Hurdle on William Henry. 'He's an another AP,' said the delighted Dai Walters, owner of the winner, while Toby Lawes noted: 'He has an exceptional racing brain.' Finally, the fitting of blinkers enabled the previously frustrating Jenkins to demonstrate on the racecourse

the promise he has long shown at home to collect the final two-mile hurdle in the hands of long-time Henderson ally David Bass. With a victory at Warwick, too, for Mr Whipped, the Hendersons were not short of wedding presents.

This is proving a heartening season for new blood. While James Bowen was once again underlining his talent at Kempton, his fellow 5lb-claimer Bryony Frost, tipped here as the jockey to watch this season, once again demonstrated her instinctive horsemanship by leading most of the way to win the Warwick Classic on Neil King's Milansbar, not always the easiest of rides and another who responded well to the application of blinkers for the first time.

Back at Kempton, we may too have seen the best horse in the north in the shape of Malcolm Jefferson's seven-year-old Waiting Patiently. On a horse already unbeaten in four chases Brian Hughes bided his time before quickening after the last to win the 32Red Casino Chase from some well-established performers by eight lengths. Daughter and assistant trainer Ruth Jeffer-

Should it come to it, I will happily chain myself next to Nicky on those bulldozer blades

son was not getting carried away and insisted that the stocky winner is a soft-ground horse who is unlikely to be performing at the Cheltenham Festival unless the ground is at the very least good to soft. 'He won't run on good and the weather gods are out of my control.'

Another significant victory on an informative day at Kempton was that of Mercian Prince for Newmarket trainer Amy Murphy, who started at her Hamilton Road Newmarket yard only in the autumn of 2016. Daughter of breeder Paul Murphy, Amy used to ride out for Nicky Henderson and Dr Richard Newland. She had spells as pupil assistant and then assistant trainer with Tom Dascombe and Luca Cumani, where she used to ride King George winner Postponed, as well as working experience in Australia with Gai Waterhouse. (I sometimes wonder if there are any aspiring young trainers in Britain who haven't done a spell with the much-admired Ms Waterhouse.) Mercian Prince had hated the ground when running previously at Aintree and was given a nice confidence-restoring ride by Jack Quinlan who deserves to pick up more mounts than those of the few jumping trainers in Newmarket for whom he does plenty of hard work. With a dozen jumpers, and 16 for the Flat, the bubbling Amy is well placed for take-off and I am sure there are more races to be won with Mercian Prince as well as the stable star Kalashnikov. Says his trainer: 'He's such a good traveller that he needs a strong pace and as he goes up in company it will only help him.'

Bridge

Janet de Botton

The first home tournament of 2018 was last week's four-day European Open Trials. Ten selected pairs played 216 boards at IMPs scoring, competing for the chance to play in this year's European Championships. The top two will join Andrew Robson and Tony Forrester (who were preselected) to form the team representing England.

My regular partner Artur Malinowski was playing with teammate David Bakhshi, and they made thrilling viewing on BBO hitting the top two slots for over half the tournament. With one match to go they were one of three who could make it — and make it they did! Many congratulations to them and to Jeffrey Allerton and Chris Jagger. England has a terrific team for the Europeans.

Today's hand shows David Bakhshi in sparkling form:

Dealer East		Love all							
♠	7 5 4	♠	J 8						
♥	J 10 9 3	♥	A K 8 7 6 5 2						
♦	K 4	♦	10 8 7						
♣	A J 4 3	♣	9						
♠	K 10 9 3	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>S</td><td>E</td></tr> </table>			N		W	S	E
	N								
W	S			E					
♥	Q 4								
♦	9 3								
♣	10 8 6 5 2								
♠	A Q 6 2	♠	J 8						
♥	Void	♥	A K 8 7 6 5 2						
♦	A Q J 6 5 2	♦	10 8 7						
♣	K Q 7	♣	9						
West	North	East	South						
		3♥	x						
Pass	3NT	pass	4♦						
Pass	6♦	all pass							

The lead was ♥Q which David ruffed and played ♦A and a diamond to the King. He can see 11 tricks but where is the twelfth? The spade finesse was likely to be wrong on the bidding. After some thought he called for the ♥J, covered by the King and ruffed. He drew another trump and West discarded a spade. Now he played a small club to the Jack and advanced the ♥10 from Dummy, again covered and ruffed with his last trump. West let go another Spade. Now the scene was set: David played ♣K and ♣Q, overtaking with the Ace and cashed his Heart winner and West was squeezed: if he discards a club Declarer can throw him in with his last club to lead into his spade tenace — so he bared his ♠K. No good! South read the position and scored the last three tricks. Ouch!



Well, I don't know about you but I found the recent festivities somewhat challenging. I didn't draw a sober breath between 8 November and New Year's Day which, as my wife Marina kindly pointed out, was neither big nor clever. She's no slouch herself when the corks are popping so for her to call me a lush is a bit rich, but I took her point and hopped meekly on the water wagon on 1 January.

As the days of sobriety turned to weeks I began to feel rather smug, especially since so many mates fell by the wayside. One chum lasted all of two days; another barely a week until a bottle of fine Beaujolais undid her; and a third told me that far from drying out he felt obliged to drink for two since his wife had done the giving up for him.

And so here we are in week three and I'm clinging on by my fingertips. My initial smugness has turned to a raging thirst and all I can think about are the treats I have in store come February. It pays to plan ahead, you see, in order to hit the ground running and so it is that I commend this very special offer to you.

Our partners at Mr Wheeler have offered the wines of Domaine de la Jasse before; they promptly sold out. On this occasion, though, they are offering two of the Domaine's wines before they have even been bottled, at bargain prices. There really is no better chance to fill your boots.

Domaine de la Jasse lies around 15km from Montpellier in the heart of the Languedoc and its name comes from the shelter and the shade (known in the local dialect as *jasse*) provided by the estate's century-old plane tree.

The winemaker is the celebrated Bruno le Breton and he is assisted by no less a figure than Patrick Léon, the former winemaker at Château Mouton-Rothschild. These two mavericks decline to follow the restrictions of the local appellation's regulations, preferring instead the freedom provided by the wider, less stringent, Vin de Pays d'Oc rules. These allow them to use unsanctioned varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as approved ones such as Syrah and Grenache.

Plenty of sun, perfect soils and aspect, old, organically farmed vines and immacu-

late winemaking all result in stupendously fine, ridiculously underpriced wines. The 2016 Barrique Blanc de la Jasse (1) is as fine and classic a Chardonnay as you will find outside Burgundy.

It's citrus fresh, but nutty and lightly honeyed too, with excellent length and is gratifyingly fulsome on the palate. There's a whisper of vanilla thanks to its being kept

Plenty of sun, perfect soils and organically farmed vines result in stupendously fine wines

for eight months in French oak barriques, but this is beautifully in check and doesn't come close to overwhelming the gloriously ripe fruit. I reckon it's an absolute belter, especially at just £9.75 a bottle.

The 2015 Vieilles Vignes Rouge de la

Jasse (2) is the estate's 'flagship' wine and an utter beauty. 2015 was a perfect vintage here — judged to be one of the finest in the past half century — with scorching sun tempered by just the right amount of rain. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (lots) and Merlot (a bit), it's rich, ripe, plummy, spicy and chocolatey, with plenty of dense blackcurrants, hints of vanilla and cedar and an achingly long finish. At just £10.25 a bottle it's a blooming steal.

If you buy two cases it goes down to £9.50 and you get a free magnum lobbed in too. Buy four cases and it's £9.25 with two free magnums; buy eight cases and it's an absurd £9.00 with four free magnums. In other words, it's ideal for those of us about to hurl ourselves off the wretched wagon.

The mixed case (£129) has six bottles of both wines and delivery, as ever, is free.

ORDER FORM *Spectator Wine Offer*

www.mrwheelerwine.com/spectator

Mr. Wheeler, Estate Office, Park Lane BC, Langham, Colchester, Essex CO4 5WR
mrwheelerwine.com; tel: 01206 713560; Email: sales@mrwheelerwine.com

Prices in form are per case of 12 unless stated

			List price	Club price	No.
White	1	2016 Barrique Blanc de la Jasse, 13%vol	£159.00	£117.00	
Red	2	2015 Vieilles Vignes Rouge de la Jasse, 14%vol	£162.00	£123.00	
		2 cases + free magnum	£324.00	£228.00	
		4 cases + 2 free magnums	£648.00	£444.00	
		8 cases + 4 free magnums	£1296.00	£864.00	
		1 case of 6 magnums	£162.00	£135.00	
		Jeroboam, price per 300cl bottle		£45.00	
Mixed		Sample case, two of each wine	£160.50	£129.00	

Mastercard/Visa no. _____

Start date _____ Expiry date _____ Sec. code _____

Issue no. _____ Signature _____

Please send wine to _____

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email* _____

Total

Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Payment should be made either by cheque with the order, payable to Mr Wheeler or by debit or credit card, details of which may be telephoned. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 16 February 2018.

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Chess

Willing to wound

Raymond Keene

'Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike,' wrote Alexander Pope about Atticus.

Those lines more or less describe the entire tone of the London Classic, which concluded towards the end of last year. Though it was a powerful event, there were too many anodyne draws to stir the blood of either the live audience or the substantial online one. In the first three rounds, there was not one decisive game, while in the clash between Aronian and Karjakin, the latter, as if reluctant to break union rules and actually win a game, agreed a draw in a winning position.

The final scores (out of nine) were as follows: Caruana and Nepomniachtchi 6, Carlsen, Vachier-Lagrave and So 5, Nakamura 4½, Aronian 4, Karjakin 3½, Anand and Adams 3.

My modest proposal to prevent this torpor at the top is to have all draws replayed as Armageddon games (short time limit, extra time for White, but Black gets the point if the game is a draw), thus ensuring a virtually exclusive tally of decisive outcomes. Of course, the chief arbiter could make exceptions where a draw had been truly hard fought and thus allow the splitting of the point to stand.

Caruana-Anand: London Classic 2017 (see diagram 1)

This position is complicated but not necessarily bad for Black. However, his next move is too slow and enables Caruana to increase pressure on the a1-h8 diagonal. **32 ... b4** 32 ... Bxc5 or 32 ... Qxc5 are more to the point. **33 Bb2 Bg6 34 Rd5 Qb5 35 Rg1 c6 36 Rxe5 Rxe5 37 Bxe5+ Kg8 38 Bd4 Kf7 39 Nh4 Black resigns**

Carlsen-Nepomniachtchi: London Classic 2017 (see diagram 2)

Carlsen has an excellent position here as his passed c-pawn is a real threat. However, he now

PUZZLE NO. 489

White to play. This position is from O. Howell-Pickersgill, Hastings 2017/18. White now terminated proceedings abruptly. What was the key move? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 23 January or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 ... Rxc5

Last week's winner Derek Shakespeare, Lymington, Hampshire

Diagram 1

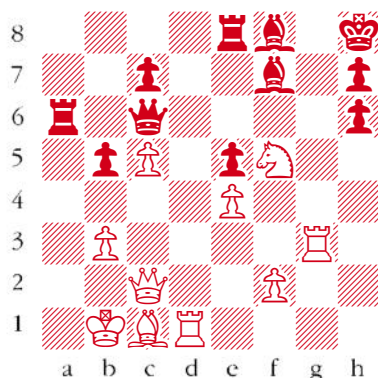
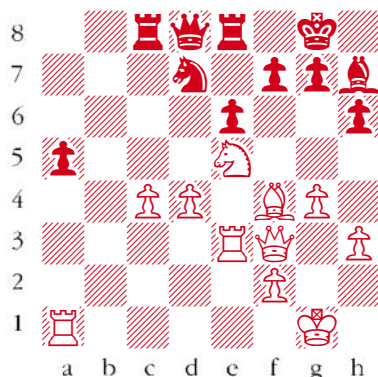


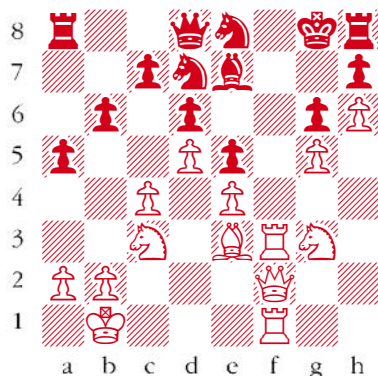
Diagram 2



goes off piste with his knight and quickly loses the thread of the game. **31 Nc6 Qf6 32**

Nxa5 Nb6 Although White has won a pawn he has allowed Black to free himself. White's pawns are weak, his king is slightly vulnerable and his pieces are rather uncoordinated. Chances are equal. **33 c5** Embarking on an unfortunate tactical adventure. 33 Rb3 keeps it equal. **33 ... Rxc5 34 dxc5 Qxa1+ 35 Kh2 Qxa5 36 Qc6** Losing immediately. 36 cxb6 Qxb6 isn't much fun for White but Carlsen would probably be able to hold the draw.

36 ... Qa4 Now Black is simply a piece up. **37 Qxa4 Nxa4 38 c6 Nb6 39 c7 f6 40 Rb3 Nc8 White resigns**



Competition

Rude food

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3031 you were invited to provide a review by a restaurant critic that is tediously loaded with sexual language.

I have had this comp up my sleeve since reading a piece by Steven Poole in the *Observer* in which he laid into the relentless sexualisation of food in our culture: 'Everyone revels in the "filthiness" of what they are naughtily pleased to call "gastroporn..."', he writes. And Jamie Oliver 'describes pretty much everything he is about to cook as "sexy", as though not quite sure whether he would like to shag it or eat it ...'

With the recent return to our screens of the queen of innuendo, Nigella Lawson, now seemed like a good time to set it. Lawson has said that she is mystified by the tag, which rather implies that it is all in the dirty minds of her devoted fans. Or perhaps, as she claims, it's all down to the editing.

There was no need for editorial intervention to spice up the entry. The winners scoop £25. Basil Ransome-Davies nets £30.

Roger Maquereau, having aroused the culinary libido of the bourgeoisie in Cockfosters, has now opened a second restaurant, La Cuillère Grasse 2, on the opposite edge of town in Hampton Wick, whose lubricious association with the adjacent Bushy Park is enhanced by a seductive menu. One can take for granted the moist, vulvoid involutions of raw oysters, but among starters here the orally inflected foreplay bar is raised by the bonsai cauliflower sautéed in an emission of soya milk and asparagus foam, its tiny clitoral florets burnished pink by a glazing of cinnamon. Maquereau's reinvention of the humble fried egg, the tantalisingly veiled yolk embraced by a white as extravagantly lacy as the filigree of a pair of pubis-hugging Janet Reger briefs, proved a climactic experience. A single bum note: regrettably, the chocolate brandy soufflé I chose for dessert was over-soused and had the droop. *Basil Ransome-Davies*

The ceviche small plates are cunning masterpieces of culinary foreplay — bright, briny, glistening tidbits teasing the taste buds with a pleasure that is well-nigh painful in the excitement it arouses, the keen anticipation of more intense delights to come. Moist and rosy, with the coquettish tang of a lime or bitter orange marinade in the Peruvian style, or voluptuous with the sultry, femme fatale succulence of an aromatic Filipino coconut vinegar, these primal morsels seduce the tongue with the raw, uncompromising carnality of waterfront nightlife in combination with the elegant sophistication of a courtesan's silk-sheeted boudoir. Even the cooked options, such as octopus and shrimp, possess a taste of wanton rawness, and the truly raw items, 'cooked' only by the caress of tropical fruit acids, fill the mouth like a kiss from a naked mermaid. Each bite quivers and yields, surrendering to your appetite, gratifying as it conquers and overwhelms. *Chris O'Carroll*

Past the proud flagpole wagging in the breeze, through the snug, embracing passageway, we enter Congress, Hugh Jeffrey-Knight's new restaurant in Moorcock Lane. Squeezing ourselves into fleshy upholstery, we find ourselves in a space dedicated to having, enjoying, biting, sucking and gobbling. We feel coaxed and welcomed, as though we have penetrated Hugh's intimate circle. The waitress recommends a luscious oyster, but I choose the lamb du Barry, a musky thicket of shredded and curled celeriac concealing moist, pink succulence, while my companion engorges herself on asparagus spears that ooze with piquant balsamic cream. After that, we both need to feel something hot and satisfying inside us. She craves the tumid, purplish couilles de mouton Limousines. I beg for the exquisite chastisement of Hugh's fiery goat tsukemen. There is an intense communion of tongues, lips and teeth until at last, exhausted but satisfied, we soothe ourselves with cold foam.
Frank Upton

I have been to plenty of foodie bordellos in my time, but The Holly is a particularly scuzzy dive. Its decorations — sprinklings of herb and spice — are what crab lice are to the meaneast brothel addict. Its chefs are so loaded with awards — riddled with them — that they have lost the ability to give their dishes even the slightest caress. The main course — a tired, no-longer-lascivious old trout — seemed to breathe out something slightly gaseous with each jolt of the penetrating fork. It lay limp, unyielding, unromantic: it had been done to death. Some cheap oil could not rescue it. As for the tarte au chocolat express, it attacked the tongue with all the pent-up gusto of an elderly eunuch with non-specific urethritis. It had a dull finish. It lay upon the tongue, and smothered it. Even a dose of KY jelly could not have rescued it.
Bill Greenwell

There's no need for a fancy restaurant to feed your fancy. Just walk down the High Street, and a burger bar will provide silky white buns and something hot to go in the middle, maybe with a large gherkin and a couple of pickled onions. Or get yourself a kebab if you need something extended and foreign. Follow the sign of the leery old beardie if your desires extend to breasts or thighs — or just something that makes you want to lick your fingers. Next door are baguettes — long and firm and French — while the traditionalist will be eager to get his fingers into one of London's hot pies (don't spill your liquor!) or dip them into a sensuous bowl of jellied eels.

You can enjoy pickling your walnuts at home, but out there you can be sure your nuggets will always be hot.
Brian Murdoch

The elegantly plated meal featured a bulging, juicy sausage deftly positioned with its tip lunging through the moist centre of a petal-shaped onion ring lathered in a creamy hoisin sauce whose only possible flaw was a slightly fishy aroma. Unable to consume the entire meal at one time, I was gratified when the waiter cheerfully bagged it for me to take home doggy-style.
Robert Schechter

NO. 3034: OCCASIONAL VERSE

You are invited to provide a poem written by a poet laureate (please specify) present or past on the engagement of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 31 January.

Crossword
2342:
Decorative
by Columba

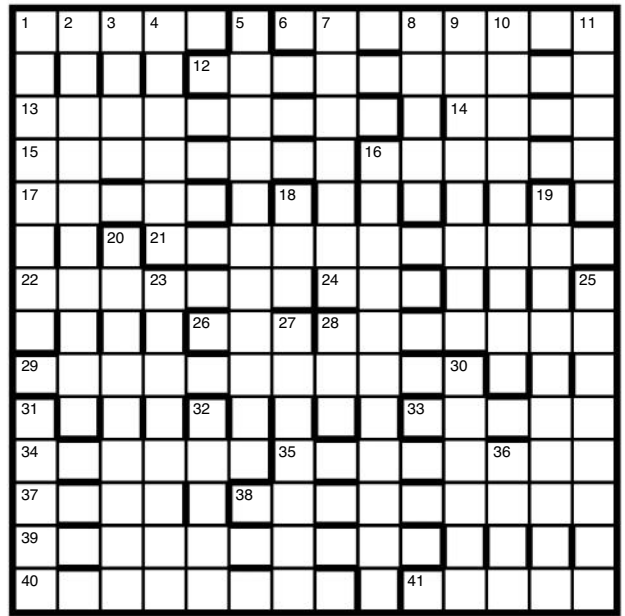
Two unclued lights are terms for the same style. One, consisting of two words, forms a cryptic indication of each of two unclued lights. The other is a word that can be divided into three words; each of these defines each of two of the other unclued lights.

Across

- 1 Part of thesis systematically weak (5)
- 6 Leading note on cubist works (8)
- 13 Turning cold during brilliant spectacle (9)
- 15 Fish indeed covered with fungus (8, two words)
- 16 Doorkeepers having no time for steady gazers (6)
- 17 Commander with note for trumpeter (5)
- 26 Undermine plodding student (3)
- 28 Device operating switch very quietly in test (7)
- 29 Bird of prey in glade, one leg injured (11, two words)
- 33 Government clears networks (5)
- 34 Apocryphal book succeeded? Very much (6, two words)
- 35 Ascetic, when beset by any sin, tormented (8)
- 37 Honour to hold old instrument (4)
- 38 Phosphate quickly coating one unfinished article of food (9)
- 39 Outline of plan for stirring up sects (10)
- 40 Attacker backing remarks about odd parts of theory (8, hyphenated)

Down

- 1 Old country with endless anxiety for apes (8)
- 2 Noticing, so nervously, people concealing identities (10)



- 3 Split, not against prophet (4)
- 5 Parts of crustaceans flourishing on good shores (11, two words)
- 7 Relative annual return not obvious (7)
- 8 Expression of impatience with gold coach (5)
- 9 Omit too much on runner with power (8)
- 10 Not so full of regret, weak leader of empire upset group of countries (9, two words)
- 11 Evil way without love (5)
- 16 Slowly, in enclosure, one with hesitation identifying flower (11)
- 18 Force in cryptic hint (3)
- 20 Not a bloke to go wild for item of footwear (9, hyphenated)
- 23 Most pious old tale about strange idol (8)
- 25 Crooks more hopeful in Court of Session (8)
- 27 Is agent, turning up with company, cordial? (7)
- 30 Umbellifer that's grey on ground (6)
- 32 Band of colour, not right for stalk (5)
- 36 Help with a fabric for embroidery (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 5 February. 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 2342, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

.....

.....

Email

.....

CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD: THE WINNERS

The first prize of £100, three prizes of £25 and six further prizes of *Bletchley Park Brain Teasers* by Sinclair McKay (Headline) go to the following. In addition, the first four winners each win a bottle of champagne. The solution is on page 29.

- First prize** Peter Turner, Bearsden, Glasgow
Runners-up F. Milne, Wells, Somerset; Jacqui Sohn, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk; Andrew Tee, Kirtlington, Oxford
Additional runners-up Simon Shaw, Goosnargh, Lancashire; Jeffrey Frankland, Storth, Cumbria; Richard Stone, Barton under Needwood, Staffs; Jeff Aronson, Oxford; Mark Rowntree, London SE10; J. Bielawski, Liverpool

No sacred cows

A delivery man, a dog bite and a police caution

Toby Young

Readers may recall that the Young family welcomed a new addition to the household about two years ago: a Hungarian Vizsla named Leo. He turned out to be incredibly high-maintenance. He demanded to be walked twice a day and invariably did something unspeakable, such as rolling around in fox excrement — or, worse, start eating it. Even after running the length and breadth of Richmond Park he would still have enough energy to tear around the house like a Tasmanian Devil, leaving havoc in his wake. I was delighted, obviously. I hoped he'd be an inexhaustible source of material for this column.

Then Leo did something really bad and the first thing Caroline said before she told me about it was: 'You can't write about this in *The Spectator*.' After a moment's pause, she added: 'In fact, don't write about him ever again.' So I have been unable to tell the story of what happened to Leo — until now. A year later Caroline has finally relented.

On 14 December 2016, at around 9.30 a.m., an Amazon delivery man rang our bell. Caroline opened the door just wide enough to receive the package, but this precaution was not enough. Leo managed to squeeze his



It was nothing too serious, just a little nip. But the man from Ocado was understandably upset

body through the crack and then ran, full pelt, towards another delivery man, this one dropping off an Ocado shop. Leo, perhaps thinking he was being protective, bit him on the leg. Nothing too serious, just a little nip. But the man was understandably upset — no doubt having to worry about aggressive dogs is the worst part of his job.

He called the police and when they turned up and examined him their initial response was that it was nothing. They left, but then returned half an hour later and told Caroline they would have to take Leo away for 'an assessment'. So off he went in the back of the van.

When the children got home from school they were horrified. I rang the number the police had given Caroline to find out which pound he'd been taken to, but was told the police now had a 'policy' of not disclosing this on account of the number of dog owners who'd tried to break their pets out. It was a case of don't call us, we'll call you.

So we waited. And waited. And waited. I foolishly told the children Leo would be home for Christmas, but he wasn't. Indeed, the police didn't contact us again until the end of January and that wasn't to return Leo, but to arrange a formal interview with Caroline at the station. It turned out they were thinking of charging her under the Dangerous Dogs Act on the grounds that Leo was out of control when she was supposed to be in charge of him. This was turning into a nightmare.

In the end, Caroline only received a caution because it was a first offence and the man wasn't seriously injured.

But we then had to make a decision about whether we wanted Leo back. He'd passed his assessment — he wasn't deemed to be dangerous — but what if he bit someone else when Caroline was with him in the park?

If your dog injures someone while he's out of control, you can be sentenced to five years in jail — not unheard of if it's a second offence. And Leo would almost certainly be destroyed.

Could we risk that? We considered sending him away to be properly trained, but that wasn't a guarantee he'd never bite anyone again. After much prevaricating, we decided we had better find him another home.

Luckily, my cousin Lucinda happened to know a Vizsla breeder in Wiltshire called Mark who was prepared to take him off our hands. He lived on a large farm with lots of space to run around in, and his partner was a vet. It could not have been more ideal and we comforted ourselves that Leo would be much happier there. We arranged for the handover to take place outside the police station.

The hardest part was telling the children. We agonised about what to say — should we tell them the police had re-housed him? — but in the end plumped for the truth. Bad idea. For weeks afterwards, they told us what terrible people we were. Then Mark sent us a video of Leo bounding around with some other Vizslas and we were able to persuade them that we'd made the right decision. I hope we did.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



The Wiki Man

A nice, cuddly NHS would be bad for us

Rory Sutherland

Recently the NHS postponed a large number of non-urgent operations to cope with what is known as the ‘annual winter crisis’. Naturally, this outcome was treated as a scandal in the press, and there were predictable calls for Jeremy Hunt to resign. But the fact that non-urgent operations are postponed is not by definition bad. It might be evidence that the NHS is working well. Or at least that it is doing what it is supposed to do, which is to deploy necessarily finite resources on the basis of patient need, rather than some other criterion — such as profitability or ability to pay. Making people wait for less urgent operations isn’t a bug of the NHS; it’s a feature.

People can and do distinguish between a common-pool resource and a private good, and judge them differently. For instance you won’t often hear me say, ‘Sorry I’m late: some bastard in an ambulance needed to get to a car accident.’ I accept that the road network is a shared resource, and other people may need it more urgently than I do. But the discussion



Making people wait for less urgent operations isn't a bug of the NHS; it's a feature

around the NHS, and the metrics by which it is assessed, encourage us to judge a common-pool resource by the same selfish standards we apply to private goods like Domino’s Pizza or M&S. Common-pool goods are different. A single customer can judge whether M&S or Domino’s are doing a good job; a lone patient cannot accurately assess a hospital. The customer is always right; the patient isn’t.

Patient satisfaction is a problematic measure because patients, on average, are more impressed by the feeling that you care than the knowledge that you cure. They judge their experience on almost any measure except objective health outcomes. It is worth remembering that Harold Shipman — not a terribly good GP by most objective standards — was nevertheless revered by his patients, perhaps on account of his willingness, easily explicable in retrospect, to visit them in their own homes. John Shaw, the astute local taxi driver who was the first person to suspect him, once shared his concerns with a passenger. She was so annoyed at his disrespect she switched to a different taxi firm.

It’s a bit like toothpaste. We ostensibly buy toothpaste to improve our dental health. But our behaviour reveals a different story: we most assiduously clean our teeth not at the optimum times (after meals) but at times when we are socially anxious (before a date, before we go

to a meeting). Confidence through breath-freshening is the dominant unconscious motivation, which may explain why 99 per cent of toothpaste is mint-flavoured; cavity prevention is mostly a beneficial by-product.

In *The Elephant in the Brain* by Kevin Simler and Robin Hanson (a fabulous new book on the hidden motives in everyday life) the authors suggest that healthcare is similar. We are programmed to seek or provide healthcare for many subconscious reasons other than improving health, often to the point of physiological harm. They attribute this to evolutionary psychology: in particular the weight we unconsciously attach to costly signalling of care — ‘conspicuous caring’ is a form of ‘conspicuous consumption’. They suggest the US could cut medical spending by at least a third without any decline in quality or expectation of life.

Even so, should we spend more money on the NHS? Almost certainly yes. But where should we spend it? On improving objective health outcomes, or on what I call ‘stripy toothpaste’ solutions — a kind of placebo-care which makes people happy, but has no measurable physiological effect? It seems we can have an efficient health service or one that no one complains about. We can’t have both.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy Group UK.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. I will be 80 in March and all my friends will expect to be asked to the celebration. My problem is that our dining-room table only fits 16, and everyone is too old for a buffet as we will spill the stuff down ourselves. How can I avoid offending the uninvited friends?
— M.D., Norfolk.

A. Are you a grandparent? If so, there must be grandchildren and easily 16 members of extended family. Save hurting your friends’ feelings by allowing it to become ‘unintentionally’ a family party

on the day itself. During the year fulfil any social expectations by hosting a series of alphabetical lunches. Ask friends in batches of 16 (or less), in alphabetical order so no one need be left out.

Q. We came up to London for the first time in almost five weeks having been travelling and in the country over Christmas and the New Year. As soon as we walked into our drawing room we were shocked to see a new set of eight cushions dotted around the room. They are vibrantly coloured and would not look out of place on the set of *Teletubbies*.

It emerged that our very lovable and conscientious live-in helper/housesitter, feeling that she was not earning her keep during our absence, has put all her energies into hand-sewing these horrors as a present for us.

We would never want to hurt her feelings, and we have pretended to be pleased, but we really cannot live with them. Mary, how can we break the news that we long to reinstate the previous shabby chics which, thankfully, she has not binned?
— Name and address withheld.

A. Tell the helper that you are so excited by the covers that you are going to take them down to your country house where you can see more of them and where they will enhance the decor scheme there. Since she presumably never visits your country house you can safely store them in your attic.

Q. Further to your advice to F.B. (9 December) regarding the annoyance of people getting out their smartphones during lunch, may I pass on a tip? The person

I most enjoy having lunch with is 20 years older than me but knows how addictive smartphones can be. During a lull in conversation, she will say: ‘Shall we have an iPhone break?’ and the two of us will spend guilt-free minutes scrolling through messages and Instagram likes that have piled up. We then put our phones away and enjoy each other’s company, free of the anxiety that (regrettable but true) builds up after no ‘screen time’.
— M.B., Florence

A. It is appalling that your advice needs to be taken seriously. However it presents a reasonable compromise in this age of addiction where so many people feel anxious if they can’t monitor their screen. We need look no further for the reason behind the drop in church attendance figures.

Drink

A vintage in retreat

Bruce Anderson



We were pondering the relationship between military history and wine vintages. It is extraordinary to think that the French managed to make wine throughout both world wars. In the late 1980s, Alan Clark had David Owen and me to lunch at Saltwood, his castle near Hythe. It is a proper castle; the stones are still marked by the rust of medieval warfare. According to legend, the knights who slew Thomas à Becket made their final preparations there. How appropriate for a future Clark residence. There was some dispute as to whether Alan went over to Rome on his deathbed, but during the years of swaggering health his sympathies would have been with the swordsmen, not the croziers. He would have had little use for turbulent priests.

Anyway, he produced a swagger wine. In the diaries, he claims that it was a 1916 Latour. Agreeing about the year, I am certain that it was a La Mission Haut-Brion. 'This should be fine,' declared our host. 'I opened it two hours ago.' I said nothing but

With a wine three-quarters of a century old, there is an analogy with opening an ancient tomb

feared greatly. With a wine three-quarters of a century old, it is wiser to uncork and pour. There is an analogy with opening an ancient tomb. Occasionally, miraculously, the corpse has been preserved. Then the fresh air arrives and it crumbles into dust.

Alan's wine did not crumble. Over the hill, yes, but it had been a very high hill. There was still plenty of fruit as well as tannin. We wondered how it would have been harvested and bottled. Although Bordeaux was not within shelling range of the Western Front, it would have fallen under the shadow, like the whole of France. Young able-bodied men would have been long gone: some no doubt already fallen; more about to be claimed in the defence of Verdun. For replacements: females, boys, *vieillards* — also, no doubt, some *mutilés de guerre*. All of them embodying the spirit of '*ils ne passeront pas*'. By the time we drank their bottle, almost all would have passed on, but we complimented their shades for producing a wine of such enduring substance.

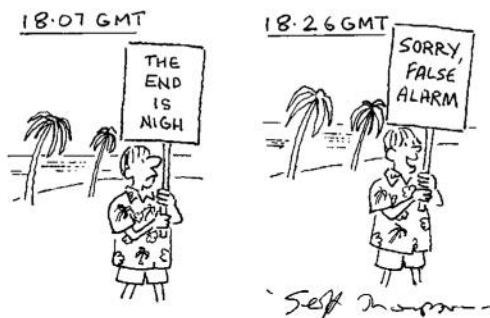
A hundred years after Verdun, the Burgundy weather tried to equal the worst climatic horrors of Flanders warfare. An inundation of rain

was followed by a frost in late April. Some vineyards almost gave up. It is a tribute to modern viticultural techniques, not to mention grit and determination worthy of Pétain's *poilus*, that any grapes survived. With the help of late sunshine, they did, though yields were drastically reduced.

This is one reason why the vintage is underrated. Another is its proximity to the 2015; big wines, full of fruit but disciplined by tannin. Bottles like that can suck the oxygen out of the market. The '15s have distracted attention from both the '16s and the '14s.

I wonder. There is no doubt that 2015 was a great year. The experts are unanimous. Yet the surrounding years should not be underrated. Moreover, the '14s are already drinkable, even premiers crus. It would be a shame to overindulge in bottles that have a fascinating maturation ahead of them: the best ones will last until the 2030s. But reports from the tasting frontline suggest that the 2015s have retreated into themselves. This is not unknown among serious wines. In earlier years, it was true of some of the '82 clarets. There is every reason to expect a second coming. Even so, I still harbour doubts. I wonder if some of the wines will eventually turn out to have too much fruit, making harmony impossible to achieve.

As for the '16s, anything from Domaine des Lambrays or Albert Bichot will be outstanding, and priced accordingly. At a recent tasting, Bichot's Chambertin was beyond praise. In all this, we are dealing with biology, climate and humanity. What an endlessly fascinating study, especially when wine is the end product.



MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Shithole

In *Polite Conversation*, Jonathan Swift presents dialogues made up of clichés, banalities and catchphrases. When Miss Notable makes a remark seen as witty, Mr Neverout exclaims: 'Why, Miss, you shine this Morning like a shitten Barn-Door.'

Perhaps we might not admit such an adjective, even in this archaic form, to polite company — except that among the chattering classes no word is entirely ostracised. In 2001, Barbara Amiel, Lady Black of Crossharbour, wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that 'the ambassador of a major EU country politely told a gathering at my home that the



current troubles in the world were all because of "that shitty little country Israel".' The remark was presented as the 'open expression' of anti-Semitism, though the man who made it, Daniel Bernard, the French ambassador to London, denied that. He was transferred to Algeria, where he died shortly afterwards.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 'contemptible' as one of its meanings, and I wondered at the time whether Bernard thought it

had the effect of reinforcing *little* rather than adding a scatological element of disgust.

So what of the question by Donald Trump: 'Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?' He used the noun *shithole* attributively to function as an adjective. *Shithole* as a noun has two main denotations: 'anus' (or 'rectum') and 'privity'.

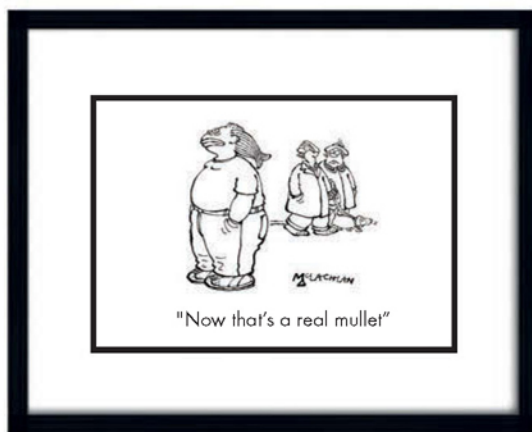
That it is not much attested before the 20th century is partly attributable to its low senses. Few wrote it down. A manuscript giving by far the earliest example, from 1629, was little known until published in 1985. Rather than

the 'privity' sense, the metaphor of *shithole* for undesirable places is taken from the sense of 'rectum'. Still, one man's desres is another's shithole. Within living memory it has been applied to the Caledonian Road in London, isolated rural spots where incest is said to be rife, and, by Nick Hornby (in fiction) to suburbia. To damn suburbia and its denizens as a quaking shithole is quite within the bounds of propriety, while to suggest that a whole country could qualify is taken to be racist. Yet many of us could think of one country or another that might merit the label. — *Dot Wordsworth*

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