

THE SPECTATOR

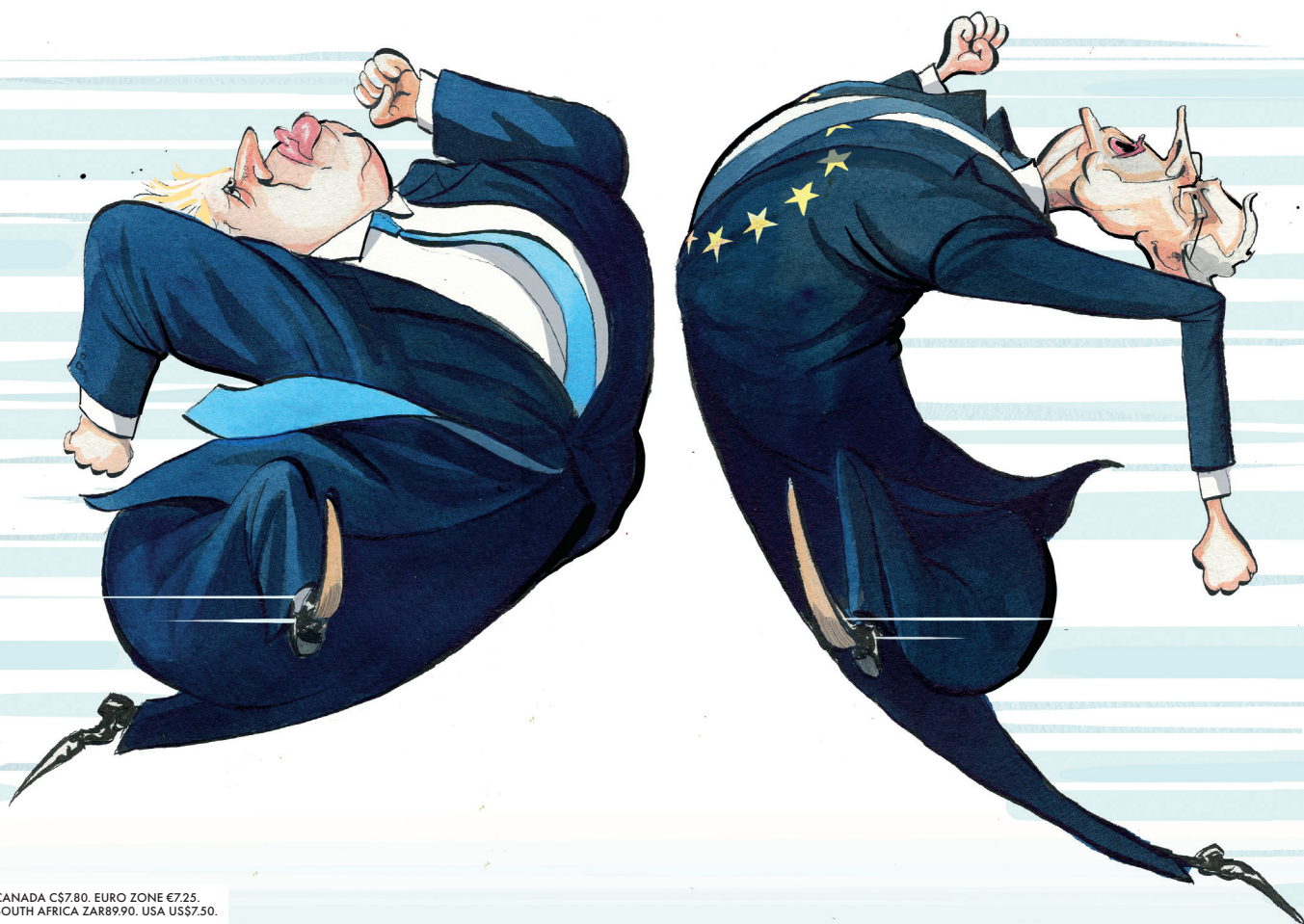
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Ross Clark

Does the IRA run Sinn Féin?
Douglas Murray

Pets aren't children
Melissa Kite

Le crunch

The Brexit wars are back, says *James Forsyth*



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Trial and error

A cornerstone of any functioning democracy is the separation of police and the courts on one hand, and government and parliament on the other. Where the latter are charged with making the law, they should never, ever be allowed to interfere with the enforcement of that law. Politicians have no power to tell the police what to investigate. As Lord Denning once observed, no policeman is subject to orders of the Secretary of State: ‘No minister of the Crown can tell him that he must, or must not, keep observation on this place or that. Or that he must prosecute this man or that one... He is answerable to the law, and to the law alone.’

In Britain, for most of the time, that separation has been respected. Prime ministers, leaders of the opposition and others with political power do not pick up the phone to Scotland Yard and demand that someone — their political opponents, for example — be investigated and prosecuted. But in recent years, we have had a breach between law-makers and law enforcers. Tom Watson, then a Labour MP, worked out that if you accuse police of a cover-up you can make them panic, and persuade them to investigate your opponents. His first success was over phone hacking. He then moved on to paedophilia.

To no one’s surprise, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has found that the ‘Westminster paedophile ring’ that Watson described in the House of Commons did not exist. The ‘clear intelligence’ he referred to turned out to be wild conspiracy theories. The claims that young boys were procured for the gratification of the former prime minister Sir Edward Heath and his colleagues before being strangled or knocked down by cars were concocted. That much became clear with the conviction last year of Carl Beech, the convicted paedophile

whose outlandish allegations led to the setting up of the inquiry in the first place.

But the wonder is how Beech’s fantasies were ever allowed to get so far, culminating in an inquiry which has cost taxpayers £150 million. Police are bombarded with such fantasists all the time. The difference was Watson’s tactics: he used social media to whip up a storm and see if the police and prosecutors would buckle. They did — with the result that the names of Leon Brittan, Lord Bramall and others were dragged through the mud.

The IICSA has not been entirely without purpose. It has shown that in the 1970s, police and other authorities were lax in

The ‘Westminster paedophile ring’ stands as an object lesson in how not to carry out a police investigation

bringing paedophile politicians to justice, and sometimes did not act when they could. It emerged, for example, that the Lancashire constabulary investigated Cyril Smith’s abuse of children in a Rochdale home in 1969 — three years before Smith became an MP. Smith even admitted that allegations made by boys were true, but they took no action. He went on to serve 20 years as an MP and to receive a knighthood. But the idea of an ongoing cover-up was a fantasy.

Police and parliamentary authorities, having been embarrassed by their failure to act in historic cases, were swept up in a sense of panic and felt the need to show that they took allegations of sexual abuse by powerful figures seriously. Even that, however, does not explain why the Metropolitan police told reporters that Beech’s allegations were ‘credible and true’. They weren’t the only force to be taken in: Wiltshire’s chief constable

Mike Veale said he believed allegations against Sir Edward Heath ‘120 per cent’. Aside from the fantastical nature of Beech’s claims, surely it ought to be obvious to the most junior of police recruits that describing any allegations as ‘true’ is prejudicial to a subsequent trial?

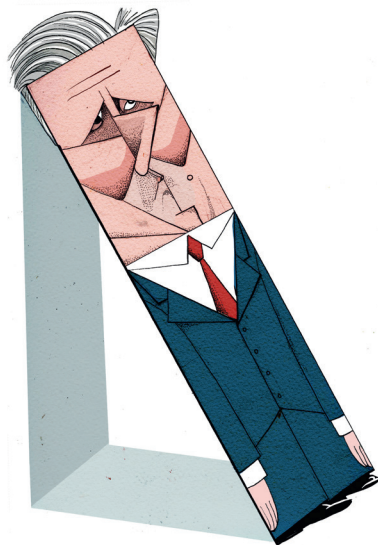
The 18-month investigation into the Westminster allegations stands as an object lesson in how not to carry out a police investigation. Officers dangled the names of well-known figures before the public in the hope of attracting more ‘victims’ to come forward — when they should have known they would attract fantasists and gold-diggers. Suspects were left in limbo long after it should have been clear that there was no proper evidence against them.

In the space of a generation we seem to have gone from a society in which people making accusations of child sexual abuse were routinely dismissed as liars, to one in which they are believed automatically. People who make accusations are referred to as ‘victims’ before their allegations have been tested in court. This is not a good foundation for justice. The accusers should be treated with respect and their allegations investigated, but their word should not be favoured over that of the accused.

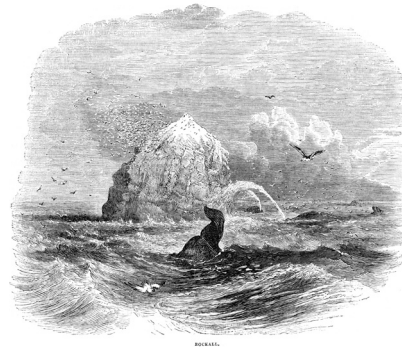
For the past ten years institutions which should be reasonable and impartial have been infected with moral panic. The police have succumbed to hysteria, as has the Church of England — which behaved disgracefully over allegations against the late Bishop Bell. It was as if both the force and the Church felt they hadn’t taken abuse allegations seriously in the past, and must make up for it. Politicians and the media often whip themselves up into a frenzy. The lesson of the past decade is that the police and prosecutors should be immune from it.



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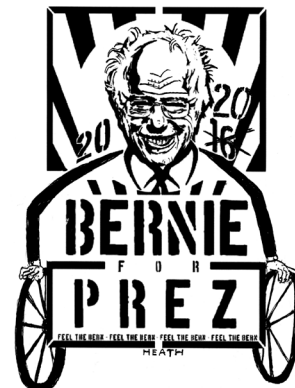
Cover by Morten Morland. **Drawings** by Michael Heath, Castro, Robert Thompson, Clare, K.J. Lamb, Pidge, Bernie, RGJ, Percival, Nick Newman, Grizelda, Geoff Thompson. www.spectator.co.uk **Editorial and advertising** The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP; Tel: 020 7961 0200, Fax: 020 7681 3773, Email: letters@spectator.co.uk (for publication); advertising@spectator.co.uk (advertising); Advertising enquiries: 020 7961 0222 **Subscription and delivery queries** Spectator Subscriptions Dept., 17 Perrymount Rd, Haywards Heath RH16 3DH; Tel: 0330 3330 050; Email: customerhelp@subscriptions.spectator.co.uk; **Rates** for a basic annual subscription in the UK: £111; Europe: £185; Australia: A\$279; New Zealand: A\$349; and £195 in all other countries. To order, go to www.spectator.co.uk/A263A or call 0330 3330 050 and quote A151A; **Newsagent queries** Spectator Circulation Dept, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP; Tel: 020 7961 0200, Fax: 020 7681 3773, Email: dbrown@spectator.co.uk; **Distributor** Marketforce, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP. Tel. 0203 787 9001. www.marketforce.co.uk **Vol 342; no 9992** © The Spectator (1828) Ltd. ISSN 0038-6952 The Spectator is published weekly by The Spectator (1828) Ltd at 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP
Editor: Fraser Nelson



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Recently I witnessed a grown man – a great, butch-looking chap – dissolve into tears when my cocker spaniel growled at his tiny white poodle.

Melissa Kite, p12

I thought, after 40 years of writing about war, I was prepared for any horror. But this is the most powerful and disturbing book I have ever read.

Antony Beevor, p30

The only thing this memoir doesn't cover in baby-making is how you persuade anyone to impregnate you in the first place.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Alasdair Palmer is a former Public Policy Editor at the *Sunday Telegraph* and worked for the Home Office when it was led by Theresa May. He writes about the dirty business of rubbish disposal on p16.

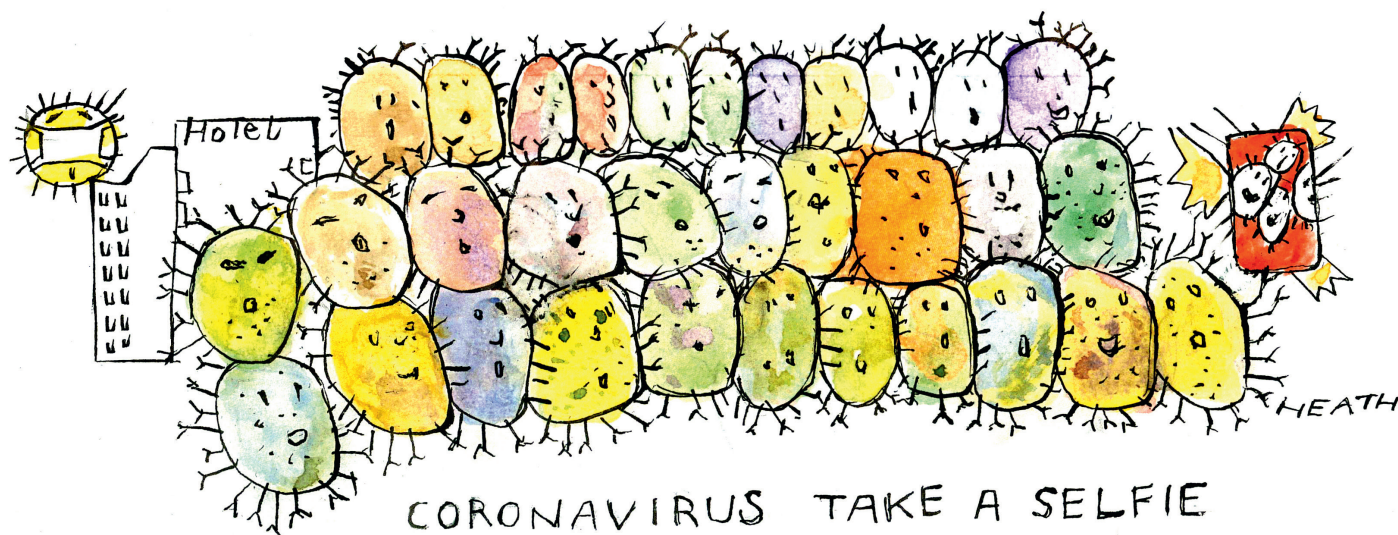
Colin Freeman is an author and a former hostage of Somali pirates. On p18, he discusses Alpha Condé and how he went from being one of Tony Blair's 'good guys' to another African strongman.

Antony Beevor, who reviews Christina Lamb's book on women in war on p30, is the author of many volumes of military history including, most recently, *Arnhem: The Battle for the Bridges 1944*.

Sara Wheeler is a biographer and travel writer whose latest book is *Mud and Stars: Travels in Russia with Pushkin and other Geniuses of the Golden Age*. She finds her bearings on p32.

Emily Hill reviews a memoir of motherhood on p33. Her first collection of short stories, *Bad Romance*, is published by Unbound.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

The government told Britons returning from 11 quarantined towns in northern Italy to isolate themselves, for fear of spreading Covid-19, the contagious coronavirus fever. Random testing began at 11 hospitals. Thirty British and two Irish passengers from the cruise ship Diamond Princess quarantined at Yokohama had been flown to Britain and sent for another fortnight's quarantine in the Wirral. The price of first-class stamps is to go up on 23 March from 70p to 76p. The EU disclosed its negotiating position on a trade agreement with the United Kingdom, saying in a strange sing-song formula that it 'should uphold common high standards, and corresponding high standards over time with Union standards as a reference point'.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse dismissed claims made by Tom Watson of a 'powerful paedophile network linked to parliament and No. 10' but said that a blind eye had been turned to the evil, as in the case of the late Cyril Smith, a Liberal MP; Lord Steel, the former Liberal leader, left the Liberal Democrats in response. The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Morris 'voluntarily stepped back' from being Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, after criticisms of his handling of a case in which a male student was accused of rape, which he denied. Wilfred De'Ath, who wrote a column about being homeless, died aged 82. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex posted on their website SussexRoyal.com a rambling response to a statement by Buckingham Palace on their withdrawal of

a copyright application for the name Sussex Royal. 'There is not any jurisdiction by the monarchy or cabinet office over the use of the word "royal" overseas,' it said. Daniel Horton, 29, appeared in court accused of causing grievous bodily harm by stabbing Raafat Maglad, aged 70, during afternoon prayers at Regent's Park mosque.

Abroad

At the beginning of the week the total number of deaths in China from Covid-19 was 2,618, out of 79,331 reported cases. The annual meeting of China's parliamentary gathering, the National People's Congress, was postponed. Iran's Deputy Health Minister, Iraj Harirchi, announced that he had contracted Covid-19 a day after appearing on television denying that 50 people had died from the virus in the pilgrimage city of Qom. South Korea reported more than 900 cases, and deaths in double figures. Venice cut short its carnival by two days as about 50,000 people in several towns in the Veneto and Lombardy were put in quarantine; cases spread across Europe. People threw stones at evacuees from Wuhan when they arrived at a health spa in Novi Sanzary in central Ukraine. A thousand guests in a hotel in Tenerife were forbidden from leaving. Thousands more were stranded in the Canary Islands when sand blown from the Sahara closed airports for the weekend.

In the Iranian elections the principalists or conservatives won a landslide, partly because reformist candidates were barred from standing; turnout was only 42.6 per

cent. Another peace agreement was signed in South Sudan after six years of civil war, which has seen 400,000 killed. Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt from 1981 to 2011, died aged 91. Thomas Thabane, the Prime Minister of Lesotho, appeared in court to answer charges of murdering his wife in 2017. A 43-year-old German, named by the authorities only as Tobias R., shot dead nine people at shisha bars in Hanau, and was found dead next to his mother's body; he had a firearms licence. Jean Vanier, who died aged 90 last year, the founder of L'Arche, a network of small communities for people to live with the intellectually disabled, had 'emotionally abusive' sexual relationships with six adult women (not disabled) between 1970 and 2005, according to an investigation commissioned by the organisation.

The EU budget was rejected by four countries described as frugal (Denmark, Austria, Sweden and Holland), which thought it too big, and 17 beneficiaries, which thought it too small. Harvey Weinstein was convicted of third-degree rape and a first-degree criminal sexual act. Roger Stone, a long-time political backer of President Donald Trump, was sentenced to 40 months in jail for lying to the House Intelligence Committee about WikiLeaks and Hillary Clinton. Three nights of rioting in Delhi over citizenship laws unfavourable to Muslims left at least 21 dead. Josipa Lisac, a singer aged 70, was denounced to the criminal courts for the way she sang the national anthem at the inauguration of the new president of Croatia. CSH

DIARY

Prue Leith



I made the mistake of saying I thought insects might help feed the world. They are high-protein, cheap to farm (they breed like rabbits and grow like Topsy), require little water and energy and probably wouldn't mind being factory-farmed. Now my post is full of mealworm powder and cricket flour and invitations to champion bug farms.

Being an adviser to the hospital food review has been surprisingly uplifting. The panel members are mostly NHS professionals who are championing at the bit to improve matters and have already led changes in their own hospitals, so know it can be done. In one hospital, lunch was as good as the best home cooking. Yes, some hospital food is dire, and reform will be a huge task and take years. But with the Health Secretary and PM on side, I think we dare to hope.

My carbon footprint should put me in jail. I spent three weeks in India over Christmas, two weeks filming in Cambodia and two weeks working in South Africa. India was pure tourism and we've cracked how to do it: mornings tramping round palaces and museums, nice lunch, afternoons asleep by the pool or siesta in bed, then a street walk in the cool, eating what the locals eat. Cambodia was to make a documentary for Channel 4, trying to trace my Cambodian daughter's roots. As a babe in arms, she was flown out of Phnom Penh just before it fell to the Khmer Rouge. We went down some blind alleys and some good ones, both illuminating and upsetting. I don't like the idea of blubbing on camera. But we had a lot of fun too, helped by nightly drinks with the crew on the roof of the hotel. The South African trip was to visit my chefs' school in Pretoria, opened 23 years ago, then called the Prue Leith College of Food and Wine. After ten years it morphed into the Prue Leith Chefs Academy and has now been grandly renamed the Prue Leith Culinary Institute. It reflects the fact that we no longer just teach chefs how to cook. Students might become restaurateurs, home economists, food stylists, recipe developers, teachers, writers, YouTube demonstrators etc.

Needless to say, being the commercial woman I am, I was also flogging my range of specs and my books. We lugged a case of 78 styles of glasses round Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria. South African media are pretty relaxed about guests hyping stuff. I'd be on a telly set, demonstrating a paneer curry, while the presenters tried on the glasses and talked about the renamed food school. But it was hard to stop them questioning me about

what interested them far more — my 80th birthday. Why hadn't I retired? What was the secret? Was it Botox? Did I go to the gym? They weren't impressed with my recipe: good sleep, good food, and happiness.

Everywhere I went cakes appeared. The chefs' school (oops! institute) ran a competition for the best birthday cake. The winner had printed photographs on the icing, from every decade of my life. I think she knows more about me than I do. A stalker's cake.

Back home I missed my slot on Bob Mills's talk show because we got stuck in the News International lift for an hour and a half. Every ten minutes the luckless security man had to ask, through the intercom, if we were OK. We were fine. I lay on the floor and read Nicholas Coleridge's memoir.

On my actual birthday, a letter from the DWP arrived telling me I now qualify for an extra 25p per week. Well, an extra teabag on Sunday mornings is very welcome. My children took the family to dinner on the excellent Grand Duchess barge, moored on the canal near Paddington Station. I'm resisting the idea of a monster party, and instead plan to have a summer fortnight doing what I love best: fishing on the Naver with ten friends for a week, then five days on the last remaining 'Puffer', the VIC 32. These coal-fired boats used to ply the seas and canals of the Highlands and Islands with cargoes of building materials, coal and sheep. The Puffer has been converted into a pleasure boat and I plan to take ten more friends from Corpach through the Caledonian canals to Inverness. I haven't told them about the need to stoke the boiler, nor about the mozzies.

Peta Leith, with whom I've written *The Vegetarian Cookbook*, and I are to be interviewed for a *Spectator* event on 24 March by Sam Leith (Peta's brother, my nephew, and literary editor of this fine organ). You can book tickets at www.spectator.co.uk/prue. Let's keep in it the family, hey?

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Sanders, Trump, and the populist juju

Bernie beats Trump! Bernie beats Trump! That's what Bernie Sanders's fans keep chanting, and they have the polls to prove it. Survey after survey suggests that, of all the leading candidates for the Democratic party's nomination, Sanders is most likely to defeat Donald Trump in the election in November. Voters like Bernie. Some 46 per cent of voters say they admire him. Only 26 per cent say the same of President Trump.

Still, most political experts think Sanders will be a disaster for the Democratic party. He may be popular with the base, they say, but he is far too left-wing for the general electorate: 2020 would be a repeat of 1972, when the radical leftie George McGovern lost to Richard Nixon in a landslide. Sanders as nominee would all but guarantee four more years of Trump and put both houses of Congress back under Republican control.

Senior Democrats are freaking out. At the candidates' debate in South Carolina on Tuesday night, Michael Bloomberg even rehashed the idea that Vladimir Putin is driving Sanders's success — a sure sign of elite despair.

What Sanders's campaign has really shown is that all the expert theories as to why Bernie can't win are not so clever. It's said that he can't appeal to racial minorities, yet in Nevada last weekend he won 27 per cent of African-American voters and 53 per cent of Hispanics. It's said that only young voters are drawn to his socialism, yet he won every age group apart from the over-65s. He's meant to have a 'ceiling' of about 30 per cent of Democratic voters, yet he won about 47 per cent of the vote, including about 22 per cent of voters who identified as 'moderate'. By Wednesday next week, after Super Tuesday — when 14 states vote — his lead could be insurmountable.

The best news for Bernie is that his rivals are so weak. Joe Biden's candidacy is a sad spectacle, his mind is gone, yet his zombie campaign drags itself on. Pete Buttigieg is a clear second in the delegate count, yet his pale imitation of Barack Obama's rhetorical style leaves people cold. Amy Klobuchar is doing enough not to be discounted, yet not well enough to count. Elizabeth Warren has faded dramatically, but she kept her candidacy on life support with a good

performance in last week's TV debate. The person who lost that debate in Nevada was indisputably Mike Bloomberg. He still has enough money to brainwash and cajole large chunks of the electorate. He had a slightly better debate this week in South Carolina, but everybody knows he has a serious personality problem.

Team Bloomberg and Team Sanders now loathe each other — possibly more than they despise Trump. After Bloomberg's campaign offices were vandalised this week, his staff were quick to blame Sanders's inflammatory language. Bloomberg then upped hostilities by attacking Sanders for having once

*Bernie might speak to swing voters.
But the booming economy may have
locked them in for Trump*

had the support of the gun lobby. It is heresy to be pro-gun in some Democratic circles; then again, plenty of Democrats love guns.

That's the point about Bernie: the usual rules don't apply. Similar to Trump, his supposed weak spots are his strengths. His fuddy-duddy appearance makes him cool. His socialist radicalism is so old-fashioned that it speaks to conservatives. He can win over ultra-progressives in multiracial metropolises while appearing to stand up for poor whites in rural areas. He has that populist juju. If the media ignores him, that's an elite conspiracy; if they attack him, ditto. So he once wrote a strange essay about rape. So what?

Sanders shrugs off criticism. On Monday, at a CNN Town Hall, he was challenged for having said that Fidel Castro's literacy programmes were a success. 'The truth is the

truth,' he said. He'll get away with that. British observers might be reminded of Corbyn and the IRA stuff: a minority feels outraged that a man who supported the bad guys can be so brazen; the majority can't remember and doesn't care.

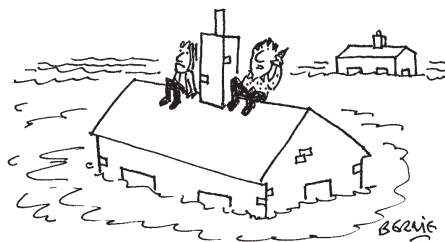
Some commentators are also eager to claim that Sanders's movement is, like Corbyn's, racist against Jews, because he has the support of public figures such as Linda Sasour and Ilhan Omar, who have flirted with anti-Semitism. But that point is neatly undercut by the fact that Bernie is a proud Jew who once lived on a kibbutz. It would be an irony of almost biblical proportions if the first Jewish president turned out to be a rabid anti-Semite.

Unless the various attack machines can find a way to stop him in the coming days, or Bloomberg somehow rigs a brokered party convention in July, Sanders will be the nominee. Yet beating Donald Trump is another matter. Can Sanders win over those six million or so swing voters who supported Barack Obama in 2012 and Trump in 2016? He might speak to their lingering disgruntlement. Yet it's equally possible that a booming economy has locked them in for Trump.

The economy could turn bad — but even then a Trump vs Sanders contest might prove that right-wing populism out-muscles left-wing populism. Team Trump will portray Sanders as 'the job killer' because he wants to ban fracking and abandon the current healthcare system, both of which would put an enormous number of people out of work. That point could be far more devastating than any grainy footage of young Bernie saying the gulags weren't so bad.

Sanders could choose a black running mate to boost Democratic turnout among African-Americans, something Hillary Clinton failed to do. But he needs to mobilise huge numbers of black voters to win in November — and Trump has had some success countering that Democratic advantage with his appeals to African-Americans.

Bernie may indeed be the best-placed Democratic candidate to beat Trump. That doesn't mean he will.



'Yes, you could say we're self-isolating.'

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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

The fall from grace of Jean Vanier is truly a sad story. The founder of the L'Arche communities did extraordinary work, practical, intellectual and spiritual, to advance the idea that those suffering mental handicap had much to teach the rest of us. His was a radical idea about what community can be. Now, however, L'Arche has accepted a report that Vanier, who died last year, had sexual contact with six women from the 1970s onwards. There is no suggestion of any exploitation of the handicapped. Unlike so many claims in abuse cases, these ones seem to have been carefully investigated. The women (all adults) were his devoted followers. Vanier appears to have told them that by getting close to him they would also get closer to God. In this, he was probably following his friend, a Catholic priest, Fr Thomas Philippe, who advanced such ideas and practices, and was duly disgraced. Archive evidence shows that Thomas Philippe and Vanier kept in touch, the latter helping protect the former. About five years ago, I was sounded out to write a biography of Vanier. I had heard him speak a couple of times and had been deeply impressed. I did have a tiny worm of doubt about the man — not about anything he said, but occasioned by his strong charisma. His ascetic, craggy good looks and incantatory voice reminded me of the somewhat bogus Laurens van der Post, and I noticed that he attracted ardent women. Remembering the history of sexual abuse by those with spiritual power, I pointed out, though I knew nothing against him, how dismal it would be to embark on the tale of a good man and then discover bad facts. This was a small factor — lack of time being the bigger one — in my refusal of the task.

The abuser's capacity to persuade others, and perhaps even himself, that sexual contact (in Vanier's case, it appears not to have been full intercourse) is what God wants is, obviously, evil. It is also heresy. It derives from the idea that some people are specially chosen by God and therefore exempt from His rules. The medieval Albigensian heresy held that some people were 'parfaits' — which gave them a licence for what the

1960s would call 'free love'. As Fr Thomas Philippe is supposed to have put it to one of his victims, 'When one arrives at perfect love, everything is lawful.' Can anything of Vanier's reputation survive this catastrophe? I do hope so. The fact that nobody's 'parfait' does not mean that no one does good. L'Arche survives, and deserves to, and it would not exist without Vanier. 'Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.'

Andrew Adonis is an impressive man, one of the few in the Labour party who never compromised with the left. Yet he is also an illustration of this column's claim that the Labour pro-European 'moderates' are just as adrift from reality as are the Corbynites. In an article in *New European* last month, headlined 'A Star in the West', Lord Adonis praised the Irish prime minister, Leo Varadkar, 'as he steers Ireland towards a unity and confidence it has never previously known'. In the Adonis theory, the Varadkar/Boris Johnson deal over Brexit would crown the 'lasting rapprochement' accomplished by John Major and Tony Blair in the 1990s and create a united Ireland: 'After all, only 11 months separated the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification.' Since then, Mr Varadkar has lost the Republic's general election, in which Lord Adonis predicted he would 'consolidate his position', and has resigned. The party with the most votes is Sinn Féin. There is much to be said for the 'modernised' and 'secularised' politics which Lord Adonis hymns — at least when contrasted with bigoted and antiquated politics — but he should recognise that millions of EU citizens feel cheated by such politics. The European Union has become the papacy of secularisation and modernisation, infallible in its own mind, harsh to its unruly flock.



Tessa Keswick has just brought out a book about her travels in China and her development of Chinese friendships over 40 years (*The Colour of the Sky after Rain*). Tessa has been my friend for most of that time, as has her husband Henry, who bought this paper in the 1970s, appointed Alexander Chancellor as its editor, and thus set it on the path to success. So at first I thought that I shouldn't comment on the book. I changed my mind, however, when I noticed a reluctance to review it — perhaps because Henry is very rich (he recently stepped down from running Jardine Matheson, the Far East conglomerate, after nearly half a century), and because Tessa, who made some of her trips through contacts made as his wife, is therefore seen as not properly qualified. In reality, these are not objections, but advantages. Henry's money and connections got Tessa to interesting places with interesting people. Her own commitment, and the fact that she was a woman with leisure in what was almost wholly a man's world of business, gave her the gift of time — living with a Chinese family to learn Mandarin, for example — which most visitors lack. Tessa's travels begin with a country so poor that lorry drivers rarely switch on their lights in the dark, thinking it saved petrol, and end with the stupefyingly rich superpower of today. The book is honest. Tessa loves China, and is persuasive about the virtues of its people — their directness and their honesty once trust is achieved. But she does not shy away from the grimness of a political order which remains adamantly opposed to basic human freedom. One of the most powerful passages comes when she and Henry meet Bo Xilai, the rising star of Chinese politics, on the day before his public disgrace — his 'utterly mournful' eyes, and the 'exceptionally tall men in dark suits' who suddenly surround him. The book is also Tessa's gesture of love for Henry. She wrote it, without telling him, when both of them were very ill. Henry was born in Shanghai, where his father traded, but driven out by the Japanese and later kept out by the communists. This book celebrates, obliquely, how he has won so much back.

Le crunch

Two irreconcilable versions of Brexit are about to collide

JAMES FORSYTH

When Boris Johnson and the new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met in Downing Street last month, they agreed on one thing immediately: that it was time to stop the sniping, animosity and backbiting that had characterised the first round of the Brexit talks. The Prime Minister emphasised that Britain wanted to be the EU's close friend and ally.

Only a few weeks later, and already the Brexit wars are back. The two sides are so far apart that many diplomats think there is a better-than-even chance that the talks will fail. One member state is already planning around the central assumption that there will be no deal by the December deadline. For its part, No. 10 is braced for the talks to collapse sooner rather than later. And all this before the negotiations have even started.

For No. 10, the whole point of Brexit was in order that Britain could break free of EU directives — but the first issue to be discussed is the so-called 'level playing field'. Brussels is adamant that unless Britain gives a long list of undertakings about its future behaviour (including adhering to EU state aid rules), talks cannot proceed. No. 10 says this is preposterous, and that it will not negotiate on this basis.

What Boris Johnson wants from the EU is very different to what Theresa May required. May was determined to avoid — or at least minimise — friction at the border. She proposed a deal where the UK would remain almost half in the single market and the customs union. There would have been what she euphemistically called a 'common rule book' (ie, the EU's rule book) governing manufacturing and agriculture. This was the issue over which Johnson resigned, saying that the UK was 'headed for the status of a colony'.

Johnson is not asking for frictionless trade. He'd like a free-trade agreement with the EU — albeit one with tariffs and quotas

as close to zero as possible. He'd be happy with a fairly standard free-trade deal where the 'level playing field' consists of a general agreement not to lower employment and environmental standards to try to gain a trading advantage. He harrumphs that the UK already has higher standards than the EU requires in many areas, and that his government intends to raise them still further.

But the EU's definition of a 'level playing field' isn't all that level. Its negotiating mandate says that EU standards will be the reference point on subsidies for strug-

will also be roughed up by the United States when it comes to discuss trade.

The EU's strategy is to offer plenty of carrot — saying that if the Brits sign, the EU will do what it can to ease frictions at the border. Everything will be as light-touch as possible. But if no agreement is reached, then the stick comes out: they will take the strictest interpretation possible of all border procedures. Brussels believes that the threat of the garden of England turning into a lorry park will trump concerns over sovereignty.

What puzzles many in government is how the EU (which has a history of misreading British public opinion) can genuinely believe this will work. First, Boris Johnson doesn't just lead a Brexit government; its central conviction is that the whole point of leaving the EU is to do things differently. Every member of the government's negotiating committee campaigned for Leave, and thinks Britain needs to be in charge of its own rules and regulations. The more the EU seeks to tie the UK down, the more convinced the British side becomes of the benefits of divergence.

Then there is the 80-seat Tory majority to consider. If the two sides decide to indulge in tit-for-tat measures at the border, that will cause

pain to consumers and the wider economy. But Boris Johnson does not have to face his voters again until 2024. Nearly every other European leader is up for re-election before then. They would have to pay the electoral price for this economic disruption long before he would. This is one of the reasons why No. 10 thinks that the EU won't ultimately follow through on their threats.

The UK and the EU are also arguing over things that have in theory already been agreed. There are competing interpretations of what the Irish protocol, which must be implemented by the end of the year, means. The EU and the Irish government are already angrily warning that if they think that the UK is reneging on this agreement, then the trade negotiations will collapse. But the reshuffle — which saw Geoffrey



gling companies, employment rights and the green agenda. No. 10 protests, saying the EU made no such quasi-imperial requests when it agreed a trade deal with Canada and Japan. To which the EU response is that the UK and EU economies are so intertwined that these conditions are appropriate. In other words: Britain is too close to be given such freedom.

To Sir David Frost, Boris Johnson's chief negotiator, this shows that the EU is still struggling to come to terms with the very fact of Brexit. The EU, he said recently, needs to 'genuinely understand, not just say it, that countries geographically in Europe can be independent countries'. Influential figures on the EU side privately scoff at the idea of the UK as a 'sovereign equal'. The EU view is that in trade talks, size is everything, and that for the same reasons, the UK

Cox replaced as Attorney General by Suella Braverman, and Brandon Lewis take over as Northern Ireland Secretary — along with the instructions given to the government's Task Force Europe suggests that the government intends to take an aggressive approach to this issue.

The end-of-year deadline is causing irritation too. The EU thinks that the UK is trying to use this deadline pressure to force concessions, and the French are already dismissing it as a form of 'blackmail'. Boris Johnson, by contrast, feels that the EU is ignoring the fact that it signed up to trying to get a deal by 31 December in the political declaration. One of his first acts after re-election was to repeat his line from the campaign trail that there will be no extension to this deadline.

The European side have taken umbrage at the UK's immigration proposals, which offer no preference at all to EU citizens. ('I'm not a racist,' a diplomat put it recently, 'but you propose to treat Europeans as you

In several areas the compromises are hiding in plain sight if only the two sides have the will to see them

do Indians.') To them, this is baffling, though not to Britain, which is home to more Indians than to citizens of any EU country.

There is another way of looking at the immigration proposals. By coming up with an immigration system that doesn't discriminate between EU citizens and the rest of the world, the UK has ensured that if the EU wants any preference for its citizens, then it must offer something in exchange. Indeed, the nature of the new points-based system means that EU citizens could — as part of a trade deal — be offered preferential treatment without the UK losing control of immigration policy.

The EU and the UK are set for a bad-tempered first few meetings. But, paradoxically, those who want a deal should be hoping for a row sooner rather than later. The two sides need to get it out of their systems and realise that the other is serious about their position before they can start negotiating properly.

At the moment, there is an air of despair about the prospects for a deal even among those who are normally optimists. One of those close to the negotiations on the UK side tells me: 'Maybe there's a way through, but I can't see it.' Yet Brexit compromises are hiding in plain sight. On the 'level playing field', for example, the UK could say that while it will not follow EU rules, it will maintain its already high standards. The UK exceeds EU requirements on minimum wage, holiday rights, maternity leave and more. On the environment, our pledge to hit

Warm-up Act

The morning insists my coffee's getting cold.
It's early and frost still crisps the lawn.

Not everyone shall live until they're old
and some might rue the day that they were born.

There was a time I'd watch the dawn like this
and smoke the day's first cigarette.

Now caffeine is the poor alternative. Tant pis...
What is this life without regret?

Or procrastination's melancholy?
The aura of something that seems to be in code.

Not stubborn news, collective guilt,
beyond capture or redress in endless overload.

So I draw out my little warm-up act, and sip,
staring like an old man who's half out of it.

Rehearsing how to give the hour the slip.
Waiting for a cue to make an exit.

—Andrew McNeillie

'net zero' by 2050 was made months before the EU said it would do the same. Britain could pledge not to backtrack on any of this — and agree that if it does, the EU could respond by imposing tariffs and quotas.

But when Tory ministers talk about the opportunities of Brexit, they talk about the ability to diverge from EU rules. The UK desire to make itself into a hi-tech hub means that when it comes to data protection, for instance, it is likely to want to diverge from the EU's cumbersome GDPR regime.

No country has ever left the EU before. No trade deal in recent times has been about where to put up barriers rather than take them down. So it is unsurprising that the negotiations are off to such an uncertain — and emotional — start. But realpolitik faces both sides. If talks fail, there will be serious and avoidable consequences — and not just for trade. An EU-UK alliance makes sense for both sides. It is simply not realistic to think that two sides involved in an economic standoff could continue to be the closest of allies on foreign and security matters.

A UK government that knows its own mind, believes in the benefits of divergence and has a stable parliamentary majority is going to take a far more robust approach to these negotiations than the May government ever did. The EU — which has understandably come to view a lot of British tough talk as bluster — should appreciate that. But above all, both sides should remember that a failure to reach a deal would be an epic failure of statecraft.



SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

James Forsyth and Peter Foster, Europe editor of the Telegraph, on the battle ahead.

Pet peeve

Let animals be animals

MELISSA KITE



‘Can my dog meet your horse?’ asked the woman, as her German shepherd lunged at me, making my thoroughbred jump up and down in panic.

We had been riding through the woods, a friend and I, when we came across one of those dog-walking clubs. Up to a dozen of what looked like former guard dogs and their owners came round a bend in the track towards us.

‘He just wants to say hello!’ the woman persisted. How many times have we all heard that from a dog-owner in the park before said beast pounces and humps us half to death? So I told her very firmly: ‘Absolutely not. Do not come any closer.’

‘Oh, but I’m getting him used to things.’ I’ve had this before. ‘Listen here. My horse is not a practice prop for your dog. And I’m not going to be thrown off and have my neck broken in the name of socialisation.’

I am afraid these well-meaning dog clubs are the tip of the iceberg. An increasing number of pet-owners do not seem to understand that their animals are, er, animals. A new generation believes its pets are human and should be treated as such. Egged on by charities that fuel anthropomorphism in order to extract ever higher donations and by a pet industry that is doing very well indeed out of the notion that ‘pets are us’, people do not want their animals to be treated as though they were in any way inferior beings.

Apparently we should not even be calling them pets. Ingrid Newkirk, the founder of Peta, that most cutting edge of animal charities, has called for people to stop calling their animals pets because it ‘reduces them to a commodity’. To which I want to say: ‘Calm down pet, it’s only a term of endearment!’

The promotion of animals to the level of thinking, discerning human beings has boosted the value of the pet industry to an

estimated £7 billion a year. The humanisation of pets is fuelling ever more elaborate treats and pampering, as if dogs enjoy going to the poodle parlour to have their nails cut, which of course they don’t. They would much prefer to be walked more so their claws wore down naturally.

But never mind. Because we now have animal social media influencers. ‘Doug the Pug’, for example, has 3.9 million Instagram followers. Owners call their pets ‘furbabies’. The term is meant to be sweet but becomes more creepy the more you think about it. Some women have taken to calling themselves ‘fur mummies’, which is down-

Owners call their pets ‘furbabies’ and some women have taken to calling themselves ‘fur mummies’

right disturbing. One dog-care business, furmummy.com, promises that: ‘At Furmummy, we treat every dog like a baby because we know that is how much they mean to you.’

Pets have replaced people in their own pecking order. A Mintel investigation discovered that 51 per cent of buyers would rather cut back spending money on themselves than their pets, with 54 per cent of millennials saying they’d put their pets’ needs before their own. Is this part of some virtue-signalling guilt complex, whereby we sacrifice ourselves for our pets? In the event of a horrible national emergency would we now kill ourselves so our dogs could eat us rather than the other way around?

Perhaps it is the propaganda from the animal charities. After a while, those relentlessly heartbreaking adverts telling us about

the suffering of so many poor creatures makes us feel a collective sense of guilt. Consequently, are animals, like teenage tearaways, becoming a social problem because of a lack of firm parenting? Is all this pampering and worrying

about their feelings doing to pets what we did to kids with PC education, making them utterly spoilt and badly behaved?

I recently witnessed a grown man — a great butch-looking chap — dissolve into tears when my cocker spaniel growled at his tiny white poodle because it wouldn’t leave her alone. ‘Oh no! Are you all right?’ he fretted, scooping the pesky pooch into his arms, when what it needed was a good telling off.

‘Positive reinforcement’, which is filling the void where conventional training used to be, does not necessarily do animals any good. Look at those owners trailing lines of treats which their fat pooches Hoover up as they follow, putting on more weight than the walk should be taking off.

Even in the horse world, there is a dangerous trend for soft parenting, in the form of riding without saddle or even bridle, no bit in the horse’s mouth, just a loose rope around its nose, allowing the horse to choose which way it wants to go down the road.

I once witnessed a woman attempting to load a horse on to a horsebox at a show-ground by standing him at the end of the ramp and waiting until he chose to get on. He didn’t choose to get on, by the way. After we loaded up conventionally, by leading our horses up the ramp, she sat down at a picnic table to sip coffee and read a newspaper, while her horse stood staring into space.

The question I ask myself is: if this horse was equal to humans in forward-thinking capabilities, why didn’t he seize the opportunity to walk off and leave his stupid owner?

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

With Melissa Kite and ‘canine couture designer’ Lilly Shahravesh.

We strive to explore further.

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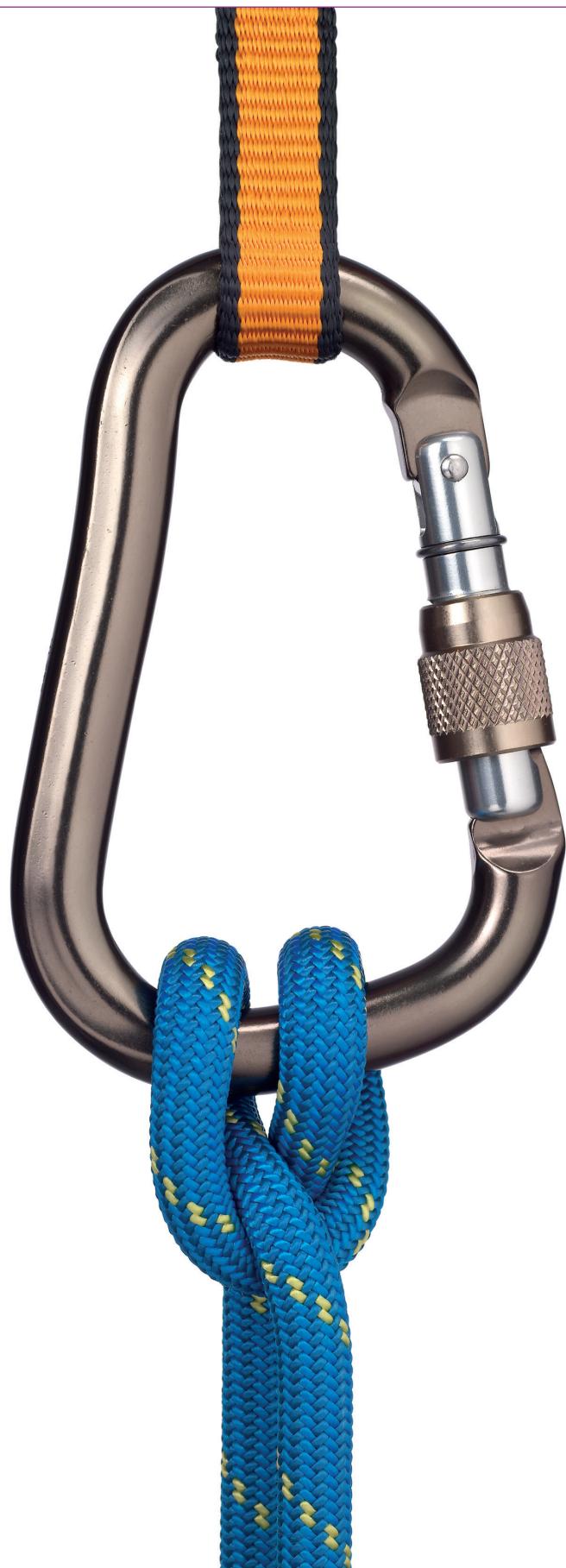
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The war the government must win



We will rue the day we all decided bullying was a bad thing. The consequence is that the inept, the imbecilic and the perpetually frit will hang on to their jobs and we will become a much less efficient country. By bullying I do not mean physically beating someone up and stealing their lunch money, which is what it used to mean when it had a proper meaning. I mean telling someone they're useless and deserve to be sacked, which is what bullying means today. As R.D. Laing might have put it, that kind of bullying is a rational response to irrationality. The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, who is 5ft 6in tall, has been accused of using bullying behaviour with regard to her civil servants. Nowhere near enough bullying behaviour in my book. One imagines the chagrin amid the Sir Humphreys: 'I have just been told what to do by a short, state-educated woman from the colonies!' The fury and loathing turned upon Patel is a foretaste of what awaits government ministers (and advisers) when they dare to tell the civil servants that perhaps things might be done differently from here on in. It is a preliminary skirmish in a war the government must win.

The bitter — and I suspect a little racist and sexist — backlash against Patel came after she had unveiled the government's new proposals to reduce immigration, something the average voter has been banging on about for 20 years since the doors were flung open — out of political spite and political expediency — by New Labour. Since then we have admitted a net amount of people to this country equivalent to a city the size of Exeter (250,000 people) every year. I — and most voters, according to the polls — would have preferred the net gain, if we had to have a net gain, to have been closer in size to that of the village of Chop Gate in North Yorkshire, pop. about nine. Patel's proposals are the first serious attempt in all that time to halt the flow, for which she deserves great credit.

Who knows if it will work? If it does, Patel will have hugely alleviated that other great problem of our age, the housing crisis. I seem to be almost alone in the country in not wishing the government to pave over every inch of our landscape in order to shove up

thoroughly nasty houses and all the clamorous infrastructure that accompanies them. (Bizarrely, those most voluble about climate change are also those who support tarmacking the green belt and thus supporting all those extra emissions from the new homes.) Before despoiling our crowded island further, why not look outside the box a little?

Our supposed need for new housing is based upon the flawed 'predict and provide' model, drawn from the expected population increase. The birth rate among indigenous Brits is pretty low. The organisation Migration Watch estimates that inward immigration is responsible for up to 45 per cent of 'household demand' — cut immigration and you therefore have an immediate effect

Priti Patel has been accused of using bullying behaviour. Nowhere near enough bullying behaviour in my book

upon this supposed need for new housing both now and in the future. Further, the real housing crisis we have — that homes are far too expensive — has been exacerbated by the unprecedented influx of people from abroad. The increased demand for housing has raised property prices by a good 10 per cent.

And yet when these points are made, there is a howl-round of outrage and self-righteousness. How dare you blame immigrants for our housing crisis! It's Tory cuts and the privatisation of social housing and a refusal to build! Well, nobody is blaming the immigrants themselves, any more than they are blamed for exerting a depreciatory effect upon the wages of the very poorest paid. But they are still both a consequence

of a net influx of immigration. If an extra 250,000 people arrive here every year, they will need somewhere to live, no? Denial of that patent fact is one of the more entertaining examples of liberal doublethink.

The puzzle remains, though. If our birth rate is stable (immigrant birth rates excepted), how come most of our new housing need is the consequence of indigenous Brits? Again, this is a question the liberals find difficult to address. Almost all of the reasons are the consequence of progressive legislation of one kind or another. Easier divorce, the breakdown of both the nuclear family and the extended family and its replacement by fissiparous single parenthood. A diminishing of communitarianism and a concomitant wish on our behalves to live separately, apart from others.

By the same token we might also blame neoliberal economic policies — an obsession with the vaulting wealth that can be generated by home-ownership and which has led to houses being seen as simply collateral, ever to be traded up, rather than as places to live in and put down one's roots. To which we might add the horror of unrealistic expectation: with 50 per cent of young people now attending university, rather than 10 per cent (which was about right), we have graduates emerging from their colleges with a 2:2 in Gender Studies, appalled and astonished that they cannot find a nice flat to buy in Islington on their wages from Poundland. I had this very discussion with a young chap on a train recently: he was furious at my generation for depriving him of the right to buy an apartment in London. He was 23. I'm so sorry, I said, where would you like your apartment to be? Belgravia? Docklands? Hoxton? I was 30 before I got my studio flat in Peckham. Until then I camped out in low-grade squats and housing association properties, devoid of a sense of entitlement.

So: bullying, immigration and housing. If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this column please ring our helpline where a counsellor will tell you to man up and grow a pair.



'And let's all try to be a little bit kinder.'

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE

The argument continues online.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Brevity goes a long way



The PM is insisting that the briefings he finds in his red box every evening should be, well, brief, and has limited them to four sides of A4. That is three too many. Emperors too had in and out boxes and knew what hard work they could be.

Seleucus, Greek king of Asia, was said to have complained that 'If people knew what a burden it was reading and writing so many letters, they would not bother to pick up a discarded royal crown'. It was a common gripe of Roman emperors, too, who had a remarkably small secretariat — Julius Caesar famously annoyed the crowd at the games when they saw him answering his correspondence — and were expected to be able to communicate personally with everyone who wrote to them, including ordinary Romans who could not get justice back home.

A friend of the emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote to him saying he had better cultivate his eloquence because his duties included: to instruct the senate; address the people; correct injustices; send letters all around the globe; maintain the pressure on foreign kings; keep provincials in order; praise the good, suppress the seditious and terrify the bloodthirsty. The emperor Julian talked of letters and petitions to which he had to respond 'travelling round with me everywhere, following me like shadows'.

This is where brevity came in. We are told how the emperor Vespasian started his day: 'He got up early, even when it was still dark, and read the letters and the official *breviaria* ("reports"; Latin *brevis*, "brief").' One such report to the emperor Augustus covered everything from finance to troop strength across the empire.

We have other examples in the letters from Pliny, governor of Bithynia (northern Turkey), to Trajan, asking for advice. Most of them are very brief and so too are Trajan's replies. An exception is Pliny's long letter to Trajan about his treatment of Christians. It receives a crisp, four-point reply.

It is said that one of the virtues of Latin prose composition is that it trains you to cut through the guff. Perhaps the PM should send out instructions for his *breviaria* to be written in Latin.

— Peter Jones

A dirty business

Criminal gangs are growing rich on public-sector contracts

ALASDAIR PALMER

There were headlines recently about how more than half of local councils had recorded a large increase in the number of 'fly-tipping' incidents: cases where rubbish and waste are collected, then illegally dumped and left to rot in open fields. That practice normally has dire consequences for the local environment, and sometimes for the health of animals and people who live close by. Various sources were quoted claiming that organised criminal gangs were usually responsible for illegal fly-tipping. On the face of it, that is an astonishing claim. What is organised crime doing disposing of rubbish? But no one seems interested in finding out what lies beneath it.

When I worked at the Home Office, I was amazed to discover the existence of this criminal underworld — and government's unintentional complicity in it. Some of the worst fly-tipping is committed by waste management companies working under contract for local councils. Dig deeper, and many of these companies turn out to have been run by organised criminal gangs. They appear to be effective and respectable, and offer astonishingly low bids for disposing of the council's rubbish. Their bids are irresistibly low because they skip the most important part of the contract: detoxifying the rubbish. They just dump it instead.

It isn't only councils that have handed contracts worth large sums of public money to organised criminals offering suspiciously cheap rates. The police themselves have done so as well: one force I've spoken to discovered that it had awarded its own waste-disposal contract to a company affiliated to an organised criminal network.

Behind the increase in fly-tipping is a frightening development: the infiltration of public sector procurement by organised crime. It is happening on a very significant scale. 'Waste management' is just the start — as it was in Italy in the 1950s for the Mafia. What propelled the Italian Mafia from a relatively small-scale criminal gang into a nationwide organisation that could control politicians and parts of the legal process was its takeover of the waste-disposal business — and in particular of government contracts.

The lack of concern from central government is astonishing and alarming. A decade ago, Scottish police investigating a taxi company owned by a well-known (and very

violent) gangster were surprised to discover that the taxi company had been given a contract worth more than £2 million by NHS Glasgow to take patients to and from hospitals. The discovery was particularly surprising as Glasgow police had warned Glasgow NHS that the taxi company was linked to organised crime.

The incident upset several senior Glasgow police inspectors. They wondered how many public sector contracts in Scotland were being awarded to what were either straightforwardly criminal enterprises or linked to companies that were ultimately controlled by criminals. So they obtained Scotland's public sector procurement database, which lists each good or service that

What propelled the Italian Mafia from small-scale gang into national organisation was waste disposal

is purchased with the roughly £11 billion worth of public money that is spent every year in Scotland. The inspectors matched the information up with Police Scotland's list of individuals and companies known to be involved in organised crime.

They were shocked by what they found: a significant portion — perhaps as much as 10 per cent — of the amount being spent every year on the purchase of services by the public sector in Scotland was going to criminal organisations. And that was just the companies known to the police. Their own list was not a comprehensive index of every criminal enterprise, and they knew it. But even using that list, it was clear that tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money was being handed to criminals. Local councils, the NHS and other government agencies were purchasing transport, security, waste disposal and other services from criminal gangs. Criminals were growing rich on public sector contracts.

One might have thought that this discovery, which the Scottish inspectors shared with everyone they thought needed to know, including ministers in Westminster, would have led to an instant reappraisal of procurement practices across the UK. If the process of criminal infiltration is happening on anything like the same scale in England as it is in Scotland, then hundreds of millions of pounds of public money is being

given to criminal organisations. The government would be actively aiding and abetting the growth of criminal enterprise on a huge scale. That is something that taxpayers might not be very happy about.

But there has been no reappraisal. Nothing significant has been done to address the problem. It hardly even seems to be recognised. There has been no announcement, no policy proposal, no speeches by the Home Secretary or the Justice Secretary. Search across police and government websites for 'organised crime', and you will find a lot of disturbing material about the consequences of allowing organised criminal groups to flourish unchecked. But you won't find anything that suggests organised crime is quietly infiltrating public sector procurement and making a fortune from it.

That may be because the government, the police and the prosecuting authorities are all at a loss as to how to stop it. During my time at the Home Office, we discussed a forthcoming speech by Theresa May, then Home Secretary, about the dangers of organised crime. I was shown a police briefing about the scale of its infiltration of the public sector. It was so secret that I had to read it under the eye of a senior police officer before he took it back.

It seems this is a battle ministers have chosen not to fight, but why? What makes them so reluctant to try to defeat a develop-



'I've been made Impermanent Secretary.'

ment that poses a moral threat to the integrity of government? Procurement rules and regulations are complicated and difficult to enforce, but is it really beyond the combined intelligence of ministers and officials to prevent companies known to be controlled by criminals from being handed contracts worth hundreds of millions of pounds?

It would surely not be hard to require organisations spending public money to check with police before awarding a contract. CRB checks are compulsory for anyone applying for a job that involves working with children: why couldn't similar checks be done with companies tendering for

public sector contracts? The short answer is: EU Directive 2004/18/EC, Article 45. In the UK, it's taken to mean that companies can only be excluded from being awarded government contracts if one or more of their directors have been convicted of a serious offence. Police intelligence that a company is suspected of involvement in racketeering or some other form of criminal enterprise cannot legally be used to prevent it from winning a public sector contract.

But now we have left the EU and the jurisdiction of the European Court, that regulation should not be a problem — at least in theory. Practice may be very different. Supposing parliament gets around to repealing EU Directive 2004/18/EC, Article 45 (and we have incorporated all EU law

Criminal groups have successfully sued councils for cancelling their contracts

into our own statute book, so it will have to be explicitly repealed), it will then require a great deal of activity on the part of public sector procurement officials to start checking whether a company that has won, or is now tendering for, a government-financed contract is linked with organised crime, and should thus be barred from receiving any government money. Criminal organisations have successfully sued councils for cancelling their contracts. Even when EU Directive 2004/18/EC, Article 45, is gone, they may still be able to do so.

It will also require officials to show a considerable degree of personal courage. Although organised crime's infiltration of government doesn't usually involve explicit threats of violence, there certainly have been cases of officials being told by thugs that: 'We know where your children go to school — bear that in mind when you make the decision on who to award this contract.'

Generally, however, the process by which the integrity of government is corrupted is much more insidious. It is through the corruption of lawyers and accountants and associated professionals who provide cover for what the criminals do and make exposing it much harder. Lies, deception, intimidation, cheating and above all waste of public money are the characteristics of organised crime as it moves in on the public sector, rather than the explicit violence depicted in movies and TV shows. That is one reason why it is so hard to deal with it.

Every individual who is part of a criminal organisation knows that 'he who has the gold makes the rules'. We are handing criminals a great deal of gold. Sooner or later, we shall find that we have to play by their rules. It is hard to overstate what a catastrophe for the integrity, the honesty, and the efficiency of our government that will be.

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Condé nasty

How Blair's protégé became another African strongman

COLIN FREEMAN

When Alpha Condé 'Le Professeur' became president of Guinea in 2010, he was hailed by Tony Blair as an ideal leader — the very model of what an African premier should be. Unlike previous rulers, Condé didn't shoot his way to the top, but arrived armed with a law degree from the Sorbonne and Guinea's first ever democratic mandate. Blair chose Le Professeur as a client for his Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), set up to nurture a new generation of 'good guy' African leaders, and Condé was introduced to a network of experts — not woolly DfID types, but sharp tacks with Downing Street experience. The idea was to replicate Mr Blair's successful policy 'delivery unit' across Africa.

Unfortunately, Condé has begun to succumb to African Strongman Syndrome. Though he's now 81, he has announced plans to scrap the constitutional rules that forbid him a third term in office. There have been protests, and at least 30 people killed. Opposition activists have been charged with insurrection. Condé's reputation as a model leader looks shaky — as does the reputation of the AGI. So how and why did the Alpha Condé experiment go wrong?

When I first went to Guinea in 2009, the previous president, Lansana Conté, had just died after 25 years in office. Another military hardman, Moussa 'Dadis' Camara, had seized power. Camara's first act was to lift the lid on how the Conté family had got into bed with Latino cocaine cartels, turning Guinea into west Africa's first fully functioning narco-state. Drug barons were hosted at a villa once owned by the first lady, and had a private airstrip to land their product. Camara organised live televised interrogation shows, where Conté's son and others confessed to using the presidential guard to protect the goods and diplomatic bags to courier them to Europe.

The 'Dadis Show', as it became known, was so popular that DVDs of it were even sold in the local markets. It also doubled as filmed proof that Camara, a braggart and narcissist, was not going to be much of an upgrade on Conté, so nobody was too sad when he was shot by his own bodyguard.

In the wake of such lousy competition, all Condé had to do was not actively mess things up. And to start with he succeeded. He paid close attention to his AGI advisers,

who set up an office in Conakry, Guinea's ramshackle seaside capital. They helped him tighten laws against corruption in the mineral sector and Mr Condé signed off a £3 billion aluminium deal with an investment fund to which Mr Blair was a paid adviser. Mr Blair stated at the time that he had not profited personally from the deal or been involved in brokering it.

AGI advised on building a new hydro-electric dam — doubling Guinea's power output — and co-ordinated the response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Soon Condé was doing the global conference circuit as a Blair-endorsed model leader, holding forth on transparency and accountability.

In 2013 there was a little bump in the road to perfect governance. Condé's security forces shot dead nine people in anti-government

At 81, Condé has announced plans to scrap constitutional rules that forbid him a third term in office

protests. A leaked AGI document showed a discussion about the need for a new 'narrative' to affirm Condé as a man of 'democratic process and dialogue'. But Condé began to make other powerful friends. In the past two years he has twice visited Vladimir Putin, whose predecessors ran Guinea as a Soviet client state in the 1960s. Russia is keen to regain its influence there. After Condé announced his plans to amend the constitution, the Russian ambassador to Guinea, Alexandre Bregadze, abandoned diplomatic neutrality and came out in favour.

In a televised speech that only a Putin apparatchik could think was normal, Mr Bregadze told Guineans: 'Do you know many presidents in Africa who do better? It's



'We're here about the superforecaster job.'

constitutions that adapt to reality, not reality that adapts to constitutions.' Mr Bregadze wasn't just being rhetorical. Since his speech, he has moved to a new job as head of the Guinea branch of the Russian aluminium giant Rusal, a sign that Moscow is digging in to protect its big mineral stake in Guinea. There are rumours that Wagner Group, the Kremlin-backed mercenary outfit, has sent 'advisers' into Guinea to help Mr Condé win this year's election. Their way of helping out may be rather different from the AGI's.

It isn't just in Guinea that the AGI has had only partial success. In post-genocide Rwanda, it has worked with President Paul Kagame, another Blair protégé. The AGI's website points out — rightly — that Rwanda now has one of the most advanced economies in Africa, but makes no mention of the widespread claims that Kagame has silenced opponents at home and sent hit squads to kill dissidents abroad. Meanwhile, in the newly minted republic of South Sudan — the one championed by George Clooney et al — the AGI's work with President Salva Kiir ended abruptly when the country lurched into a civil war that has since claimed nearly 400,000 lives.

Perhaps, in Guinea's case, it's time for Blair to intervene again. You can imagine the phone call. 'Hi, it's Tony here. Remember me? About this plan to stay on. It's not exactly the way we do things in the West...' When I asked the AGI recently if Tony Blair had been in touch with his old protégé they declined to say, although they confirmed that they still had staff working in Guinea to support infrastructure projects. But this is the trouble with helping such rulers when in power — they may begin to think they did it all on their own. Some in Guinea say that Condé began to feel Blair was surplus to his requirements after the premier won his second election in 2015.

The AGI, meanwhile, has now also been incorporated into the new Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, a thinktank that aims to fight 'authoritarian populism'. Given Le Professeur's new friendship with Mr Putin, it could well be that he has a very different set of dealings with Mr Blair in future.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Colin Freeman and Chatham House's Alex Vines on where it all went wrong for Guinea.



Ventures that can change the world

The Spectator's Economic Disruptor of the Year Awards 2020, sponsored by Julius Bär, opens for entries on Thursday 5 March. We're excited to hear from entrepreneurs in every sector and region of the UK whose products are changing their markets in terms of price, choice or technology, and have potential for international growth. And in this third year of these high-profile Awards, we're also looking for outstanding examples of social impact.

Meanwhile, we'll present a series of inspirational stories behind 2019's Disruptor finalists. First, Martin Vander Weyer meets Brendan Hyland, of WFS Technologies, the subsea wireless communications venture that was the winning entry for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

We could hardly have found a better Disruptor champion for Scotland and Northern Ireland than Brendan Hyland, a native of Belfast (and engineering graduate of Queen's University there) who's now a veteran Scottish entrepreneur, having built two major technology businesses at Livingston in Midlothian. The first, Kymata, made optoelectronic components for telecoms networks and was sold to Alcatel of France in 2001. The second is WFS Technologies — which offers an heroic tale of persistence, ingenuity and occasional luck to kick off this series of profiles.

Founded in 2003, WFS is a world leader in subsea technologies that reduce cost



Martin Vander Weyer

and risk for the offshore energy industry and have other applications related to climate change and aquaculture. It started in a very different field, looking for wireless solutions to the 'kerb-to-house' problem at the ends of onshore optical-fibre networks. But 'it was tough to make money in BT's backyard', Brendan says, and WFS moved on, via contracts for the UK Ministry of Defence, to work on video links for 'autonomous underwater vehicles'.

His team began with 'a profound degree of ignorance' about the possibilities of subsea communication and a belief that it was impossible to transmit radio signals through water, until they made a surprise breakthrough — 'a penicillin moment' — which won them an innovation award from the MoD in 2006. They had proved that subsea wireless was possible, with applications for submariners, environmental monitoring and the energy industry. But it was very expensive — and Brendan's next challenge was 'to

reduce the price point to a level that made commercial sense'. First progress came from an unlikely direction: a collaboration with Wavejet, a Florida-based venture making motorised surfboards.

The real target was to sell monitoring devices for offshore oil, gas and wind installations, but energy companies were themselves in a downturn in 2015-16 that restrained their spending. 'It was a matter of give up or dig in, so we dug in.' The biggest obstacle was limited battery life and the huge cost of replacing batteries in deep water. 'We had to change the rules of that game and by smart engineering we've done so', reducing power consumption in WFS's patented data transmission devices 'by a factor of 1,000'.

Why is WFS a true disruptor — and what is it that keeps Brendan, at 56, fired up to drive the business forward? 'Our future is in the ocean,' he replies. 'Offshore wind is a huge source of energy. Aquaculture is going to be a huge source of food protein. Coastlines are threatened by climate change. The ability to measure and monitor through low-cost wireless devices is key to making the right investments in all these areas. By extending the Internet of Things into the ocean, we're changing the world.'

The entry form and terms and conditions for the 2020 Economic Disruptor of the Year Awards will be available from 5 March at www.spectator.co.uk/disruptor. The closing date for entries is 5 June 2020.

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How Sinn Féin got away with murder



The online world should be credited when it gets something right. And on Twitter an account titled ‘On This Day the IRA’ gets something very right. Granted, it’s not your usual internet fare. It includes no videos of cute animals sneezing. It is simply an archive-rich account which records what the IRA did on that day in history.

Naturally, each day brings more than one thing to commemorate. On the day I’m writing, the account records James Keenan and Martin McGuigan, two Catholic 16-year-olds blown up by the IRA in 1979 while they were on their way to a Saturday night dance. There are also anniversaries from 1977 and 1988, and Reginald Williamson, a 46-year-old father of two who was killed in 1993. The girlfriend of the off-duty RUC member was driving behind him in a separate car after a night out together. She described the effects of the under-car bomb going off. A bang, a scream, and then, as she ran over to her boyfriend, the first fruit of the IRA’s labours: ‘I looked down and his legs were gone.’

Aside from families, friends and this sombre account, few people remember these dead. Few joined the ranks of famous victims who emerged from larger, or state-caused, atrocities. The families rarely got any apology out of the IRA greater than ‘Sorry our car bomb went off early, or in the wrong street’.

If there was any justification for this, it was that in the North and the South of Ireland things needed to move on. For two decades, such sentiment held because the peace held. This in spite of disturbing corners, such as those secret portions of the Good Friday Agreement that allowed the loved ones of people killed by British soldiers to seek justice, while the families of those killed by the IRA were expected to watch their murderers walk free, and sometimes into government.

Now elections in the Republic of Ireland have come along to further unsettle this moral equilibrium. Three weeks ago Sinn Féin won more votes than any other party, and as a result the political wing of the IRA is negotiating to form a govern-

ment in Dublin. True, there have already been upsets. Soon after the election there was a Labour-like scandal when it turned out that one of SF’s new elected representatives, Reada Cronin, had a social media history that even Baroness Chakrabarti might have thought fishy. Among other things, Ms Cronin appeared to favour the idea that the Rothschild family conspired with Adolf Hitler to bring about the Holocaust.

Over the days in which Cronin was forced to do the usual apology tour, I’m sure I was not alone in feeling that there was more to say. Have we become so preoccupied with online crimes that actual crimes have begun

Have we become so preoccupied with online crimes that actual crimes have begun to take a back seat?

to take a back seat? Or is there perhaps a certain boredom — a certain tedium — with stating the bleeding obvious? Whatever the explanation, while the press were focusing on one Shinner’s anti-Semitism, a voice in my head kept shouting: ‘What about the paramilitary wing? What about the death squads? What about all the dead — all the Jameses and Martins and Reginalds?’ A party so unbothered, if not proud, of its actual crimes will hardly be detained by a few online infelicities.

True, the party has spent recent years adapting to the new ‘social justice’ mantras that have swept Ireland even faster than everywhere else in recent years. SF have almost managed their rebrand from murderous nationalists to social justice internationalists. Though it has included some grindingly noisy gear changes. Four years ago a Sinn Féin senator in the North claimed that the 1981 hunger strikers died for gay rights. How I would love to have seen someone say to a naked Bobby Sands, sitting in his cell: ‘So I hear you’re doing all this for the gays, Bobby?’ For his response would likely have been neither diverse nor inclusive.

But it is all of a piece. While most people weren’t watching, the Shinners dolled

themselves up for a new generation. And the election results showed how many people in Ireland were persuaded by this. Deciding in the process that the past was less important than the future, as though the two were separable. So we can now observe a party trying to form a government whose relatively kindly face is Mary Lou McDonald — a woman very happy to shout the IRA slogan ‘Our day will come’. The Dail is adorned by Dessie Ellis, a former IRA man reported to have been linked to around 50 murders. Even the party’s younger sparks like David Cullinane are happy to toe the old line when it comes to the murderers. Cullinane concluded his election night address with all the old slogans, including ‘Up the RA’ [IRA]. Picked up on by the national press afterwards, Cullinane said he had nothing to apologise for and in any case, his comments were about the past, not the future.

The discovery that Gerry Adams is on Sinn Féin’s negotiating team cast further doubt on that — curiously, though, Sinn Féin didn’t announce his involvement in the talks. Only when the party’s own internal documents were leaked and revealed that Adams was on the team did a new generation have another chance to get used to the idea that Sinn Féin don’t always tell the truth.

So is it all in the past? Not according to Ireland’s own police chief, Drew Harris, who this week said what everyone in the intelligence and policing community knows — which is that Sinn Féin the political party is to this day still overseen by the army council of the IRA. Meaning that the next Irish government could be led by the only party for miles — or decades — around that comes with all the advantages that can be accrued in a democracy from having your own armed assassination gang.

Perhaps this is what history always feels like. Politicians lie to gain power. Memories fade. As the ‘On This Day’ account reminds us, people get away with murder. But Sinn Féin’s success is a reminder also of one of the great mysteries of Ireland, both North and South: how a people famous for remembering everything can have forgotten so much.

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A new angle

What would a Keir Starmer Labour party look like?

KATY BALLS

There's still a month of the Labour leadership contest to go but most MPs have already concluded that Keir Starmer will win. The shadow Brexit secretary has led in every category so far: MPs, unions and local parties. As the contest enters its final stage, polling suggests the membership agree and Sir Keir will sail through. His closest rival, Rebecca Long-Bailey, is now seen as a ten-to-one outsider. One bookmaker is already paying out on a Starmer victory.

But if the race seems all but over, the conversation about what he'll do as Labour leader is very much ongoing. Is he the leader that the party's moderates have craved to stand up to the hard left — or a vessel for continuity Corbynism?

So far, he has tried very hard not to say. He has managed to attract supporters from both sides of the party, parading a reputation for pragmatism to win support from the centre, while using selective cases from his legal career to present himself as a champion of left-wing causes. Most of these cases he lost, but to today's Labour party this isn't such an issue.

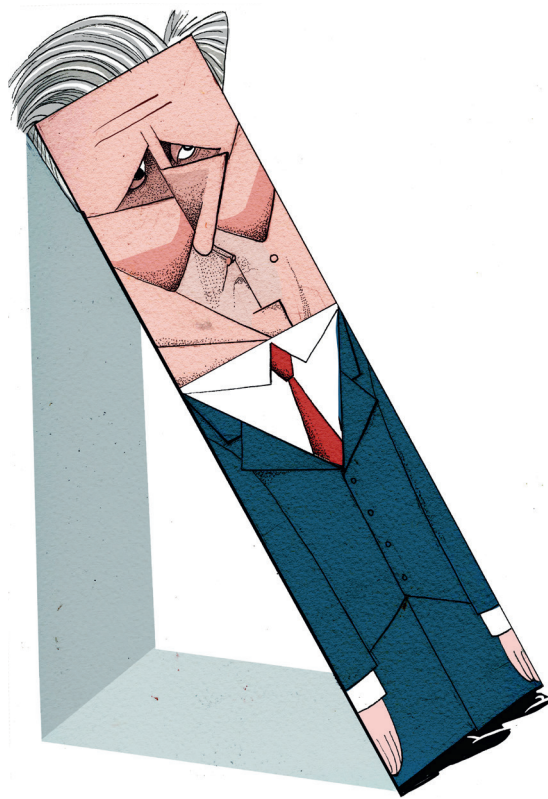
His campaign team has tried to balance the various Labour tribes. It includes Simon Fletcher, who has made a career working for socialist politicians, such as Ken Livingstone at City Hall. From the right of the party he has Matt Pound — formerly of Labour First, a Corbyn-sceptic group that has clashed with Momentum.

His supporters range from unashamed Blairites, such as Ben Bradshaw, to Laura Parker, the Momentum organiser, and to the now-retired Corbyn cheerleader Paul Mason. Sir Keir has spoken frequently in the campaign of the need for unity and to move past the internal conflicts of recent years. But there's a sense that sooner or later, he'll have to favour one faction at the expense of the other.

'Keir is a blank page,' admits one MP backing him. 'No one knows what he will really do. We're all just hoping it will be

close to our own politics.' Those hoping for early clarification may be left disappointed: Sir Keir and his team see his leadership as a five-year project. Expect some strategic ambiguity in the early stages. They accept that it will take years to get the party to where he wants it to be.

Some changes can be made quickly. He has already promised to give roles to his leadership rivals Lisa Nandy and Rebecca



Long-Bailey (although he has drawn the line at Jeremy Corbyn).

'How many of the old shadow cabinet stay in depends on the size of his lead,' says a party source. 'The bigger the lead, the bigger the change.' Expect fresh faces to be included as part of a bid to show the party is moving forward. Bringing back those who wouldn't serve under Corbyn would also be a way of signalling that the party has changed.

Next: party organisation. There will be a move to oust members and supporters guilty of anti-Semitism. In theory, this ought to be uncontroversial, but given how high tensions run in the party, there's a view that the EHRC investigation into allegations of anti-Semitism within Labour could offer Starmer the necessary cover to take drastic action. The results of this are expected after the May local elections.

Corbyn allies are still running the Labour machine — Jennie Formby as General Secretary, for example. Sir Keir is under pressure to clear them out. This will be an uphill task. There are already reports that the hard left is digging in and will even install allies in key roles in anticipation of his arrival.

An easier task ought to be found in his team's hopes to establish an efficient media operation to take advantage of the Tory policy of boycotting certain programmes. When, for instance, Priti Patel was under pressure this week, a sharp Labour machine would have been quick to attack and make hay. Since the 8.10 a.m. slot on the *Today* programme seems to be up for grabs for the foreseeable future, it's an open goal. It's also viewed internally as crucial, given that the 80-strong Tory majority makes Labour victories in the Commons unlikely.

In parliament, Sir Keir will try putting forensic lawyerly pressure on a Prime Minister who dislikes it. But what issues will he be pressing? It's thought he will position himself to the left of Ed Miliband. Ten pledges he made this month included a vow to keep Corbyn's policy to abolish tuition fees — as well as a programme of mass nationalisation and a 'Prevention of Military Intervention Act' to end illegal wars.

'He didn't need to do it,' says one concerned supporter. 'We'd been told he wasn't going to do policy because he didn't want to be wedded to anything.' Others complain that it was a very Gordon Brown thing to do: make a rash decision in response to something your rivals are doing.

Brown might not be far away. The two men are still close (it was Brown who hired Starmer as Director of Public Prosecutions) and often speak in private. Starmer has also sought advice from Sadiq Khan, Labour's most senior elected representative.

It's this appetite for winning that could separate him from Corbyn. Those who have worked closely with him say he takes an interest in polling in a way that Corbyn never did. 'Keir wants to be prime minister,' says a Labour source. 'He's focused on that in a way Corbyn and even Miliband weren't. He will react to the country and its needs, rather than just going on ideology.'

Feverish imaginations

The most dangerous thing about coronavirus is the hysteria

ROSS CLARK

If you have just cancelled your trip to Venice and ordered your £19.99 surgical face mask from Amazon, how about this for a terrifying vision: by the time we get to April, 50,000 Britons will have succumbed to a combination of infectious disease and adverse weather. Frightened? If you are, don't worry: you survived. It was two years ago. In 2017-18 the Office for National Statistics recorded 50,100 'excess winter deaths'. The explanation, according to the ONS, was probably 'the predominant strain of flu, the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine, and below average winter temperatures'.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) is a pretty virulent virus all right, but not in the way you might imagine. It is less our respiratory tracts it has infected than our inner sense of angst. By last Monday there were 79,331 confirmed cases worldwide, all but 2,069 of which were in China. There have been 2,595 deaths in China and 23 elsewhere in the world. And seasonal flu? According to an estimate by the US-based Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it has caused between 291,000 and 646,000 deaths globally a year. To put it another way, if the number of deaths from coronavirus rises a hundred-fold in the next few weeks or months, it will only have reached the lower bound of the estimate for existing strains of flu.

How many of us wear face masks because of winter flu? How many planes and trains are cancelled? Does the stock market slump? There is some justification for being more wary of Covid-19 than the flu. The former is an unknown quantity and we don't yet have a vaccine. But we know more about it by the day. Its death rate is now around 1 per cent or less and it is mostly killing people with pre-existing health conditions; anyone else would be unlucky to die from it.

Coronavirus hysteria occurs because we confuse precaution with risk. We see Chinese cities being cut off, people being quarantined, factories closed, the streets emptying (save for a few people in face masks) and we interpret this as a sign of grave and imminent danger. If China had not taken such dramatic steps to stop the disease, we wouldn't be half as worried.

There seems to be a distinct strain of Sinophobia in our attitude towards infectious disease. Every novel disease that comes out of China instantly seems to

gain the description 'pandemic' — even when diseases such as Sars and H5N1 avian flu hardly justify being called an 'epidemic'. Covid-19 seems to fit neatly with our fears about Huawei spying on our phones and Chinese manufacturers stealing our jobs. Diseases from elsewhere don't excite the imagination nearly so much. There was a brief flurry of concern in 2014 when Ebola, vastly more lethal than Covid-19, emerged in West Africa (it has since killed 11,310 people globally). But if we are going to worry about any infectious disease, it ought to be tuberculosis. The World Health Organization reports there were ten million new cases worldwide in 2018, 1.45 million deaths, and 4,672 cases in England. But no one ever bought a face mask because of that. How many people even know that the epicentre of tuberculosis is India, with 27 per cent of cases globally?

There is something more to the Covid-19 panic. It is the latest phenomenon to fulfil a weird and growing appetite for doom among the populations of developed countries. We are living in the healthiest, most peaceful time in history, yet we cannot seem to accept it. We constantly have to invent bogeymen, from climate alarmism, nuclear war and financial collapse to deadly diseases. Covid-19 has achieved such traction because it has emerged at just the right time. At the end of January, Brexit had just been completed without incident. The standoff between the US and Iran — which preposterously led the 'Doomsday Clock' to be advanced closer to midnight than during the Cuban missile crisis — fizzled into nothing. The Australian bush fires, which caused an explosion in climate doom-mongering (even though the global incidence of wildfires has fallen over the past two decades) had largely gone out. What more was there to worry about?

Then along came a novel strain of disease and the cycle of panic began again. But there are already strong signs that it has peaked. In the seven days before 24 February, the WHO recorded 6,398 new infections in China — down from 13,002 the previous week. On Monday it was 415. Very soon we are going to have to find another thing to agonise about. Asteroids? The next 'freak' weather incident, now the storms have died down? Who knows, but we will certainly find something.

BAROMETER

What a hole

A hole built into the wall of a NatWest bank branch in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, became an unlikely tourist destination with five-star reviews on TripAdvisor. Some other surprising attractions:

— The Bude tunnel is a 230-yard Perspex tunnel linking a supermarket to its car park in Bude, Cornwall. It started to gain five-star reviews when it was decorated with Christmas lights.

— Streets of bungalows in Kidlington, Oxfordshire, became a destination for Chinese tourists, with one telling reporters that the village brought you 'closer to the simplicity of your original self'. A more likely explanation is that tourists on coach trips had been dumped there rather than pay an extra £53 to visit Blenheim Palace.

— The A272 so impressed a Dutch visitor, Pieter Boogaart, that he published an entire book about it in 2000.

Duty bound

There were calls for the Chancellor to reform stamp duty in the Budget. How has the number of property transactions across the UK changed over the past 15 years, as stamp duty has been increased?

2006/07.....	1.7m
2008/09.....	793,000
2010/11.....	877,000
2012/13.....	928,000
2014/15.....	1.20m
2016/17.....	1.15m
2018/19.....	1.19m

Source: HMRC

Facts of life

The Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England blamed 'austerity' for a fall in the rate at which life expectancy is growing. Some other countries which have seen a fall in the rate of increase in life expectancy between 2006-11 and 2011-16:

US.....	90%
UK.....	76%
Spain.....	37%
Germany.....	36%
Portugal.....	32%
Sweden.....	31%

Source: ONS

Royal treatment

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex agreed not to use the 'Sussex Royal' brand, in spite of having trademarked it. Outside the UK, restrictions on using 'royal' as a brand name do not apply. Some products which use it:

- Schwarzkopf Igora Royal hair colour
- Royal Langnickel artist's brushes
- Royal Canin dog food
- Royal Chai premium instant tea
- Royal Henna powder hair dye

Why did no one believe Johnny Depp?



When it was first reported that Johnny Depp had been hit and pelted with crockery by his slight, blonde then wife, Amber Heard, I'm afraid my first reaction was disdain. Johnny and Amber recorded their rows on their mobile phones (as you do) and a 'reliable source' leaked the recording: 'I was hitting you, it was not punching you,' Amber says to Johnny. 'Babe, you're not punched.' Then, exasperated: 'You are such a baby. Grow the fuck up Johnny... I did not hurt you, I did not punch you, I was hitting you.'

At first my sympathies were with Amber. C'mon Johnny, c'mon Captain Jack Sparrow, can't a lady throw a plate or two? Surely a slap, under provocative circumstances, is OK? The TV of my youth was full of ladies with shoulder pads slapping men. Barely a week went by on *Dynasty* without Joan Collins, as Alexis Carrington, clipping some cowering chap. Very satisfying it was too.

It's worse for a man to hit a woman than the other way around. You might think you disagree — most millennials are bound to disagree — but think of Hollywood, that mirror of all our souls. Think of the hundreds of jolly romcoms in which the girl gets to swat the guy — he's come on too strong maybe, or there's a misunderstanding. No big deal. Now just imagine a romcom in which the male protagonist loses his rag and smacks his love interest.

A week after the recording was leaked, another window opened up into the Heard/Depp love nest; another demented recording found its way to the *Mail*, and after this one, the affair can be seen in a very different light. My whole gung-ho approach to women slapping men looks different and I'm having to rethink my prejudices, which is uncomfortable.

'Tell the world, Johnny, tell them: I Johnny Depp, a man, I'm a victim too of domestic violence...' This is Amber taunting Johnny, hissing at him, daring him to go public. 'You're bigger and you're stronger. I was a 115lb woman... You're going to get up on the stand, Johnny, and say "She started it"? Really? Just see how many people believe or side with you.' It was as if the whole drama suddenly changed genre, from a portrait of

a rock'n'roll LA marriage into something more like *Single White Female*.

After recording two, I was not Team Amber anymore. Worse: I wasn't even on my own team. Amber Heard was right. No one had thought to believe Johnny for a second, no one had questioned her version of events, not because she had a watertight case — but because she was a woman.

To understand how crazy that last recording is, you have to understand something of the history of the Depp/Heard affair. In the summer of 2016, after just a year of marriage, Amber accused Johnny of hitting her. She posted photos of her slightly bruised

It never occurred to me or the usual activists that Johnny could be the one who needed help

right eye on Instagram, and as she filed for divorce she took out a restraining order. There really wasn't much in the way of evidence, but Amber looked the very picture of a 21st-century victim: beautiful, fragile, bravely out as pansexual. The world rallied round and anyone who even considered questioning Amber's account of events was quickly labelled a misogynist.

Both Depp's ex-wives seemed confused. Vanessa Paradis said: 'In all these years I have known Johnny he has never been physically abusive with me and this looks nothing like the man I lived with for 14 wonderful

years.' Depp's first wife, Lori Anne Allison, agreed, saying he was a 'soft person'. Depp's daughter Lily-Rose Depp defended him too, and was attacked by *Grazia* magazine as a result: 'Heard's voice counts and our insidious, doubting voices do not.'

Johnny believes the furore caused him to lose his most lucrative gig, the role of Captain Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series, and no one thought it unfair. I didn't think it unfair, I simply assumed that Johnny was a cad. It never occurred to me or to the usual activists against abuse that Johnny could be the one who needed help. He's a man, part of the patriarchy, how can he be a victim?

In 2015, just after Amber and Johnny tied the knot, the UK outlawed 'coercive control' — the attempt by one partner to bully and dominate another. But when the law was announced by Karen Bradley, the then minister for preventing abuse and exploitation, she made it quite clear who needed protecting: 'No one should live in fear,' she said, 'which is why this government has made ending violence against women and girls a priority.' In 2016, *The Archers* ran the story of timid Helen and Rob, her controlling husband, and for a while after that no women's magazine was complete without a ten-point checklist: 'How to tell if you're dating a male narcissist.' Diagnostic jargon spilled over from psychology into ordinary marital arguments, which was useful for a while. 'Don't gaslight me,' I once said to my husband mid-row. It felt very empowering. 'I'm not gaslighting you, I'm just disagreeing with you,' he said. 'There's got to be a difference.'

I'm not suggesting that Amber has a personality disorder — who knows what the next episode of the Johnny and Amber show will reveal? He's currently suing her for defamation and loss of earnings over the *Pirates of the Caribbean* affair. Amber says Depp is trying to 'victim blame' her and the recordings are being 'twisted'.

But as we *Archers* fans know, it is textbook narcissist to accuse your partner of the crimes you yourself have committed — domestic violence, say — and to taunt them with the fact that no one will listen. It's textbook narcissist to pose as the victim when in fact you've been the bully all along.



'Oh no! What have I tweeted...?'

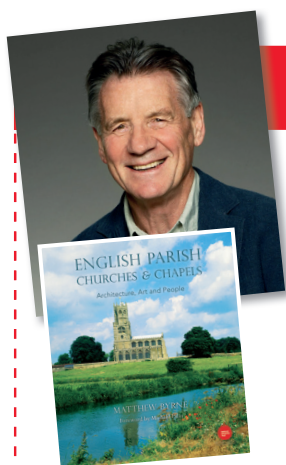


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Devolved or decentralised?

Sir: Paul Collier ('Northern lights', 22 February) conflates what devolution has come to mean, in UK terms, with decentralisation of authority. Thus it is adrift to imply that Edinburgh has benefited from a conscious decentralising of powers from central government. It was simply that Scotland as a whole got devolution and Edinburgh is its capital city, whereby it administers the devolved responsibilities.

Until such time as commentators and politicians distinguish properly between devolution and decentralisation, they will continue to prompt fears that England could be balkanised rather than treated as a national entity on a par with Scotland. Situate its devolved English parliament and government in a more northerly latitude of England, with London becoming UK federal territory, and that will do more for the North and elsewhere than granting crumbs of local power to a few other cities.
Ken Stevens
Sonning Common, Oxfordshire

Sustaining networks

Sir: Douglas Murray believes that the BBC should be allowed to die if it fails to cater to his taste in high culture ('How low can the BBC go?', 22 February). How stark the contrast between this and his friend Roger Scruton's wise guidance that we should instead sustain the networks of familiarity and trust on which a community depends for longevity, and that we must sometimes reform in order to conserve.
Richard Lyon
Edinburgh

The BBC is outstanding

Sir: As a faithful Belgian *Spectator* reader for years, my defence of the BBC does not spring from politics. English viewers may not be aware of it, because they are so used to the outstanding quality, but I can assure you that the BBC's programmes are probably the best in the world and are an example for television makers all over the place. It would be a crying shame to try to muzzle the BBC, just because the news gathering and opinion programmes may seem to be a bit too progressive or independent for some people's taste.

The general public, not only in Britain, adore the BBC's documentaries, sports programmes, the well-made drama, the quizzes and witty panel shows. Please don't kill the goose with the golden eggs.
Paul Jacobs
Producer, Belgian radio and television (ret.)

Don't forget Bragg

Sir: Like Douglas Murray, I no longer listen to BBC Radio 4 in the morning. I now wait until *PM* to get my news from the excellent Evan Davies, whose forensic intellect is juxtaposed with sincere good manners, even if he does, on occasion, lose sight of the objectivity Lord Reith understood to be the principal requirement of a journalist.

As for TV culture, I have to thank the Beeb for my improved mental health, as the plethora of dancing programmes, cookery programmes and house improvement programmes send me to bed early.

However, there is one person, at least, whom Douglas Murray overlooks, and that is Melvyn Bragg, whose *In Our Time* programme has me delaying my start on a Thursday morning. He wastes no valuable air time at all promoting his own personality: just a 'Hello' and he's off. He does not interrupt his well-picked guests, and he has an uncanny ability to listen like the audience does.

Dick Durham
Leigh-on-Sea, Essex

Good cops, bad cops

Sir: As someone who has had more than his fair share of cycling-related incidents, I sympathise with Lionel Shriver over her two-wheeler run-in with a copper ('How I became an easy police target', 22 February). I hope the following may encourage her: when a policeman stepped into my path in Camberwell and, upon my objecting, told me to 'shut up', I found the complaints procedure to be surprisingly efficient. I received an apology from his supervisor within a few weeks, and the man in question faced disciplinary action.

When someone stole the wheels from my car in Hertfordshire, the police were, amazingly, able to catch the thief through DNA testing of some blood he'd left on the road. Conclusion? Some police are bad apples, some sympathetic and helpful — and sometimes you're just bloody lucky.

Jon Frank
Greenwich, London SE10

Police reader

Sir: I was very sorry to read of Lionel Shriver's recent 'contact' with the police. She was clearly treated with both a lack of respect and basic humanity. I do hope that she is now recovering from this unfortunate incident.

Despite her assumption about the officer involved, perhaps Lionel can be reassured that there are police officers who do read *The Spectator*.

Richard List
Detective Chief Superintendent,
Thames Valley Police, Aylesbury, Bucks

Penny purchases

Sir: Nigel Kavanagh-Brown gives sound advice on pence and pennies (Letters, 22 February). After all, the cry was 'Penny for the Guy'. However my recollection is that in the 1960s, two essential accoutrements each cost a penny: unwrapped gobstoppers and rolls of percussion caps.

John Spencer-Silver
London SW11

Where's Mr Wordsworth?

Sir: I've noticed Dot Wordsworth hasn't mentioned her husband lately. I do hope he is well. Perhaps Dot could let us know?

Billy Nanner
Nottingham
[Dot's husband returns, p62]

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Bet like Buffett: the virus scare is a chance to buy cheaper



If anything, stock markets have been slow to respond to the spreading coronavirus outbreak. Stories of Chinese supply interruptions, from JCB digger components to plastic toys, have been circulating since mid-February, while hedge funds have been hard at work short-selling cruise-operator shares: Royal Caribbean and Carnival are both down 30 per cent. Now airlines have taken a pasting too, with easyJet and Ryanair among the big fallers in Monday's sell-off of European stocks, following news of a cluster of virus cases in northern Italy.

Meanwhile, a turning point may or may not have been reached in the rate of reported cases in Wuhan, where the outbreak began. The World Health Organization says it has seen positive indications there, but this probably isn't the moment to start believing propaganda from Beijing: shortly after the announcement that President Xi Jinping was belatedly taking charge of China's response to the crisis, I read: 'Ninety per cent of Chinese cities simultaneously recorded a drop in the infection rate.'

Whatever the truth, the natural order of things suggests the medical emergency will fade in the spring and shares will recover. Back in the 1980s, it was commonly said that 'When America sneezes, the world catches a cold' — meaning that recessions over here inevitably followed downturns over there because US companies, banks and consumers had such enormous impact abroad. Now that China is suffering a major disruption for the first time since it emerged as a global trading titan, we really don't know how severe the economic infection is going to be, though we do know it will be exacerbated by unpredictable local patterns of travel restriction, supply shortage and stockpiling.

Meanwhile also, canny stock-pickers scan the pharmaceutical sector for claims of a first coronavirus vaccine: Californian biotech company Gilead Sciences is one share on the rise, and I see mention of smaller US Nasdaq-listed names such as the drug developer Novavax, up 30 per cent in February. Other pundits suggest buying temporary-

ily afflicted consumer stocks such as Nike, casino operators such as Wynn Resorts, or more sensibly, the healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson. But armchair investors should, of course, do the equivalent of washing their hands and donning a face mask before placing bets in such an uncertain field.

Buffett's bulletin

There are many reasons to salute 89-year-old US investor Warren Buffett besides the size of his accumulated fortune — \$90 billion at last count — and his declared intention to give almost all of it to charity. I've always liked his remark that money 'can't change how many people love you' and admired the mix of optimism, amiability and frankness in his annual letters to shareholders of Berkshire Hathaway, the holding company that has returned more than 20 per cent compounded annual growth since 1965, double that of the S&P 500 index.

This year he was frank about his own life expectancy — 'Charlie and I long ago entered the urgent zone,' he said, referring to his 96-year-old business partner Charlie Munger — and about the difficulty of finding companies they would like to acquire, which must meet criteria that include being run by 'able and honest managers'. Instead he and Charlie have simply ridden the 'fickle stock market', buying smaller stakes and clocking up \$54 billion in unrealised gains for last year but underperforming recent indices because they shun the hot tech stocks that Buffett says he doesn't understand. Making an exception for Apple, which he calls 'probably the best business I know in the world', he prefers banks, insurers, railroads and established consumer brands.

In interviews this week he also reminded investors not to panic-sell in reaction to 'today's headlines', but 'if it gives you a chance to buy something you like even cheaper, then it's your good luck'. I look forward to next year's Buffett bulletin, putting this year's coronavirus market scare into longer-term perspective.

In the departure lounge

Last week I predicted Barclays' trouble-prone chief executive Jes Staley might soon be 'stepping back in the manner of Prince Andrew', following revelations of a past business relationship with Jeffrey Epstein. This week we learn the bank is already looking for an outsider to replace Staley in 2021, at the AGM in May or at the latest the end of the year. One source said this would allow him a 'graceful departure' but somehow I doubt it: the timetable looks awfully long for any boss to be still at his desk when the board has taken away his filing-cabinet keys and shareholders are grumbling. Gracefully or otherwise, expect a new Barclays chief sooner rather than later.

Breakfast at the old bank

Speaking of Barclays, as I often do, let me recommend the eggs benedict at Quod, the restaurant of the Old Bank Hotel on Oxford's High Street. I bet I was the only person breakfasting there on Sunday who knew the hotel in its former existence as Barclays' local head office, presided over by a director who told me, as his undergraduate lunch guest, that he regarded unauthorised student overdrafts as 'indistinguishable from theft'. This was 1974, when the British economy was a wasteland of strikes, inflation, Labour taxes, failing businesses and dismal graduate job prospects, but the darker issues of the day were barely discussed. Instead, as the port and madeira circulated, my host and another (more sophisticated) guest debated whether it was better to have a handbell on the table to summon the butler, or a more discreet foot-operated one beneath.

I have kept a little bell in my own dining room ever since, in memory of that occasion and in case a butler turns up. The past really is another country and, contrary to impressions I may sometimes give, I don't want to go back there. But I'm always glad to find handsome old banking halls pleasantly repurposed.

BOOKS & ARTS

Mark Cocker describes a passionate naturalist's descent into criminality
Duncan Fallowell recalls the refreshing informality of interviewing Andy Warhol

James Walton finds Marina Lewycka's latest novel so bonkers as to be almost exhilarating

Antonio Pappano lets slip that there's a new Ring cycle on its way at the Royal Opera House

Lloyd Evans encounters comedy gold in Ben Elton's stage adaptation of *Upstart Crow*

Deborah Ross is captivated by *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*



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A monumental staircase in a vaulted interior with columns, c. 1750–55, by Piranesi
Martin Gayford — p46

BOOKS

The cheapest, deadliest weapon

Nothing prepared Antony Beevor for this devastating exposé of the systematic use of rape in war and ethnic cleansing

Our Bodies Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women

by Christina Lamb

William Collins, £20, pp. 418

I had assumed, after 40 years of researching and writing about war in the 20th century, that I was prepared for just about any horror. But Christina Lamb's research, into the mass rape of women and young girls in more recent wars and ethnic cleansing shook me to the core. This is the most powerful and disturbing book that I have ever read, and it raises important questions.

Lamb takes us from one zone of racial and religious aggression to another. The attackers have different motives and each persecuted minority is culturally unique, yet the pain and suffering of their victims are terrifyingly similar. She meets the Yazidi women, seized by Isis warriors from their ancient homeland between Syria and Iraq, chosen by lot as sex slaves, then sold on like second-hand cars from one rapist to another. The Muslim Rohingya women in northern Myanmar are violated with conspicuous cruelty by the Buddhist army in order to stamper an entire people over the frontier to Bangladesh.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram kidnaps girls en masse to turn them into 'bush wives' to produce another generation of fighters and slaves. 'I abducted your girls ... I will sell them in the market, by Allah,' declared their leader Abubakar Shekau, after seizing hundreds of schoolgirls. 'I will marry off a woman at the age of 12. I will marry off a girl at the age of nine.' Militia groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo sometimes even rape babies and infants because they are led to believe that this will give them special powers, or cure them of HIV.

There have been so many more examples

of mass rape in different countries. Bangladeshi women were abused terribly in 1971 by their fellow Muslims from the Pakistan Army in its attempt to crush the independence movement. The Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis was known for its massacres, yet the mass rapes which accompanied them were overlooked at the time. The 2018 report of the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict named a minimum of 19 states in which women had been

*This is the most powerful
and disturbing book
I have ever read*

raped during recent conflicts. It also listed '12 national military and police forces and 39 non-state actors' as guilty of mass rape.

Rather like the killing of prisoners in wartime, rape has seldom been mentioned in the past, partly because it might have been embarrassing to think that one's own side might also be guilty, but also because of an assumption that it had always been a natural part of war. 'For decades there was little discussion,' Lamb writes. 'It took rape camps being set up again in the heart of Europe for the issue to get international attention. Like many people, the first time I heard of sexual violence in conflict was in the 1990s during the war in Bosnia.' And yet rape had certainly not been absent from the ideological conflicts of the first half of the century.

In the Spanish Civil War, officers in Franco's Army of Africa, during their advance on Madrid in the late summer and early autumn of 1936, urged their Moroccan troops to rape, and in many cases disembowel, the wives and daughters of peasants and workers as a deliberate act of terror to panic the Republican militias. The greatest example of

all took place in 1945, as soldiers in the Red Army raped an estimated two million German women, tens of thousands of Hungarians, and even those women of supposedly Allied nations, such as Poles and Serbs. The Imperial Japanese Army did not restrict itself to the perpetual rape of 'comfort women' imprisoned in military brothels. They also believed in the gang rape of enemy civilians as a form of comradeship bonding.

Lamb's book should certainly provoke much debate and I hope it will also clarify some thinking. Perhaps the phrase 'rape as a weapon of war' has become too much of a standard term. In many cases it is correct, although a more accurate version would be 'a weapon of terror in conflict and ethnic cleansing'. Yet much depends on whether the 'weapon' is a deliberate military policy. It certainly was with the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh, Franco's Army of Africa, the Japanese Army and the Myanmar Army, along with all the other acts of ethnic cleansing.

But there are also examples of where an army has slipped its leash, and soldiers simply exploit the opportunity. In the case of the Red Army, the position was complex. Soviet propaganda had dehumanised the 'Fascist beast', and even the 'blonde witch', with calls for vengeance, yet many officers and soldiers were horrified by what their comrades did and took no part in it. A number even saved German women. So, we do need to be careful about generalisations.

The feminist definition of rape is that it is an act of violence driven by a compulsion to exert power, and has nothing to do with sex. But that is naturally the victim's point of view and does little to explain the motivation of the perpetrator. All the sadistic acts, which Lamb quite rightly does not spare us, clearly support that perspective. The



A young Rohingya woman, one of hundreds raped by Myanmar armed forces, shelters at Leda, an unregistered Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

dehumanisation of the enemy, which needs to be heightened by a strong dose of fear along with the hatred, is also another part of the weapon of terror. But men's motives to rape in war obviously vary, from sheer sexual opportunism to the fanatical compulsion to hurt, humiliate, pollute, disfigure and even kill their female victims. And as the Red Army example showed, not all men become rapists, even when they face no retribution. Also, to refute the black and white approach, Susan Brownmiller acknowledged in her seminal work on the subject, *Against Our Will*, there is even the 'grey area of wartime prostitution', where men with food, as well as guns, can exploit another form of power.

The very phrase 'weapon of war' also unintentionally reinforces that old mistake of including rape as a natural part of the landscape of armed conflict. Unfortunately, as Lamb emphasises, in the few recent cases where perpetrators have been brought

to trial, prosecutors tend to drop the rape charges when they find it easier to convict on the more general charge of terrorism.

When you tackle such horrors, they have a way of coming back to haunt you in the dark watches of the night

That is no comfort whatsoever to the women who have had to summon up great courage to appear as witnesses.

The vast majority of victims suffer twice. Those who survive their ordeals then have to face ostracism from their own families and communities. They are seen as polluted. Many commit suicide, unable to cope with the contempt and shame heaped upon them. Most of the rest, whatever culture they come from, describe feeling 'dead inside'. It is very hard to enjoy normal human relations after an assault

intended to dehumanise one. And how can one trust anyone again when, in the case of ethnic cleansing, former friendly neighbours become savage aggressors? As Lamb argues, the survivors are heroic. Mercifully for the male reader, there are some heroes too on their side of the fence, principally rescuers and doctors.

It must also have taken courage to research and write this book. When you tackle such horrors, they have a way of coming back to haunt you in the dark watches of the night. In 1944, a traumatised Vasily Grossman wrote, after producing the very first report on the atrocities of the Treblinka extermination camp: 'It is the writer's duty to tell this terrible truth, and it is the civilian duty of the reader to learn it.'

Christina Lamb has more than accomplished her duty. It is now our duty to face this other 'terrible truth' — that of man's inhumanity to woman.



Lost in a dark wood: Gustave Doré's illustration of the opening lines of Dante's Divine Comedy

Going round in circles Sara Wheeler

Wayfinding: The Art and Science of How We Find and Lose Our Way

by Michael Bond
Picador, £20, pp. 278

Some years ago I participated in a late-night Radio 3 show on exploration and travel. When I left the studio with my fellow contributors, both distinguished explorers, we got lost in the bowels of Broadcasting House. Round and round the dimly lit corridors we trudged, and only after talk of bivouacking did we finally reach a lift and escape.

Michael Bond, formerly the senior editor at *New Scientist*, has produced *Wayfinding*, an excellently researched popular science book which explains how people — including experienced travellers — get lost, and why some individuals have superior navigational skills than others. 'Most importantly,' he writes at the outset, 'the book is about our relationship with places, and how our understanding of the world around us affects our psychology and behaviour.'

Arranging his material thematically, Bond begins with what we know of prehistoric man's astonishing ability to remember a route over vast distances, and

goes on to examine the skills of the few remaining groups of hunter-gatherers, for example the Aché of eastern Paraguay. He then examines the spatial abilities of children compared with those of adults. Which nationalities are best at finding their way around (Finns top the table) and why? A lot of pages are devoted to the workings of the brain, and in particular how that organ acquires and then uses knowledge of space. The hippocampus has a starring role here, as it is the part of the brain which produces detailed spatial observation. (London black cab drivers have bigger hippocampi than average.)

A core theme throughout is how our brains make the cognitive maps that keep us orientated (or don't). Do genetics, upbringing or whether you are left-handed play a role? About halfway through, Bond reaches the big one: is it true that women are worse navigators than men? (You'll have to read the book to find out, as there are various theories and much that we don't know. Bond is too astute to present supposition as fact.)

Throughout, he draws on the wisdom of a range of academics, from evolutionary biologists to anthropologists and psychologists, as well as 'experts on lost-person behaviour'. He also quotes widely and wisely from non-academic sources, from Tolkien ('not all

those who wander are lost') to contemporary psychogeographers.

The pages on the role of toponyms, and why they were invented, are fascinating: fancy a trip to Puukammalatalik on Baffin Island, 'The Place Where Someone Once Left a Pouch'? Perhaps inevitably, non-scientists will most enjoy the specific anecdotes concerning real people, drawn from locations from Pole to Pole. My favourite chapter in this regard considers the exploits of some of the most exceptional navigators in human history, on the ocean, in the air, on land, on ice and even in space. The narrative picks up speed here. I was hoping that Shackleton's fabled rescue mission in the Southern Ocean in 1916 would appear, and it does: it's one of the greatest stories ever told, after all, and one can't hear it too often. The boss and five of his men travelled 920 miles in a patched-up lifeboat, in appalling seas, steering supposedly by dead reckoning, for which they needed the sun — except that cloud cover meant it was scarcely ever visible.

Elsewhere, experts dispense advice on what to do if you get lost, though it turns out that many well-trained people don't take it when they are indeed adrift in the forest. It's worth paying attention to the tips here, in case it happens to you. Bond says that it is not just in the movies that lost people burn precious energy walking round and round in circles.

The prose is clear, though occasionally a colloquial note jars ('humans were wayfinders from the get-go') and some generalisations are crudely obvious ('road safety is

About halfway through we reach the big one: is it true that women are worse navigators than men?

a critical and genuine issue for the freedom of movement of children'). The book, not a long one, has 39 pages of source notes and one feels in the hands of a writer adroit at marshalling a wide range of sometimes wildly varied material.

The arrival of GPS naturally receives attention, as well as the blizzard of navigational apps proliferating in the developed world. Do these devices diminish our innate abilities? Probably. The penultimate chapter turns to the urban environment and how we manage in it, reporting on which cities are easiest to get around (London does badly). The section on libraries, hospitals and museums is revealing. The final chapter analyses the way in which, neurologically, dementia affects the human ability to navigate space (in fact Alzheimer's crops up a lot throughout the volume. The disease particularly affects the hippocampus).

After reading this book the reader might like to try out some of Bond's theories. So go on: get lost.

Can we have a pet instead?

Emily Hill

My Wild and Sleepless Nights: A Mother's Story

by Clover Stroud

Doubleday, £16.99, pp. 272

When you're not a mother it's hard to imagine what motherhood is like. Anyone you know who becomes one assures you that you have no idea what it's like, and replaces you with some other woman who does, and you never see her again. The End. So then you have to tax your mother on the subject. 'What's it like — giving birth?' And she says: 'It's fine. You just breathe,' before snorting derisively, 'but she had gas and air' when an aunt later claims to have done it without any pain relief.

In the absence of any actual information from any source whatsoever you start to blame the *omertà* on the idea that childbirth is exactly like that scene in *Alien* in which a bloody, flesh-coloured thing bursts out of John Hurt, and all the rest is screaming. Which is why this memoir is so overdue, because the only thing it doesn't cover in baby-making is how you persuade anyone to impregnate you in the first place. ('What is wrong with me/n?' I want to yell at Clover Stroud, but alas she cannot hear me.)

'Having a baby is like joining a cult,' this mother of five admits, adding that for every woman (like me) desperate to get in, there's another alternative me (whose vagina's been ripped apart) frantic to get out:

At the school gate, I smile and try to look happy. When another mum asks me how I am, I lie. I don't say that I frequently feel crushed, bored, angry and completely f—ed off.

The story begins when Clover is pregnant with a heartbeat that will become her fifth child, Lester. ('"Why on earth would you do that to yourself?"', a woman at a party asks me when I tell her how many children I have.') Meanwhile, her eldest, Jimmy-the-Teenager, chooses this exact moment to start behaving like a teenager, and gets busted by the police for carrying a knife — given to him by his loving mother. Obviously.

'Look, look at this,' I say, running across the lawn to pick up the target. This is what the throwing knife was for. It's really boring for teenagers. In the middle of the country. I mean it's boring for me, a grown-up, so I've tried to imagine what it's like for a teenage boy.

Also leaping off the page are Dolly — who mothers her mother beautifully — and Evangeline — who gets very excited when asked if she would like to help change her baby brother: 'Change him? For something else? Like a pet? Can we change him for a guinea pig?' Plus toddler with a toy train

— Dash — whose temper tantrums are totally tectonic.

It's the honesty that makes this book so compelling: TMI in Technicolor! Siri — but not for sissies... 'There were times when the other children were very small, when I would take them to baby groups, looking for other women I could talk to about the new feelings of dark love which occasionally took hold of me,' Clover notes, before deciding: 'It's safer to just go on singing pat-a-cake-pat-a-cake as if the feeling didn't exist', only to put it down on paper.

She compares herself, constantly, with all the other mothers who might be doing it better. Especially Biff's and Chip's (all 'crap hair and stripy jumpers') and Topsy's and Tim's (who 'never behaves as if another slow afternoon alone with her children, when there might be so many other thoughts she could be having and lives she could be inhabiting, will actually kill her').

I have learned too much to fit it in here. But I think the mad, messy message is ultimately this: what having babies means is that there will be 'less of the good things, like sleep, sex and money' but 'more pure love'. And I hope, like Clover, I get to 'wrap that around me ... while I'm alive on this earth'.

Completely unhinged

James Walton

The Good, the Bad and the Little Bit Stupid

by Marina Lewycka

Fig Tree, £14.99, pp. 266

Faced with Marina Lewycka's new novel, it's tempting to say that *The Good, the Bad and the Little Bit Stupid* is also a pretty serviceable description of its contents. Yet, in the end, that feels far too neat a formulation for a book that goes well beyond the uneven into the realms of the completely unhinged. For one thing, its elements — among them

suburban social comedy, the horrors of Brexit, money laundering, geriatric sex and the international trade in human organs — seem not so much disparate as random. For another, they're never remotely blended, but simply allowed to co-exist.

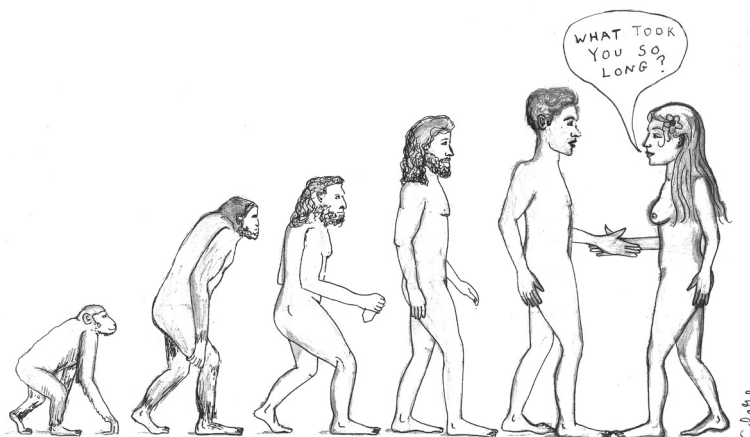
The novel begins in Sheffield, and in territory familiar from Lewycka's all-conquering 2005 debut *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, when a self-deluded oldie falls for a brassy blonde. On EU referendum night, 79-year-old George Pantis (whose surname, we're repeatedly reminded, sounds quite like 'panties') is kicked out by his wife Rosie for voting Leave. Standing in the rain in his pyjamas, he's then taken in by his Ukup neighbour Brenda — to whom, he decides, 'he must look ... like Colin Firth emerging from the lake at Pemberley'.

As ever, such beady but essentially kindly comedy sees Lewycka at her best. The trouble is that the book's tone, along with the characters' personalities, keep changing to suit the shifting needs of the plot — and, as it transpires, those needs shift a lot.

After his marriage breaks up (for a bit), George wins £7 million in the Kosovo State Lottery, despite never having entered it. He then becomes so smitten with the mysterious young hottie who shows up with a keen interest in his online-banking password that he accompanies her to her home village in Albania to start a new life (for a bit). At which point, Rosie and Brenda abandon their ferocious rivalry (intermittently) and go after him, together with Rosie and George's son Sid. And with that, the novel goes into full James Bond mode (for a bit), with gun-toting villains and a secret clinic for the extraction of human kidneys.

Fortunately, the baddies are no match for an elderly Sheffield couple, their maths-teacher son and a brassy blonde — and the four return safely to a Britain, where we get both a series of impassioned lectures about how Brexit will reduce us to 'eating home-grown cabbage and wormy potatoes' and a happy ending.

At times, admittedly, all this is so bonkers as to be almost exhilarating — but bonkers it remains nonetheless.



Period piece

John Self

Here We Are

by Graham Swift

Scribner, £14.99, pp. 208

There's something — isn't there? — of the literary also-ran about Graham Swift. He was on Granta's first, influential Best of Young British Novelists list in 1983, and he won the Booker Prize in 1996, but he has never attained the public-face status of his contemporaries. That may not be so surprising, given who those publicity-hoovering contemporaries are, Amis, Barnes, McEwan and Rushdie among them. Once in a while, one of his books rises a little higher in the sky — 1983's *Waterland*, 1996's *Last Orders*, 2018's *Mothering Sunday* — but will *Here We Are* be one of them?

The title gives a clue to what sort of book this is. It's something a secondary character says when delivering drinks or proffering something: 'Here we are!' It's a 'bright and strangely echoing phrase', a welcome which is simultaneously a piece of empty conversational filler, of no nutritional value. Above all, it speaks of a particular aspect of England, an England of ginger beer, cold frames, magicians in top hats and people called Ronnie, Eric, Agnes and Sid — all of which feature in *Here We Are*.

The magician is Ronnie Deane — stage name Pablo, after a parrot he had as a childhood pet — and the book covers his relationship with his wife and assistant Evie, and their mutual friend Jack Robinson, who often acts as compère for Ronnie and Evie's end-of-the-pier magic show in Brighton. 'Please join me, folks, boys and girls, in drink-

ing to Ronnie's other half. Or should I say halves? May he always keep putting her back together again.'

A triangle of characters provides a sturdy, reliable structure for a novel, and there are some foreseeable developments coming from that; but the book is more interesting on the subject of change. As a child during the second world war, Ronnie was evacuated to Oxfordshire, and it was while living there that he learned how to perform illusions; he returned to his parents, aged 14, changed by those developmental years. All three main characters have changed their names: Evie to Eve when she's on stage with Ronnie, and

It's comforting and cosy: a bit sad, a bit funny, a bit interesting — but only a bit

Jack from Robbins to the more archetypal Robinson when he dons his 'black-and-white get-up that was the outdated rig of showmen, conmen, masqueraders everywhere'.

The biggest changes in the book are hidden. The story jumps from 1959 to 2009, and there's some pleasant mental exercise to be had in working out what happened in between. But it's firmly backward-looking, and most of the book feels not just set in the 1950s but as though it were written then too: there's no sense that this is a new perspective on the past. It's comforting and cosy, which are by no means futile attributes in a book, but it does make the effort of reading it feel mildly inconsequential. It's a bit sad, a bit funny, a bit interesting — but only a bit. Swift does show admirable boldness in his refusal to provide a neat ending, but for a story about magic and showbiz, it's weirdly lacking in pizzazz.

The Twittering World

It's like posting letters to the press —
the local press, or spilling matches
from the shaken matchbox of your brain
convinced you've composed the I-Ching
not *I wuz ere* in some drunken cubicle
in Vladivostok or Le Paz. Let's be clear,
your words are going nowhere, pal,
but thin air, the ether. They skedaddle,
die, they disappear, and not one tweet
will save your neck. No one gives a toss.
So save your breath, your thumbs, your wrist
which, the way that you've been using it,
must ache. For all our sakes, grow silent
as the grass, be quiet a bit, and shut it, please.

— Richard Lambert

An Ethiopian Exodus

Stephen Daisley

Red Sea Spies: The True Story of Mossad's Fake Diving Resort

by Raffi Berg

Icon, £16.99, pp. 324

Menachem Begin was Israel's most reviled and misunderstood prime minister. Reviled by Britain for his paramilitary activities against the British Army in Palestine, Begin was a keen admirer of the Westminster parliamentary system and English common law. Reviled by Jimmy Carter as a hawk who refused to cede an inch of territory, this ultra-nationalist signed the peace treaty with Egypt that returned the Sinai. Reviled by the left as a racist and fascist, Israel's first right-wing prime minister summoned the head of the Mossad soon after his victory and instructed him: 'Bring me the Jews of Ethiopia.'

That unexpected order from a mercurial leader began a train of events that led to Operation Moses, the covert immigration to Israel of thousands of Ethiopian Jews, whom the Israeli Orthodox rabbinate had only latterly recognised as halachically Jewish. How they ended up in Ethiopia is the subject of legends, but no firm historical answer; yet while their adopted homeland referred to them as *falasha* ('landless'), they knew themselves as 'Beta Israel' — 'the house of Israel'. They had a land, Jerusalem, and would return one day. As an Ethiopian Jewish children's song ran: 'Stork! Stork! How is our country Jerusalem doing?'

The gap between that longing and its realisation over a series of months in 1984 and 1985 is the subject of Raffi Berg's *Red Sea Spies*. Posing as European investors, Mossad agents purchased Arous, an abandoned Italian resort on the shores of the Red Sea, convincing Sudan that they could bring tourists back to the country. To that end, they flooded Europe with glossy brochures for a package holiday 'a wonderful world apart', with 'some of the best, clearest water in the world'.

By day, they ran their diving resort; by night, they sneaked Jews out of the refugee camps in Sudan to which they had journeyed. Cut off from other Jews for millennia, Beta Israel believed themselves the last of the Israelites, and were astonished to learn that Jews could be Europeans.

Initially, the returnees were spirited through the desert back to a coastal point near Arous. There, special forces lay waiting with dinghies to row them to a naval ship moored out in the Red Sea, which in turn delivered them home to Israel. Discovery and death hung over these tense, danger-drenched night crawls;

the dinghies eventually had to be abandoned after Sudanese troops mistook the convoys for smugglers one night and opened fire.

Mossad switched to airlifts, flying Beta Israel out from a disused British airstrip, although this only drew more attention, and the operatives found themselves in a series of close calls. In the end, Jerusalem paid off Khartoum and was allowed to transfer a further 6,000 Jews to Israel, provided they did so in secrecy, for the Sudanese president, Jaafar an-Nimeiry, feared a backlash from Arab allies.

To throw off suspicion, a commercial airliner was eventually used and Beta Israel flown to Ben Gurion via Belgium. Despite the spies' best efforts, the mass immigration was picked up on, and when the story hit the press Khartoum cracked down, under pressure from the Arab world. In all, 8,000 Jews made it out and a further 14,000 were airlifted in 1991 in the follow-up Operation Solomon.

The scope of the operation was breathtakingly daring. As Berg writes:

What the Mossad mission amounted to was having to engineer a mass exodus of an unknown number of nationals of a foreign, hostile state, people who spoke no Hebrew, were antiquated in their ways, barely travelled and distrusted strangers.

Netflix's *Red Sea Diving Resort* is an entertaining but licence-taking version of the same events, but *Red Sea Spies* is what really happened. There is none of the Hollywood colouring-in, and yet the book is all the more vivid for it. Berg knows he has a movie on his hands — part thriller, part dark comedy, all true — but instead of embellishing, he brings out the native drama in an improbable story of a clandestine homecoming, *Exodus* as orchestrated by a spy agency.

Berg, Middle East editor of the BBC News website, is not the first to tell this tale. One of the operatives, Gad Shimron, went public in 2007 with *Mossad Exodus*, a first-hand account of the perilous journey from Begin's order to the airlifts. But Berg faithfully captures the perspective of Beta Israel, not least through Ferede Aklum, the teacher turned secret agent whose own attempt to reach Israel in 1973 was stymied by the Yom Kippur war, and who determined that all of Beta Israel should one day reach Zion.

Berg declines to speak as others do of a 'rescue'. Beta Israel were not helpless victims. They walked in their thousands from the highlands of Ethiopia to the refugee camps of Sudan, many dying on the way, the rest facing death if they were uncovered as Jews. It was a risk they took to reach the shores of sought-after, dreamed-of, sung-about Zion and return at last to Jerusalem.



The white-morph gyr falcon, the largest falcon in the world, reaches prices of \$400,000

The prize of the skies Mark Cocker

The Falcon Thief: A True Tale of Adventure, Treachery and the Hunt for the Perfect Bird

by Joshua Hammer

Simon & Schuster, £18.99, pp. 336

The art of falconry is more than 3,000 years old and possibly as popular now as at any time. Its devotees argue that in a pure form it is a deeply honourable tradition, requiring superhuman patience to coax a magnificent

Dubai's sheikhs are among the world's wealthiest and most unscrupulous consumers of hunting birds

predator to hunt at the owner's behest. It is a relationship, they would also claim, of mutual understanding and partnership between hawk and human. That's the positive version.

At its most degraded, falconry seems to be a psychopathological obsession, rooted in a fetish for control over beautiful raptors, which sometimes drives practitioners to morally dubious, even illegal, behaviour. The American journalist Joshua Hammer

has written a revealing portrait of the sport that is located at a point where these two versions intersect.

The book's anti-hero is a complex, troubling and seemingly unrepentant figure called Jeffrey Lendrum, who grew up in white Rhodesia. There he became a passionate naturalist, placing his obvious physical courage and considerable knowledge at the service of research projects to protect rare birds of prey in Zimbabwe's national parks. One of the specialties of this brave young man was to abseil down crags to check otherwise inaccessible eagle nests. However, these formative episodes were shared with Lendrum's father, Adrian, whose shadowy role in the son's descent into criminality seems to be hinted at by Hammer.

Gradually it dawned on friends and colleagues that father and son were not just collaborators in the conservation work. They were stealing rare eagle and owl eggs, among others, and threatening the very birds they purported to love. It led directly to the first of Lendrum's court appearances for wildlife crime, which also seemed to be

the moment that he realised the financial potential in the illegal sale of rare birds of prey.

Like a well-schooled crime reporter Hammer investigates and describes Lendrum's 35-year career as an egg thief. He does a fine job of piecing together the shadow life, and he has also travelled the world, because his subject is a criminal of global aspirations. Yet the terminal destination for Lendrum's travels was always Dubai, whose sheikhs are among the world's wealthiest and, it would appear, the most unscrupulous consumers of hunting birds.

The *sine qua non* for these oil magnates is a white-morph gyr falcon, the largest falcon in the world, said to reach prices of \$400,000 in some exalted quarters. The problem is that for decades there has been an international restriction on trade in the species. Smuggling them is a complex logistical challenge, given that the wild population of gyr falcons lives in the Arctic belt across Canada, Greenland and Russia. Even peregrines, which are another key desideratum for Middle Eastern falconers, are largely found in northern latitudes, including Britain.

To move wild, adult, highly strung birds through airports or border controls without detection is almost impossible, so Lendrum developed a strategy of carrying only

the falcon eggs in concealed pockets about his person. He timed the smuggling trips so that the embryos remained viable and could hatch into lucrative young birds on arrival.

To do this he had to climb to nests in Greenland or Chile, or the steep-sided gorges of the Rhondda Valley, and then fly to Dubai within hours of stealing the eggs. It sounds logistically impressive and full of derring-do. But the final image we get of this master criminal is much more prosaic and perhaps sadder even than Hammer himself acknowledges (in the course of assembling his story the author has been clearly touched by Lendrum's undoubted charisma and persuasive charm).

In the end, Hammer cannot indicate the full extent of his subject's criminal practice. But the man has now been charged and found guilty five times on four continents, has served two spells in British prisons and has absconded from a seven-year sentence in Brazil. Money was almost certainly the primary motive for Lendrum; yet in the concluding pages we meet a man who is unemployed and homeless, and whose criminality has damaged most of his close relationships. There is precious little sign of financial profit, let alone happiness.

One caveat about this absorbing, entertaining and well-written book: Hammer's grasp of ornithology is shaky. There is no such species as black pelican; lapwings don't dive for fish, they eat invertebrates; harrier hawks don't occur in Britain; a 'lesser gull' is really a lesser black-backed gull; they are — oddly perhaps — called Canada geese, not 'Canadian geese'; and lesser yellowlegs are not woodland birds but waders.

Most erroneous of all is what Hammer chooses to call 'the fragile, symbiotic relationship between man and the wild'. Almost every falconer we meet in this book suggests that no such relationship exists.

The great taboo-breaker *Duncan Fallowell*

Warhol: A Life as Art

by Blake Gopnik

Allen Lane, £25, pp. 930

In 1983 I was sent to New York to interview Johnny Rotten and I took the opportunity to call on Andy Warhol. The Factory was in the phonebook; and the receptionist, Brigid Berlin, said that Andy was in Milan but would be back the following afternoon. 'You better give him half an hour. Why don't you come over at 2.30 p.m.?' So I did.

I'd never been part of that New York scene, but wanted to meet someone who had helped me develop my own freedoms almost 20 years earlier. According to Blake Gopnik's book, I should have found a studio



Warhol was the first truly American artist —
the first of consumerism, the media and technology

ALAMY

that was triple-locked, with an anxious artist hiding inside. But it wasn't remotely like that. I just rang up, turned up and started talking to Warhol, and grasped immediately the key to his greatness — an alert but gentle largeness of soul which freed up everything around him: all was work, all was art, yet all was artlessness. He was the only person I met in New York who was completely natural and not pushing an angle.

Warhol was the first truly American artist, the first who didn't need validation from Europe, the first of consumerism, the media and technology. He revolutionised subject matter, technique, colour, photography. He also invented slow cinema, happenings, installations; pulled rock music into the avant garde via the Velvet Underground and created modern lifestyle journalism with *Interview* magazine. He made being straight and sober a bore from which it never recovered. He recorded everything and kept everything. He died before the digital age, but he'd already sussed its behaviour. We all live in Andy's world now.

Gopnik's long biography is much needed — and it's not long enough. The text is quite a roller-coaster, as the author attempts to resolve what he sees as the artist's contradictions, something which Warhol himself never bothered about. At his revolutionary height in the 1960s, when he ruptured art and society through the astonishing liberties taken by his paintings, films and superstars at the Silver Factory, Warhol went home at night to

be looked after by his mother. Gopnik sees this as an example of Warhol's irony, but that is wrong. It's not his irony, it's ours.

Among Gopnik's sources too there are numerous conflicting views on Warhol's character: he was cold, he was kind, he was bad at sex, good at sex, witty, dumb, knowing, naive. Many sources are quoted directly at length without being identified by name, only by phrases such as 'said one art-critic

There are many conflicting views of Warhol's character: he was cold, kind, witty, dumb, knowing, naive

friend' or 'an upper-crust British architect' or 'a hot-shot young writer' or 'one posh collector'. This is unforgivable, and casts a shadow over the whole enterprise.

It seems that Gopnik never met Warhol. His task might have been easier if he had. He would have 'got it' at once and experienced Warhol whole. Instead of viewing these contradictions as varieties of moral failure, he would have understood that they were precipitated by Warhol's straightforwardness. Only a less courageous, more considered person could be consistent. Like all great originals, Warhol did not need permission to act. He could be dishonest but never deceitful.

Gopnik doesn't love Warhol. He's always seeming to be giving him marks out of ten, one minute comparing him with Picasso or

Leonardo (fine by me), the next putting him down. For example, he presents him as fey and indecisive about religion; but I asked Warhol outright: 'Do you believe in God?' 'Yeah, I do.' 'Do you believe in life after death?' 'In an abstract way.' Very clear answers. Gopnik makes much of the 'camp' in Warhol; but for me, camp does not characterise his art at all, which was, in the first instance, bewildering and shocking; he was the greatest taboo-breaker of the 20th century. And where Gopnik sees detachment or ruthlessness, I see generosity: Warhol gave many people the space (and money) to explore themselves.

Gopnik's task has been enormous and, despite my reservations, all this hard work is immensely valuable. But the result cannot be definitive. I missed, for instance, Andy's remark: 'Once you stop wanting something, you get it'; and any mention of that sombre Sunday at home in the 1980s when the impossible happened — Andy's phone didn't once ring. People today forget that by 1983 Warhol was unfashionable. When I wrote up my meeting at the Factory, nobody in London wanted the piece. It was only published after his death four years later, when interest in him started to revive.

Looking again at Warhol's pictures, I notice that works which once seemed so explosive now strike me as creations of classical self-possession and elegance. What an amazing man.

Andy Warhol, a major retrospective at Tate Modern, will run from 12 March to 6 September.

Not a party person

Mike Cormack

The China Journals: Ideology and Intrigue in the 1960s

by Hugh Trevor-Roper,
edited by Richard Davenport-Hines
Bloomsbury Academic, £25, pp. 296

This book is a rather startling depiction of Hugh Trevor-Roper's involvement with the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU), his sponsored visit to China in October 1965 (just months before the Cultural Revolution got under way) and his efforts to find out who actually controlled and funded SACU.

Having been induced to be a sponsor of the society on legitimate grounds of interest in China and its history, Trevor-Roper was a last-minute addition to a delegation visiting Beijing and Xian. He was promised freedom of movement and access, though the reality turned out quite differently. *The China Journals* thus comprises four sections: Trevor-Roper's diary of his three-week visit;

his diary of his time in Oxford and London two months later, when he tries to get to the bottom of SACU; his suppressed *Encounter* article on the episode; and a diary of a later visit to Taiwan and Cambodia. This last is tangential to the purpose of the book, but presumably included for balance on Trevor-Roper's feelings about China. (He uses phrases such as 'the worthless Chinese' and others even less complimentary.)

The first section is the most interesting. Trevor-Roper is lumped with three other fellow travellers: Mary Adams, a stereotypical upper-middle-class committee-joiner and do-gooder; Ernie Roberts, assistant secretary-general of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, a *bon vivant* and claimer of proletarian virtue; and Robert Bolt, the playwright. He is soon exasperated by the vanities and stupidities of Adams and Roberts, and the diary is littered with amusingly poisonous portraits of them.

But, more seriously, the promises of free access and movement turn out to be worthless. The group is forced to remain together, every visit choreographed and monitored by interpreters and political minders, every question and request for information treated with the utmost suspicion, every interaction guarded. (The one time Trevor-Roper does get to meet Chinese historians they remain almost silent, visibly frustrated at being minded by their voluble professor, a party hack.)

Political discourse is also sterile. (Roland Barthes, during his own tour of China in 1974, called the outpourings of tedious ideological rhetoric 'bricks': visitors then were subjected to enough to build a house.) War threatens between India and Pakistan during the tour; Pakistan is an ally of China, India a rival, so the conflict can only be framed in a Manichean manner — or, as the guides put it, by reference to 'objective facts'. Bolt dares to suggest that the truth isn't so clear cut, only to be battered by more verbal bricks.

Less seriously, or more entertainingly, their guides behave like every incompetent low-scale Chinese authority — which will be familiar to anyone who has endured

peremptory but bungling hotel or station staff there. Trevor-Roper and Bolt give them nicknames, such as Cement-head, Duck-bottom and Smooth-face.

But it's not all contempt. Trevor-Roper manages to abscond a few times, and throbs with pleasure at old Beijing:

There were imposing hollow facades, frontispieces of exquisitely carved stone, carved wood reliefs, armigerous gateways leading into alleyways or courtyards, and stylised flora and fauna at every point; toad-like lions squatting on cottage doorsteps, proud, rampant lions on balustraded roofs, here a stone stork on a cottage chimney, there a caparisoned elephant in relief over a cottage door, festoons of fruit and flowers carved in relief over doors and windows.

He also relishes Chinese opera, the Temple of Heaven and the Forbidden City — though he abhors the 'totalitarian megalithic style' of the Great Hall of the People — as well as the vivacity of the ordinary Chinese.

The subsequent sections concern his efforts to expose SACU as a communist front. He writes that, as a sponsor of the society, he feels obliged not to resign but to attempt to restore it to its proper purpose. This is rather patrician of him, but you sense he also enjoys the conflict, as well as despising the bad faith, lies and double-dealing that go with communist parties (and what he calls the communist). The *Encounter* article concerns not his visit but the story of SACU and is a fine example of his journalism, with its wit and insight.

The China Journals is not perhaps an important book. SACU is a mere pimple on Anglo-Chinese relations, and the behaviours of communist fronts are tediously familiar. But it is enjoyable for the human comedy and high quality of Trevor-Roper's prose. It is, however, rather eccentrically edited. The introduction is unfathomably long, around 50 pages, and grindingly detailed. The footnotes are also stuffed with extraneous information. But you can skip all that and simply savour Trevor-Roper's moral outrage, aesthetic feeling, keen political antennae and judicious penmanship.



'Opera is something you come to later'

After a record 18 years – and counting – as music director, Antonio Pappano talks to *Norman Lebrecht* about life after Covent Garden and how opera is beyond younger audiences

The horse beats me to the stage door by a short nose. Known as Tiz, it's an opera specialist who comes up from Norfolk for 10 a.m. rehearsal and is driven back home each night. Tiz is on call right through the *Fidelio* rehearsals – unlike, as Sir Antonio Pappano points out, the star tenor who does not show up for the first act.

This is a fairly sore point, and I wait until late in our conversation to probe it. There has been a media hoo-hah about *Fidelio* tickets going to ROH friends, leaving hardly any for the general public. Pappano, the quiet man of opera, suddenly shoots up an octave.

'That's not particularly true,' he cries. 'In October, we released several hundred tickets. They were snapped up. We couldn't sell *Fidelio* for love nor money the last time we did it. I don't understand. Is it because of Jonas Kaufmann? Really?? He doesn't sing until the second act.'

The notion that Covent Garden keeps its treasures for the rich cuts him to the quick. 'We are going into 1,500 cinemas with *Fidelio* on 17 March. That's a lot of people to reach. We are going into people's houses, where they live. I try to fight with my TV programmes [the idea] that opera is only for elites and toffs. The best sound in this house is where the cheapest seats are. Get in there early and get a sense of community in this beautiful horseshoe.'

After a record 18 years as music director, longer than Haitink, Colin Davis or Solti, he is about to share thoughts about his future, the mere mention of which sends a chill through the building. Put plainly, Pappano is Covent Garden's talent magnet. The reason Kaufmann, Netrebko, Terfel and co. turn up year after year, and never cancel as they

do elsewhere, is that they love working with a guy who has coached singers since he was ten years old, assisting his father, a private voice tutor, in a Clapham council flat. He would also go out with his mother at dawn, cleaning offices.

His mother is now 86 and when he wants to visit her in Connecticut she tells him not to take time off work. 'Oh, don't you come, your work is the most important thing,' he trills in an Italian accent. 'That immigrant work ethic was instilled in me.' So was the paramountcy of family. 'If there's one thing I'm proud of,' says Pappano, 'it's the family we've created at Covent Garden.'

Moving to America in his early teens, he caught the twang but left the country when

There's a Ring that Pappano's 'looking forward to' in the season after he is supposedly leaving Covent Garden

Daniel Barenboim plucked him from a City Opera piano to be his assistant at Bayreuth. He learned to be a music director in Oslo and Brussels, where an EMI producer negotiated his transfer to London.

Covent Garden has been his preoccupation ever since, but that is about to change. He turned 60 a few months ago – with an intimate dinner for 50 in his favourite St John's Wood restaurant – and he's thinking hard what to do with the rest of his life. First, he has booked a sabbatical next year – 'during the season,' he stabs the air, though he'll be reachable by email. To escape altogether, he's taking a slow trip to the Antarctic and Patagonia with his wife Pam, a voice coach.

They have been married 25 years and

work together from time to time. 'At the beginning and end of season,' he clarifies, 'there's no ballet here, so it's opera full-on and we don't have enough pianists. She comes in, and they love her. In our life, Pam doesn't say a lot, but two words and I understand everything. In that way, she has a tremendous influence and a tremendous power. And I also say she's a moral force. She's terrific with people, we share decisions.'

Those decisions are beginning to take shape. During his year off, he will conduct Puccini's *Fanciulla del West* in Berlin ('Danny's house') and the ROH production of Szymanowski's *King Roger* at La Scala. He is also giving masterclasses at Aldeburgh and the Royal College of Music, reaching down to his roots. Last summer he conducted the National Youth Orchestra of the USA. 'It was a picture of America,' he says: the melting pot, all the colours, that energy. 'I'm building bridges again to America after not conducting there for years.'

That could be where his eye turns once his contract ends at Covent Garden in 2023. Or maybe not. I chide him that he has told me many times that he's leaving the ROH, only to sign on for five more years. He looks sheepish. 'I've been offered other houses,' he says, 'and I turned them down because I don't think I could replicate the conditions here – the family that has been created. And I like the building. I like the fact that rehearsal rooms have windows. That's quite rare, actually.'

He lets slip that 'there's a *Ring* with Barrie Kosky which I'm very much looking forward to' in the season after he is supposed to have left. No need to shortlist his successors yet.



Antonio Pappano (right) with Jonas Kaufmann rehearsing *Andrea Chénier* at the Royal Opera House. They reunite this *March for Fidelio*

Meanwhile, he says, 'I'm gonna do what is essential to me. Over the years I've given away a lot of sexy operas to other conductors — to get them [to work] here. Three times *Elektra* has come here with other conductors. Next time, Jesus Christ, I'm gonna do it. *Wozzeck* I haven't done since 2002. I'm thinking of myself a bit — two new Verdi productions. Verdi doesn't lend itself to conceptual treatment. That's my job: to defend Verdi. Do it with passion and conviction. Tell the story.'

Before anyone calls him conservative, he urges the Royal Opera chief Oliver Mears to challenge him with new directors. 'Ollie immediately got that. He's very different from Kasper [Holten] and that's good for me.' He finds Tobias Kratzer, the *Fidelio* director, 'really interesting.'

Away from the ROH, he is music director of the Santa Cecilia orchestra in Rome.

Santa Cecilia has been booked as resident orchestra of the Salzburg Easter Festival in 2024, a summit won as a result of Pappano's intensive work ethic. Watching him in rehearsal, he never lets up. Even if it's conducting the house pianist while chorus

Pappano is Covent Garden's talent magnet. The reason Kaufmann and co. never cancel as they do elsewhere

members block their spots on stages, his arms are high and his intensity palpable.

Beyond 2024, he maintains: 'I don't have anything in the book. I'm not actively seeking employment. I'll be 65. There are so many young conductors around. You should hear them, I work them hard.' There are two he's training at Covent Garden that he thinks will go right to the top.

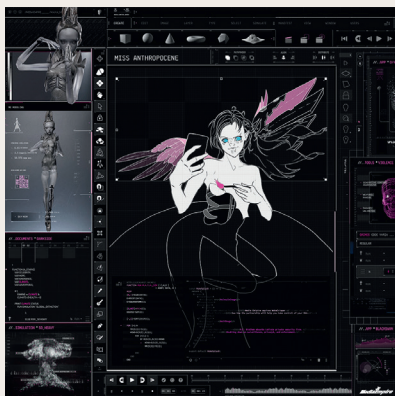
Accusations of elitism offend him per-

sonally. The floor-mopping immigrant kid who is now a knight of the realm does not take lessons on diversity quotas from the Islington cappuccino classes. Instead, he has his own view on who the audience should be. 'In this country,' says Antonio Pappano, 'I've observed that despite all our talk of wanting to bring in younger audiences, opera is something that you come to... later. Younger people tend to be restless. We're asking them to sit sometimes for five hours on end. I'm comfortable with classical music, in general, that you come to it later in life.'

As for your chance to see Jonas Kaufmann in *Fidelio*: 'Hey, if you want to go to the opera you gotta plan ahead — especially if you want to come to *this* opera house.'

Fidelio is in rep at the Royal Opera House from 1 to 17 March.

THE LISTENER

Grimes: *Miss Anthropocene*

Grade: B

The old axiom no longer applies. In modern popular music, it is possible not only to gild a turd, but to gild it so copiously that consumers scarcely catch a whiff of the ordure underneath. The studio is everything: you no longer need to be able to sing, write a tune or play an instrument — with enough electronic manipulation your turd can still become an epic and convince the perpetually gullible rock and pop press that something Important is taking place. In a sense, then, the other old axiom is also redundant: in pop music today, you can fool all of the people all of the time.

The Canadian musician Grimes is not quite at turd level: there is some talent there, although I'm not sure quite what it is. Not writing songs, not singing, not playing anything — maybe a sonic imagination and a certain winningly grim froideur. And for this she is very generously lauded.

This album occasionally grabs the attention — in the faux-industrial motorik basslines of 'My Name Is Dark' and the keening falsetto that begins the track 'Violence': both of these tracks kind of coalesce into what you might call a 'song', if you were being kind. And there is a propulsion and energy to them.

For the rest it is the studio very cleverly at work, her voice soused in grandiose echo or elevated, like that of Pinky and Perky, into the stratosphere — vocals as just another instrument, endlessly manipulated. Fragments of melody come and go, swathed in deeply meaningful effects designed to imply gravitas — where there is, frankly, very little. Occasionally interesting, rarely arresting.

— Rod Liddle

Opera

Eurotrash Verdi

Richard Bratby

Luisa Miller

Coliseum, in rep until 6 March

Les vêpres siciliennes

Wales Millennium Centre, and touring until 9 May

Verdi's *Luisa Miller* is set in the Tyrol in the early 17th century, and for some opera directors that's a problem. After all, they're busy people. They probably never had time to read *Wolf Hall*, or to speak to any of the 100 million people worldwide who watched *Game of Thrones*. It's self-evident to them that modern audiences will be unable to empathise with anything involving swords, castles or feudal hierarchies. Which is why they work hard to imagine new contexts that can make these hopelessly dated dramas address contemporary life as we live it, right here, right now. Counts, village maidens and men in ruffs? Baffling. But a clown strapped to a gyrating crucifix being stabbed with arrows by a group of dancers in flesh-coloured swimming caps and black fetish wear? Now that's relatable.

In fairness, not everything in Barbora Horakova's new production for ENO is quite so *Eurotrash*. The stark white sets, the

A clown strapped to a crucifix is stabbed by dancers in swimming caps and black fetish wear

presence of children to evoke the characters' lost innocence and the final image of a trickling, encroaching blackness as Luisa and Rodolfo face death — there were ideas here that sort of worked, if intermittently. Let's be clear: there's nothing intrinsically wrong with abstraction, relocation or outright surrealism in opera. What intelligent opera-lover wouldn't rather engage with a production by, say, Katie Mitchell or Netia Jones, than yawn through some overcooked Zeffirelli revival? What matters, in the end, is whether a director opens up an opera's dramatic possibilities, or whether they shut them down.

Throughout Horakova's *Luisa Miller*, you felt the drama being stunted or obscured; being made less than it could be, and certainly a lot more simplistic than it might have been with musical performances as tremendous as these. Yes, it looks cool to have Wurm (admittedly not Verdi's subtlest character name) tailed by writhing, gurning dancers. Wouldn't it have been more interesting, though, to let Solomon Howard's bitumen-like bass and towering, magnetic physicality suggest that there's more to the character than generic evil? Some of this stuff was just

embarrassing. The malevolence of Verdi's Count Walter (James Creswell, giving an aristocratic swagger to his rolling, black-and-bronze phrases) has credible human motivations. But no, Horakova has him dressed as a tycoon and rolling a barrel of oil, which he smears over a brutalised, semi-naked youth because, hey: capitalism, right?

Meanwhile the cast sang and Alexander Joel conducted like this was the *Luisa Miller* of their dreams. The original play was by Schiller; this is Verdi's German Romantic opera and Joel made it feel as urgent and ominous as *Freischütz*, with velvet-dark basses, sulphurous trombones and plaintive, languishing clarinets. David Junghoon Kim, as Rodolfo, launched his high notes fearlessly into the depths of the Coliseum, and Elizabeth Llewellyn, as Luisa, accompanied singing of luminous, fluid richness and aching expression with a physical performance that suggested a hyperactive infant. Horakova wouldn't leave her alone; characters delivered intimate messages while standing yards apart with their backs turned, and at any point the chorus (who also sounded magnificent) might prance on in some new combination of facepaint and bloomers. Apparently the director was booed on the first night. There were only cheers when I attended; and rightly, because performers this good deserve better.

It doesn't need to be this hard. In Cardiff, David Pountney has taken another mid-period Verdi shocker, *Les vêpres siciliennes*, and given it an updated semi-abstract staging that clarifies the action where Horakova obscured it, looks striking where *Luisa Miller* looked cluttered, and amplifies rather than diminishes the believable human relationships and emotions that are the main claim of this, or any opera, on a modern audience. The oppressed Sicilians get black 20th-century workwear; the French oppressors have colourful, vaguely ancien régime finery. Raimund Bauer's atmospheric, frame-like sets glide around to imply great halls, corridors for conspiracies, and private spaces that focus the drama right in on the central performances. Even the ballet makes narrative sense.

This isn't as high-powered a cast as ENO's but the storytelling is so taut, and Carlo Rizzi's sleek, volatile conducting is so pacy, that the result is entirely compelling, with Giorgio Caoduro's warm-voiced, intensely human performance presenting the tyrant Montfort as a figure of such sympathetic complexity that the obvious parallel was with Philip II in *Don Carlo*. In Verdian terms, that's as good as it gets. Anush Hovhannisyan as Hélène and Jung Soo Yun as Henri crowned ardent vocal performances with a tremulous, controlled pianissimo as they looked into the other's eyes. You didn't have to know that this was supposed to be 13th-century Italy to feel that this mattered. The tension even

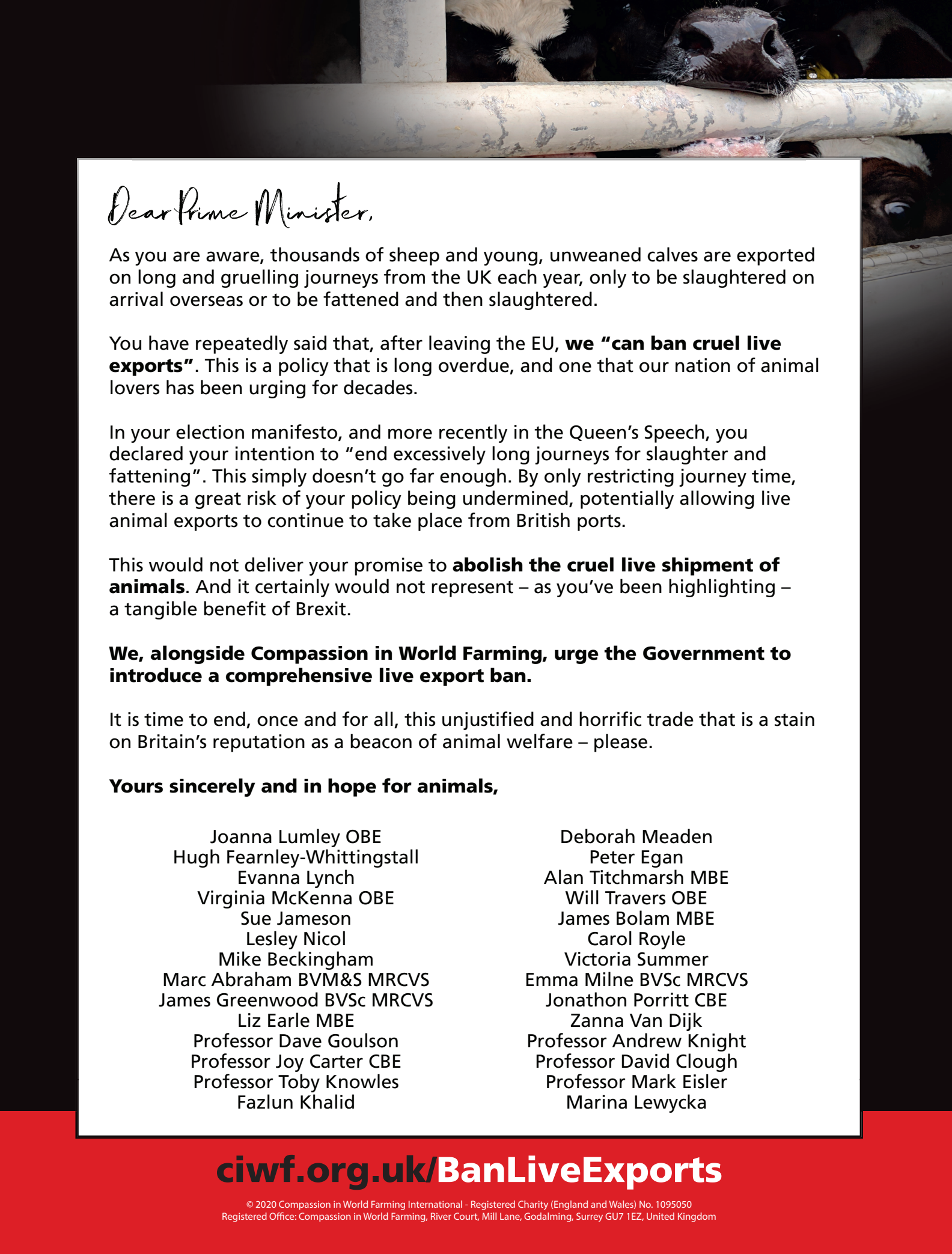
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Dear Prime Minister,

As you are aware, thousands of sheep and young, unweaned calves are exported on long and gruelling journeys from the UK each year, only to be slaughtered on arrival overseas or to be fattened and then slaughtered.

You have repeatedly said that, after leaving the EU, **we “can ban cruel live exports”**. This is a policy that is long overdue, and one that our nation of animal lovers has been urging for decades.

In your election manifesto, and more recently in the Queen’s Speech, you declared your intention to “end excessively long journeys for slaughter and fattening”. This simply doesn’t go far enough. By only restricting journey time, there is a great risk of your policy being undermined, potentially allowing live animal exports to continue to take place from British ports.

This would not deliver your promise to **abolish the cruel live shipment of animals**. And it certainly would not represent – as you’ve been highlighting – a tangible benefit of Brexit.

We, alongside Compassion in World Farming, urge the Government to introduce a comprehensive live export ban.

It is time to end, once and for all, this unjustified and horrific trade that is a stain on Britain’s reputation as a beacon of animal welfare – please.

Yours sincerely and in hope for animals,

Joanna Lumley OBE
Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
Evanna Lynch
Virginia McKenna OBE
Sue Jameson
Lesley Nicol
Mike Beckingham
Marc Abraham BVMS MRCVS
James Greenwood BVSc MRCVS
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Professor Dave Goulson
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Zanna Van Dijk
Professor Andrew Knight
Professor David Clough
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survived two separate interruptions by a mobile phone, prompting Rizzi to stop conducting and plead for silence. The round of applause that followed suggested that he'd already got the audience wholly on side.

Television

Seeking closure

James Walton

As in many thrillers, the characters on display in *Flesh and Blood* (ITV, Monday to Thursday) often seemed locked in a fierce competition as to which of them we could trust the least. The early front runner was Mark (Stephen Rea), a retired surgeon whom the not-long widowed Viv (Francesca Annis) introduced to her three grown-up children as her new boyfriend. But was Mark all he appeared to be? And if not, was this necessarily a bad thing — given that what he appeared to be was spectacularly shifty?

Soon, though, the grown-up children had plenty of other people to worry about, including themselves, as they messed up their lives in an impressive variety of ways. Helen (Claudie Blakley), first seen sucking needfully on a gin and tonic, was a high-

TV programmes should be forced to let us know in advance if they have a disappointingly inconclusive ending

flying NHS management consultant, whose neglected husband proved susceptible to any ladies pretending to share his interests, however uninteresting. ('I rewired the whole place myself,' he told one woman in a pub during a particularly comprehensive description of his DIY activities. 'Really?') she replied, leaving him immediately smitten.) Natalie (Lydia Leonard) had spent the past five years waiting for her married lover to initiate a much-promised divorce rather than merely repeating his catchphrase, 'Leave it with me'. Jake (Russell Tovey), a recovering alcoholic and fitness instructor, was estranged from his own wife after running up huge gambling debts, and now sought to clear them by becoming a gigolo for an older and impeccably empowered local solicitor. But was she actually as happy as she claimed to keep the relationship purely financial?

Meanwhile, coming up fast on the rails in the untrustworthiness stakes was Mary (Imelda Staunton), Viv's next-door neighbour on the Sussex coast. At first sight, Mary was a classic Good Soul: selfless to the point of self-martyring, a reliable supplier of freshly baked cakes and a woman whose two main ways of announcing her presence were 'Yoo-hoo' and 'It's only me'. Yet, before long, you couldn't help notic-

ing that, whenever she turned away from a conversation with the family, her smiling expression was instantly replaced with one of Machiavellian scheming. Nor did she seem any keener than Viv's children on their mother starting a new life with a new man in a new home.

We knew from the beginning that matters wouldn't end well — although not how or why. In the opening sequence, police lights flashed away in the darkness as somebody was stretchered into an ambulance. But instead of telling us who it was, the programme then concentrated on the back stories of all concerned, interspersed with scenes of Mary and the siblings lying through their teeth to a poker-faced detective about how happy the family had been before the unspecified 'incident'. For his part, the detective assiduously avoided so much as a pronoun when referring to 'the victim'.

ITV obviously thought highly of *Flesh and Blood* — hence the decision to broadcast it over four consecutive nights: an always-risky strategy that both presupposes and demands a serious degree of viewer commitment. For most of the programme, too, you could see why. Those back stories were intriguingly peeled away in a series of short but unhurried scenes that between them provided a pretty thorough exploration of the human capacity for self-deception. There was also a strong but unforced sense of how sibling bonds can be claustrophobic and reassuring at the same time.

In fact, the longer the drama went on, the more its heart seemed to be in the family relationships rather than the thriller element. Because of the timing, I won't spoil the ending, but I think I can say that the programme did a fairly good job of spoiling it for itself. Eventually, give or take the odd loose end, we did get a satisfactory answer to the whodunnit — which in this case, of course, included who they dun it to. But then in the very last second came another twist which suggested either that *Flesh and Blood* had the sort of compulsive need to pile up endless reversals (a kind of twist-Tourette's) so common in psychological thrillers, or that it was suddenly on the hunt for a second series — which always feels a bit of a swizz when you've been watching something for hours in the entirely justified expectation of a complete resolution.

I've sometimes wondered about launching a campaign for TV programmes that leave us hanging like this to be forced to let us know in advance. ('Warning: this series contains swearing, scenes of violence and a disappointingly inconclusive ending.') Admittedly, if *Flesh and Blood* had done that, I might have missed out on a well-above-par piece of TV drama, but it was also one that ultimately came across like a sharp and thoughtful family saga with a thriller somewhat uneasily attached.

Theatre

Changing the bard

Lloyd Evans

The Upstart Crow
Gielgud Theatre, booking until 25 April

Collapsible
Bush Theatre, until 21 March

A Moorish princess shipwrecked on the English coast disguises herself as a boy to protect her virtue. Arriving in London, she's hired by William Shakespeare as an assistant to his maidservant Kate, who instantly falls in love with the exotic cross-dressing newcomer. This absurdity, familiar to fans of *Twelfth Night*, is the opening move in Ben Elton's exquisite Shakespearean remix, *The Upstart Crow*.

It's 1604 and the Bard is in poor creative form. 'I have banged out a few clunkers of late,' he admits, referring to *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. 'Should have been *All's Well That Ends Crap*,' suggests a lackey. Enter a Puritan who denounces drama as an ungodly art while slapping himself across the face to purge his soul of sinful thoughts. This gives Shakespeare an idea. He will 'Malvolio'

The elevated silliness of Elton's many-layered plot is superbly handled. This is comedy gold

the Puritan and send him a fake love letter purporting to come from Kate. Meanwhile Kate's affair with the disguised princess is compounded by the arrival of the princess's twin brother, also shipwrecked on the English coast, who has dressed himself as a girl.

The elevated silliness of Elton's many-layered plot is superbly handled. He steals key elements from classic plays and welds them on to the known facts of Shakespeare's life. His two daughters, Susanna and Judith, arrive from Stratford and are forced to pledge their affection for their father in order to secure a portion of his estate. Maidservant Kate plays the role of Cordelia in this affectionate *King Lear* spoof. Elton is clearly a formidable Shakespearean scholar and he delights in satirising Jacobean English which was more thickly laden with Anglo-Saxon than the language we use today. 'Tufting-mufflers,' and 'cockling-pouches' are his coinages for human genitalia. He calls homosexuals 'gaysome hugger-tuggers'. The dreaded Puritans, who want to close every theatre in the land, are 'God-prodding pure-titties'. 'Fut-tocking' is an all-purpose intensifier which sounds both obscene and harmless.

The show is enlivened by Steve Speirs who plays Richard Burbage as a fruity, preening thesp, like Charles Laughton in the bath. Every syllable drips with oil and suds. Dan-



David Mitchell as a Pooterish Shakespeare

ielle Phillips and Helen Monks are superb as Shakespeare's daughters, who smoke clay pipes and use distorted Brummie accents ('you' rhyming with 'thou'). David Mitchell's Shakespeare is a mixture of egoism, uncertainty, fun-loving mischief and Pooterish irascibility. 'I'm not bald, I have shy hair,' he mooches defensively. He follows the script effortlessly as it passes between the Jacobean era and the present day. His comedy-rap exit line — 'who da Bard? Me da Bard!' — might easily have fallen flat. Mitchell's amused cynicism makes it soar. If you're taking your kids to this show, and I can't recommend it highly enough, give them a forward briefing on the plots of *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear* and *Othello*. A short lesson on Shakespeare's family (his two daughters and the early death of his

only son, Hamnet) would be a useful addition. This is comedy gold.

Margaret Perry is a rising wunderkind from Cork. Her first play, *Porcelain*, was plucked from the slush pile at the Abbey Theatre and given a full production. That doesn't happen very often. Her latest, *Collapse*, arrives at the Bush in west London tinkling with gongs from the Dublin fringe, the Vault Festival and Edinburgh 2019.

The show is a monologue spoken by Essie (Breffni Holahan), a young Dubliner in need of a job. To complete her CV she canvasses friends and family for adjectives that describe her character. 'Smart' and 'personable', suggest her parents. 'Militant perfectionist', says an ex-boyfriend. Essie sits in her bedroom hunched over the internet,

occasionally venturing out to meet potential employers. She has to endure the fake chumminess of hipster bosses who sprawl on bean bags pretending that the job interview is just a chat with a new friend. As her applications are rejected she gets more engrossed in the web and comes close to mental collapse.

Though the piece is verbally rich, it's a little bedazzled by its own virtuosity. And the storyline — jobless yuppie seeks position in Dublin — is hardly the stuff of great drama. Very basic questions go unanswered. Who is the real Essie? How will her quest alter her? Who does she care about, apart from herself? She mentions Mum and Dad but only in passing. Her lovers, or former lovers, are Hayley and Derek. Is she still with them? Is she gay, bisexual, experimenting?

The show ends with some kind of reconciliation and the arrival of a second performer, which mars the purity of the piece as a solo effort. The writing and the observations are good but I wasn't convinced they belong in a drama. Essie notices a patch of exposed brickwork. 'I know how that feels.' A line for a novel maybe. To me this felt like an interesting but overpraised dud. However the run has just been extended. So what do I know?

Dance

This will hurt

Sara Veale

Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch – *Bluebeard*

Sadler's Wells

Dances at a Gathering/The Cellist

Royal Opera House, in rep until 4 March

Pina Bausch's best work always hovered between the familiar and the unknown. The late choreographer revelled in borders and thresholds, the hinterlands where fantasies collide with reality. The gulf between men and women — their conflicting desires, instincts, clout — was one of her favourite trenches to plumb, so it's no wonder she was drawn to *Bluebeard*. Her 1977 production was shown for the first time in the UK this month.

The show's full title — *Bluebeard. While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók's Opera 'Duke Bluebeard's Castle'* — is the first hint at its tangled drift. Splintered into cryptic scenes, some buoyant, some disturbingly visceral, it doesn't narrate Perrault's folk tale about a serial wife-killer but contemplates its violence: Bluebeard's catapult between cruelty and melancholy, his new bride's doomed bid for deliverance. It's a dance of manipulation, with Bluebeard taking charge, usually through physical force. He even conducts the music, rewinding a tape recorder to replay snatches of Bartók's early 20th-century score, though it's

Bausch who's the real maestro here, flipping gloom on its head. Savage encounters turn frisky; jokey montages end in bodies beaten against walls. Nothing is straightforward — a riddle she would return to in works such as *Café Müller* (1978) and *Victor* (1986), resisting black-and-white moral scrutiny.

Christopher Tandy brings a brutal pragmatism to the title role — he doesn't want to hurt you, but he will — while Silvia Farias Heredia is his terminally hopeful wife, bolting (and later limping) through dead leaves to dive into his arms once again. As the men of the ensemble creep and gurn, the women defer, swerving between fawning and frightened. They're gifted a fleeting moment of dominance when they join forces and whip Bluebeard with their hair.

At two hours uninterrupted, it's a long, wearying watch, full of duplicated outbursts, each reworked with ever-sharper fury. The repetition is the point, I guess — a nod to the grapples lovers insist on going to bat for — but it doesn't make these bruising encounters any easier to witness. Where the mood is ugly, though, the stagecraft is bright. *Bluebeard* tees up the high-throttle theatricality and expressiveness we've come to associate with the author of modern Tanztheater, the lush sets and waggish peacocking. There's historical value here, no question.

The choreographer Cathy Marston totes

her own decorated catalogue, and her new ballet, *The Cellist*, is a choice addition. In step with her fondness for distinguished female subjects, it spotlights Jacqueline du Pré, a mid-century cello prodigy who lost her gift to multiple sclerosis. It's Marston's first main-stage production for the Royal Ballet and distills a complex chronicle into a thoughtful hour of dance.

Lauren Cuthbertson brings a wistful radiance to the central role, clasping her instrument with longing. By instrument I mean fellow principal Marcelino Sambé, who's tasked with animating her cello as

*Savage encounters turn frisky;
jokey montages end in bodies
beaten against walls*

a living, feeling companion. It's a delicate act, but Sambé pulls it off, melting into Cuthbertson's rocking pliés while gusts of Elgar and other staples from Du Pré's rep surge in the background. There's fluency in their sways, serenity to the way they curl into each other's blank spaces. Marston's choreography is resourceful, gesturing at orchestral performance without tipping into literalism.

The ballet zips through 30 years of biography, including Du Pré's teenage debut and her marriage to the conductor Daniel Barenboim (Matthew Ball, looking very

debonair). The storyboarding is muddy — there are some forgettable characters and confusing timelines, some fussing with cardigans and cello cases — though it prudently leaves the MS struggle for the final chapter. Kudos to Marston for defining her subject by her talent, not the disease that stole it.

No such nuance in the other half of this double bill, a revival of Jerome Robbins's *Dances at a Gathering*. That it's a vehicle for technique, not narrative, should be self-evident — it has no plot or characters — but apparently early audiences needed it spelled out, because Robbins yell-wrote some explicit instructions to the editor of *Ballet Review* in 1972: 'please print in large, emphatic and capital letters [that] THERE ARE NO STORIES TO ANY OF THE DANCES IN DANCES AT A GATHERING...THE DANCERS ARE THEMSELVES DANCING WITH EACH OTHER TO THAT MUSIC IN THAT SPACE.'

'That music' is a string of Chopin piano pieces, including a mazurka that races like a Looney Tunes chase scene. It's a fickle soundtrack — witty one minute, elegiac the next — that sends the dance to all sorts of places: sliding splits and flicking feet, centre-stage gallops and lifts that zoom into the wings. Marianela Nunez is the best of the bunch at carving out quiet moments amid the noise.

JAMES LLOYD

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Grocery Bag, 2016, oil on canvas, 18 x 16 inches



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'Dike at night.
Reflected lights',
1908, by Léon
Spilliaert

Exhibitions

It's grim up north

Martin Gayford

Léon Spilliaert

Royal Academy, until 25 May

French Impressions: prints from Manet to Cézanne; Piranesi drawings: visions of antiquity

British Museum, until 9 August

The strange and faintly sinister works of the Belgian artist Léon Spilliaert have been compared — not unreasonably — to those of many writers, Edgar Allan Poe among

them. But as I walked round the Spilliaert exhibition at the Royal Academy, it was not any of these that came to my mind. It was the *Father Brown* detective stories by G.K. Chesterton.

I wasn't thinking of the neatly paradoxical plots, but rather of Chesterton's mastery of atmosphere. Consider *The Absence of Mr Glass* (1914), which takes place in a 'desolate' seaside resort. As Father Brown investigates, '...the afternoon was closing with a premature and partly lurid twilight; the sea was of an inky purple and murmuring ominously'.

This could be a description of a Spilliaert, the master — as it turns out — of haunted Edwardian seascapes. He spent his most productive years in Ostend, a sort

of Belgian Brighton with royal connections and a cheery, seedy atmosphere. He was born there in 1881 and — on the evidence of this exhibition — did almost all his best work in the town.

Much of it belongs to a short period in Spilliaert's twenties, during which he was lonely, ill and suffering from chronic insomnia. The RA show includes an array of self-portraits: haggard, wild-eyed and with an air of gloomy desperation. These were drawn by night in his studio, its windows opaque black.

Spilliaert, though an eccentric loner (or perhaps because of it), is nonetheless recognisably Belgian in mood. There are even moments, such as the way the ripples are a maze of crinkly, swirling lines when he

brings to mind another great compatriot, Hergé, the creator of *Tintin*.

His work looks forward to the surrealism of Magritte and back to James Ensor, a celebrated, older artist who was also living in Ostend. Spilliaert did not imitate the older man's obsession with carnivals and masks, but there was a connection between the two: an underlying sense of weirdness. Despite this affinity, Ensor does not seem to have welcomed Spilliaert's attempts at friendship. 'No sooner do I open my door,' he complained, 'than his delicate silhouette appears.'

Spilliaert would often go for solitary walks along the promenade, and he looked down from his workplace on to the fisherman's quay on the North Sea, which stretched to the horizon. The resulting pictures belong to a northern tradition, which includes Munch and Friedrich, of stark confrontation with a cold and infinite sea. Spilliaert's seascapes such as 'Breakwater with Pole' or 'Signal from the Pier' (both 1907) are pared down to almost abstract geometry, and nearly monochromatic. He also specialised in a genre you might call the spectral still-life. 'Flasks' (1909) is a drawing of three bottles on a shelf; it's

Spilliaert's pictures belong to a northern tradition of stark confrontation with a cold, infinite sea

completely naturalistic, but somehow, perhaps because of its inky darkness, exudes an atmosphere of disquiet.

After a disappointing war — he joined the civic guard, but was expelled for accidentally taking aim at a Belgian soldier — Spilliaert fell in love and married. Although he lived for another 30 years, this domestic happiness marked the end of his inspiration as well as his angst-ridden, reclusive life.

On this showing, he was an uneven, repulsive and limited artist. Even so, like the Finnish painter Helene Schjerfbeck, whose work was shown at the RA last year, he was a poetic north European painter who deserves to be much better known in this country.

Spilliaert's approach — bold, simplified shapes, limited colour range — lent itself to printmaking and book illustrations (there are a number of the latter on show). Over at the British Museum Print room, *French Impressions: prints from Manet to Cézanne* makes the point that not every great painter could — or indeed wanted to — translate their art from canvas to etching or lithography. Cézanne and Van Gogh were scarcely interested in print media, but Gauguin and Degas were both as brilliant and innovative as printmakers as they were with paints. Manet, like his idol Goya, was able to distill the essence of his art into black-and-white prints. While Toulouse-Lautrec, who was not in the class of those others as a painter, was

at his best as a poster designer. He shines in this display.

Also at the British Museum there is a pioneering little show devoted to Piranesi's drawings. This marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of the versatile Italian — architect, dealer in antiquities, and master printmaker. A teacher once warned him: 'You are too much a painter, my friend, to be an engraver.' But this delightful exhibition demonstrates the opposite. Piranesi, who came from Venice, drew with the brio of Tiepolo. His preparatory sketches fizz with freedom. But it was the way he was able to condense that energy into the final image that make his prints so powerful.

Podcasts

Double agents and dog-ears

John Phipps

When will the definitive history of the modern Middle East be written? For 20 years and more, a continent has been torn apart by invasion, upheaval and civil war. It took hundreds of years for balanced histories to be written of the Reformation, European history's most obviously comparable period. If you want the whole story of the modern Muslim world, written from a dispassionate, God's-eye view, you may be waiting a long time.

For the moment, more personal accounts will have to suffice, and *Conflicted*, a series of amiable hour-long conversations between the Middle East expert Thomas Small and former jihadist Aimen Dean, makes a strong case for just this kind of opinionated, idiosyncratic history.

'There is no one on planet Earth like Aimen Dean,' says Small. I admit he has a point. As a young man in the 1990s Dean joined Al-Qaeda, swearing loyalty to Osama Bin Laden. After he became disillusioned with the group, he defected to the West, returning to Afghanistan to spend eight years inside the terrorist group as an MI6 double agent. Finally, to use the pair's recurring phrase, he 'sunk to his lowest ebb' and joined the financial sector.

It's an extraordinary CV, one that gives him a unique perspective on modern history. On 9/11, he had just left a meeting with his MI6 handler when he saw a crowd of people watching television through an Oxford Street shop window. A plume of smoke was pouring from the side of the World Trade Center. He was only half surprised. 'I was thinking: maybe that's the one, this is the one we were warned about. But how did they get the bomb all the way up there?'

Over the course of their first season, the

two men made an astonishingly good fist of explaining an awful lot, making a generous point of signposting the moments when their views might be considered controversial.

Small is a Greek Orthodox Christian, and Dean is a Salafist Muslim, but the two men are old friends, and their conversation is shot through with fellow feeling. At one point, Dean reveals he has even memorised a section of the Christian gospel in Aramaic. 'You poster child for ecumenical harmony, you former Al-Qaeda fighter, you,' laughs Small. It's lovely to hear. Tolerance would be easy, if we were all this tolerant.

The first episode of the new season aired in early February, focusing on the killing of Qassem Soleimani. Small and Dean have two stern words about Soleimani's death. Firstly, that the idea of killing Soleimani did not originate with Donald Trump, but with Mike Pompeo, his hawkish Secretary of State. Secondly, they warn us against cheering on regime change. 'If Iran descends into chaos,' says Dean, 'it's not going to be a revolution, or an overthrow of a regime. It's going to be another Syria.'

Like so much good radio broadcasting, *Conflicted* shows us just how interesting it can be to listen to two intelligent people dis-

Conflicted shows us the joy of listening to two intelligent people discussing the subject they know best

cussing the subject they know best. *You're Booked* shows us that in the wrong hands the same idea can be bland, bland, bland.

In weekly episodes, Daisy Buchanan talks to a literary-adjacent person about their favourite books and reading habits. It's an uninspired concept, and Buchanan is not a gifted interviewer. Does her guest ever dog-ear their paperbacks? Do they feel guilty about not reading enough? Do they sometimes just want something light and easy? It normally falls to the interviewee to add a little interest to proceedings, and episode quality varies accordingly. Richard Ayoade is thoughtful and funny. Diana Henry is robustly likeable. Jess Phillips is two platitudes in a trench coat. 'Most of the people I know haven't actually read *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,' says Phillips, hopefully not talking about her colleagues in parliament.

This podcast belongs to the world of 'book culture': the buzzy calendar of events, readings and festivals that is more interested in selling books than reading them. It feels devoid of real substance. Asking authors about their reading habits is like quizzing junkies on their paraphernalia. Who cares what brand of needle they use? I want to hear about the gold stuff. But to give the show its due, it wasn't so bad to have on in the background as I flipped through my shelves thinking about what an interesting and knowledgeable person I might become, if I ever got round to doing any reading.



Adèle Haenel as Héloïse in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Cinema

What a scorcher

Deborah Ross

Portrait of a Lady on Fire

15, Key Cities

Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is set on a remote, windswept Brittany island in the late 18th century. It's about two women falling in love and it's rapturous, scorching, ravishing and will lock your eyes to the screen. I've seen it three times and on each occasion my eyes were locked to the screen. At this point I could also say it's a film that tells the male gaze to go take a running jump, then follow up with one of my lectures on post-structural feminism, as I know you are keen on all that, but 'rapturous, scorching and ravishing' will do for now. Plus it is deeply romantic. And wildly sexy. And, my God, so full of feeling. So let's just go with all that.

Noémie Merlant stars as Marianne, an artist employed by a countess (Valeria Golino) to paint her daughter Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) on that windswept island. Héloïse

is betrothed to a Milanese nobleman but before the marriage can proceed he must see a portrait because that's how it worked before Tinder. However, there is a problem. Héloïse's older sister was similarly betrothed but fell to her death from a cliff — or did she jump? — and Héloïse has thus far refused to be painted. So Marianne, who arrives in the guise of a walking companion, must observe her closely and then paint later in secret. Marianne looks. And looks and looks

It is deeply romantic. And wildly sexy. And, my God, so full of feeling

and looks. Until, finally, Héloïse looks back. It is all in the looking, and in looking at the looking we are taught to look too. I don't, for instance, think I'll ever be able to look at an ear again without taking note of its 'warm and transparent hue' and how it must 'yield to the cheek'. In fact, I haven't stopped looking at ears since.

Sciamma, who also wrote the screenplay, has created a film of patient tenacity as longing and desire slowly build. There are no men to speak of and, with the countess away on a trip, that leaves just Mari-

anne and Héloïse in the house along with the servant girl, Sophie (Luana Bajrami). They play cards, share meals, smoke pipes — Marianne is fond of a pipe — and read Ovid in the evenings as that's how it worked before Netflix. Here, women's bodies are not idealised, so, interestingly, it's periods, unwanted pregnancies, armpit hair. Yet while there are no men, their power is everywhere. Héloïse must accept her matrimonial fate. Marianne can only exhibit under her father's name and is not allowed to study the male nude form. ('Is it a matter of modesty?' asks Héloïse. 'It's mostly to prevent us doing great art,' replies Marianne.) But Sciamma is so smart, and the characters feel so true and real, that none of this feels like the feminist dogma you are so keen on. In fact, the two leads inhabit their characters so fully it's as if they are not acting, even though you know they are.

Portrait is a film about what it's like to truly see and be seen, and while never melodramatic, it does culminate with a crescendo of feeling and if 'page 28' of Marianne's sketchbook doesn't break you, absolutely nothing will. I was going to add that you'll understand if you go and see this but there must be no 'if'.

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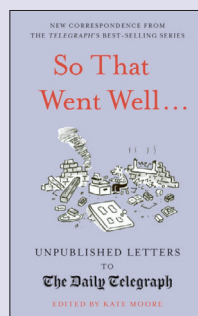


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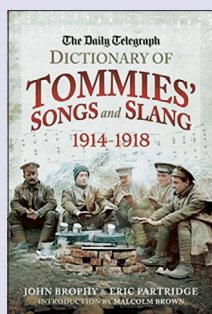


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Rockall

By David Butterfield

In 1978, an invitation was sent to some 200 members of Oxford's Dangerous Sports Club, which simply read: 'Tea, Rockall, Black Tie.' The good news was that invitees had never visited this part of the UK; the bad was that it is way out west. Forget Land's End, or the Western Isles, or even far-flung Fermanagh. First get to the Outer Hebrides and then head into the Atlantic for 230 miles or so. There a single tooth of granite, 60-foot high, will emerge from the waves. Welcome to Rockall, the last acquisition of the British Empire.

Though known to the Vikings, and to map-makers since the 16th century, Rockall was until 1955 *terra nullius*: land claimed by no one. No wonder. With no trees, no bushes, no shrubs, no soil, and no permanent wildlife, Rockall is, well, all rock. But when Britain started nuclear testing in the north Atlantic, fears arose that this uninhabitable island would give a foothold to Soviet spies. So the Union Flag was raised in the 1950s, and a brass plaque affixed: 'Possession of the island was taken in the name of Her Majesty.'

Tourism is not really on the cards. 'No place,' the Lords were told when Rockall became part of Scotland, 'is more deso-



An 1862 etching of Rockall

late, despairing and awful.' It cannot sustain human life; even the gannets and guillemots that stop there are dislodged by storm waves that wash over the entire island. Save for the stoic periwinkle, there is no permanent resident. Intrepid humans wanting to give Rockall a go must bring supplies and lash themselves Prometheus-like to Hall's Ledge, the only flat part of the rock. The record stay — 45 desperate days spent in a bespoke plastic pod — was set by Nick Hancock in 2014.

A couple of centuries earlier, in 1811, HMS *Endymion* had made landfall on Rockall. But most ships that end up there do so unintentionally, foundering on it or

Helen's Reef nearby. In 1904, the Danish liner *SS Norge* was suddenly ripped open, disappearing with her 650 passengers. The danger persists: although a light beacon was installed in 1972, it would not survive long.

So who's in charge of Rockall? Angus Macneil, MP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles)? Or the clan Mackay, who claimed Rockall for their own as long ago as 1846? Given the abundance of fish in the area, Ireland and Iceland keep a beady eye. And it was here, in 1997, that the last land invasion of the UK came: protesting at the growth of the oil industry, Greenpeace squatted for six weeks on the rock they redubbed Waveland. But, like the passports they issued, the relics of their time on the island were soon washed away.

Back to that invitation. Ten hearty souls made the trip to Rockall as a fierce gale blew in. After a five-day search for the blasted island, the team at last summited the rock. When they did, roughly the same number of humans had set foot on the moon. Scrambled eggs, champagne and a general knees-up ensued. When drink ran out, they leapt off the island, pilfering the plaque and rewinding its rock.

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ORDEREATLOVE

What is the dental etiquette regarding the ownership of gold fillings?

— Dear Mary, p61

LIFE

High life Taki



Gstaad

It feels like a sepia-tinged melodrama, one directed by the great schlock master Sam Wood. Driving along the winding valleys through 17th-century villages, Gruyères Castle on one's right, the heartbeat would quicken as Gstaad beckoned in the distance. Gstaad in those days meant beautiful women, parties galore, challenging, snow-covered slopes to swish down, and a friendly atmosphere. Only the lucky few knew about the place.

All that has gone down the drain, except for the prices, which have gone through the roof. It's called progress. I used to be able to identify the mood of a time, especially here in Gstaad, but no longer. For starters, there is no more snow from upstairs, only the man-made white stuff. The last February with no snow whatsoever was back in 1964, and I spent it hitting tennis balls with Irwin Shaw on the Palace hotel outdoor courts.

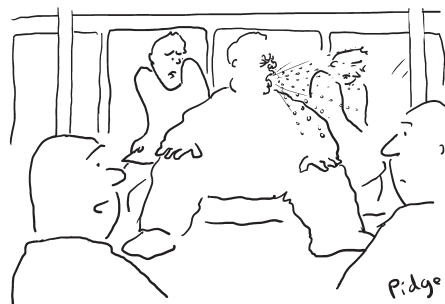
Nobody talked about climate change in those days, and those who did were as wrong as the modern maniacs trying to shove it down our throats. One such Extinction Rebellion asshole who drives a Porsche tried to collar me the other day, and he got a somewhat rude response. 'Talk to the Chinese, tell the African Bushmen to stop burning wood, and the Markles to offset their carbon footprint by staying put in Hollywood,' I said. 'I use a sailboat, a mini, and walk everywhere, so shut up.'

From my chalet high above on the Wispile, I can see green all around me. The white stuff is far away, up on the glaciers in the distance. Man-made paths of snow have the suckers going up and down the ski lifts like robots, après-skiing being the operative word. Still, there are those, like my own son, who insist that there is snow and good skiing, but the venue changes a lot — daily, in fact. The only good news in all this is that I will have to give up skiing in the near-future and the lack of the white stuff makes it easier to do so.

The lack of snow was offset by karate camp, with the arrival of my karate sensei Richard Amos and Ben, a tough member of the Swiss team. Implicit in karate is a sense of personal dignity, once a characteristic of the samurai, although even that has now given way to American-style commercialism. But the way of Bushido, at least to some of us, remains a code of moral principle. Richard Sensei, Ben and I went at it hard, but then I noticed they were cheating, taking it easy on the old boy. I truly felt like quitting. But it is the way of Bushido: one does not attack old men. Still, a few bruises make it easy to fool oneself and I celebrated the finish of the three-day camp with a bottle of vodka all to myself.

Throughout these 55 years of karate, especially before sessions that require hand-to-hand fighting, I have inspired myself by reading about real combat, as in James Holland's brilliant *Normandy '44*. I read about my wife's uncle, a battalion commander in the Panzer-Lehr-Division, 'the urbane and aristocratic Major Prince Wilhelm von Schönbürg-Waldenburg'. Eight Princes Schönbürg were killed in action in the second world war. Seven died on the Russian front, Wilhelm on the counterattack in Normandy, taking a direct hit in the turret of his Panzer and dying instantly. The Nazis made sure that nobles were in the thick of the fighting, and the extremely good-looking Wilhelm was all of 25 when he died.

And now for the good news: the group of *Spectator* readers who came up to Gstaad for lunch and a short speech by yours truly turned out to be the nicest bunch of men and women I've met in a hell of a long while. Even the Anglophobe Alexandra, my wife, has become an instant Anglophile on their account. There were about 40 of them, and what struck me was that they were not a silly, jolly bunch, but



'He used to be just a manspreader.'

serious men and women who had obviously reached the top of their professions such as the law, academia and business. Yet they were a happy group who knew more about *The Spectator* than the little Greek boy and had very interesting things to say. There was not a single bore among them, most likely a first ever here in Gstaad.

My plan was to talk about my 62 years in Gstaad as compared with my 43 years as a *Spectator* columnist, and how Gstaad has gone to the dogs, whereas the *Speccie* has gone from strength to strength. It was a good idea but I wasn't able to do it justice because I couldn't go full out. Anyway, my visitors were happy to be in the sun and they even thought to bring me a bottle of the great Lagavulin scotch whisky: 'Your sainted editor's favourite,' as my friend Michael put it.

Low life Jeremy Clarke



Joyce Marriott of Pyrton, Oxford, has written a letter to the *Times* on the subject of how a person's imagination can be unduly influenced by one particular film. The film *Old Yeller*, she says, had such a powerful effect that for the past 30 years she has devoted her life to animal welfare, dogs particularly. 'Such is the power of movies,' she concludes.

Although I haven't seen *Old Yeller*, I agree that a film can sow seeds in the imagination which prosper and flourish and eventually overrun it. My own imaginative Japanese knotweed was sown by the first film I ever saw, aged seven, on the big screen at the Ritz cinema in Southend-on-sea in 1964: *Zulu*, starring Stanley Baker, written by John Prebble and Cy Endfield, directed by Cy Endfield and produced by Stanley Baker and Cy Endfield.

Zulu is basically one long battle scene, a dramatic retelling of the defence of Rorke's Drift by a company of South Wales Borderers against 4,000 Zulus, the untested section of the massive Zulu impi which earlier in

the day had wiped out an invading British army column. It was a unique triumph of the short stabbing spear over the Martini-Henry carbine with an effective range of 400 yards. The final scene shows four rows of red-coated infantry in a redoubt shooting down hundreds of semi-naked Zulu warriors at point-blank range. The film could easily be dismissed as mad jingoistic nonsense, perhaps even a foundational myth of the moronic, white-supremacist generation who tipped the vote in favour of exiting the European Union. As a seven-year-old, I'd never dreamed of such violence.

But notice this: Baker was a lifelong socialist; Prebble was a communist party member and Endfield a Young Communist League worker at Yale. In 1951 Endfield was blacklisted by Hollywood and came to England to continue making his politically charged films. Prebble wrote revisionist history. And the more I watch *Zulu*, the more convinced I am that it is essentially a film about the rigidities, complexities and fluidities of the British class system. I also think this is why the film is still popular. Watching *Zulu*, we lower-middle-class, old, white people recognise and laugh at the same

*It was in the Ritz cinema
overlooking Southend pier, aged
seven, that I fell in love with Africa*

interclass antagonisms mitigated by mutual grudging respect that we recognise and laugh at in *Dad's Army*, and hardly see anywhere else. All gone now of course.

At seven years of age I failed to notice this class business. The aplomb and independence, for example, with which Colour Sergeant Bourne handled his own class predicament as the medium of communication between 'the lads' on the barricade and the gentleman officers. ('Nobody told you to stop working!') And certainly not the nature of the tension between the nihilism of Private Hook and the false consciousness of his working-class fellows. Nor the historic challenge to the Victorian landed gentry, exemplified by the lisping Lieutenant Bromhead (for whom the situation is desperate but never serious), by the rising technocrat class in the shape of (big girl's blouse) Lieutenant Chard. Nevertheless I think a large part of my imagination was moulded in that one film by the impression made by John Prebble's dialogue and Cy Endfield's class-conscious vision.

Rather thin stuff on which to base an imaginative understanding of the world, you twit, you might say. Well, it's a step up, let me tell you, from the pop song lyrics and advertising jingles that occupy the rest of the space. And even as the most feeble caricature of reality, I would argue that *Zulu* is a more subtle interpretation of British class relations and imperialism than the paradigms

and simplicities of, say, something bleakly didactic written by some middle-class leftist luvvie and shoved out by the BBC.

The thing that entranced my child's eyes, apart from the cook getting a spear in his back and haemorrhaging blood from his mouth, which overflowed down his chin, was the scenery. And above everything else it was the revelation of the ways and manners of an unsurmised and different civilisation — the Zulus. Their bravery, their nakedness, their blackness — their harmonised singing, especially — thrilled me. 'They are a great, great people,' says missionary and religious maniac Reverend Witt, played by Jack Hawkins, of his parishioners. I would claim that it was there, at the Ritz cinema

overlooking Southend pier, that I fell in love with Africa.

It was a dramatised, cinematic, fictional image I had fallen in love with, I knew that. (Later I read that the singers and dancers at the unforgettable mass wedding ceremony at the beginning of the film, for example, were professional performers bussed in from the night clubs of Johannesburg.) But the shock and thrill sustained by the seven-year-old boy in a dusty velveteen cinema seat has reverberated undiminished through a lifetime of reading about sub-Saharan Africa and going there as often as possible. I'm now up to 18 countries out of 55. Such indeed, dear Joyce Marriot, is the power of movies.

Bliss

*Ignorance is bliss, bliss ignorance – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

Ignorant in childhood and
ignorant still in age: our only hope
to know we are. I don't mean
rude or coarse but not-knowing
and knowing we don't know
the half of it simply because
you can't halve something
that has no terminus.
Now talk to me about bliss.
Whatever you do: know
what you know's of limited use,
however encyclopaedic it is –
however unique your synapses,
however quantum your leap.
Advise the Member for Hubris
to read Ecclesiastes
as he tumbles into the abyss.
And talk to me about bliss.
Diagnose the pain, the fault in the machine.
Cure the incurable diseases.
Put an end to the Crisis.
Turn the mirror to the wall.
Have God save the Queen if He pleases.
Rescue Adam and Eve from the Fall.
Make hindsight foresight.
Please everyone all of the time.
But talk to me . . . about bliss.

—Andrew McNeillie



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SPECTATOR
LIFE

Real life

Melissa Kite



Nice of the NHS to send an advisory text about coronavirus, because I was wondering.

Is it possible to have a touch of coronavirus? If so, the builder boyfriend and I suspect we may have had it, and fought it off.

Out of nowhere, I suddenly felt like I couldn't get any air into my lungs. The sensation was very like altitude sickness, as if someone was holding my shoulders down. This went on for several days until one night I threatened to take myself to casualty with a suspected heart attack.

Being a committed hypochondriac, I got no sympathy at all from the BB, who told me not to be so stupid. I went off to the spare room in a huff and put myself to bed to die alone, telling him he'd be sorry when he woke up to find there was no one to wash and cook for him.

But he was adamant I was making a fuss over nothing, as usual. He said he had also just had several days of feeling as though he was fighting for every breath. It was obvious to him that we had both had the same thing. A virus of some sort, with slightly odd symptoms. No cough, no cold, no fever. Just gasping for breath like a fish out of water.

So I was interested to receive the official guidance from my local GP surgery about coronavirus. They texted me in what I assume was a round robin: 'Dear Ms Kite, if you have been to China, Macau, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Republic of Korea or Malaysia in the last 14 days...'

Nope. I haven't been anywhere in years, aside from Greece last summer, and as one of the horses managed to inexplicably keel over while I was there — after I had spent weeks preparing a fail-safe care regime involving various friends conducting round-the-clock checks while I was gone — I don't suppose I will be going anywhere ever again. '...and have a cough, high temperature or shortness of breath...'

Well, that's interesting because I had assumed you had to have some or all of those symptoms, but they do seem to be saying you can have just one...

'...even if it's mild...'. It wasn't mild; I felt like I was having the air squeezed out of me...

'...or if you have been in close contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus...' — here comes the good bit — '...then DO NOT go to a GP surgery, community pharmacy or hospital.'

Crikey. Then how am I to be cured?

'Call NHS 111, stay indoors and avoid close contact with other people.' I wonder if they send medical help to your house. Yes, I'm sure that's what happens. I'm sure they don't just leave you hanging on the line while someone called Margery says, 'What's that, lovey? You feel like you can't get any air into your lungs, lovey? You worried you might have a touch of coronavirus? Hold the line, lovey, I need to look at my crib sheet. Right, I'll just have to take you through a few security questions first. Do you have your ten-digit NHS number, your blood group, your partner's blood group and the first 17 letters of your mother's maiden name?'

Happily, I pretty much did stay indoors until I felt better anyway because I couldn't get enough air into my lungs to facilitate movement beyond the doorstep. It was the most extraordinary feeling. And I didn't go to the GP because I very rarely do, unless it's something so clear cut I can simply tell them what I require.

I did pop into the pharmacy in the village because the only thing that made me feel better was lying on the bed with my eyes covered with soothing eye pads like Bubbles DeVere in *Little Britain*, although I have no idea whether the pharmacy I popped into would be classed as a 'community pharmacy'. It is a pharmacy in a community but I'm not sure whether, in NHS speak, a pharmacy in a community is the same thing as a 'community pharmacy', which may have special political status.

When I felt able to sit up in bed and feebly prod my iPhone, I put my symptoms into Dr Google and was surprised to find that the sensations in my lungs might be nothing to do with the lurgy and everything to do with having a week-long panic attack.

Is there any wonder, when I'm receiving texts telling me that if I succumb to coronavirus I must stay inside, nail large pieces of crooked wood across the windows and paint a 'C' on the front door until someone comes round ringing a bell?

In any case, after several more days of gasping, I woke up to find I could breathe normally again.



Narcissus feels outnumbered

Bridge

Janet de Botton

Bridge experts are a lovely lot. They give their time freely and generously to encourage and teach students and bring bridge to a wider, young audience. Prof Sam(antha) Punch organised a terrific pro/am event last week for 76 pairs and raised more than £50k for her Keep Bridge Alive charity.

The Young Chelsea BC is launching a major drive to recruit young players by offering to teach bridge to every student in London — all 375,000 of them! Bright young stars India Leeming (who is running the YC youth initiative) and Shazaad Natt are organising a teaching weekend, and up at Acol Stefan Skorchev ran his annual Invitational Pairs which is becoming a must for more experienced players.

My hand today comes from that Pairs, won by rising young star Ankush Khandelwal playing with former junior whiz kid Nick Sandqvist. Matchpoint scoring:

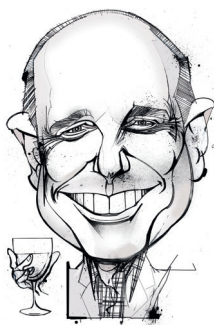
Dealer South

E/W vulnerable

♠ A K 7 3	♠ Q 9 8
♥ A Q 9 7	♥ K 10 8 4
♦ K J 8 5	♦ Q 10 7
♣ 7	♣ K 8 2
♠ 10 6 4 2	♠ J 5
♥ J 6 5	♥ 3 2
♦ 9 2	♦ A 6 4 3
♣ 10 9 5 4	♣ A Q J 6 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

West led a small Spade, ducked to East's Queen, who played a Spade back. A Diamond to the Jack lost to the Queen, East returning a Club to declarer's Queen. A Heart to the Queen and King came next, and now East made the great play of a low Heart to break communications. West's ♥J was taken by the Ace and declarer took stock. He recognised these 4-4 fits, and how to test the defenders. He led the ♦8 to his Ace, cashed the Ace of Clubs and played the ♦4 back to dummy's King. When the ♦5 was led from dummy, with only two cards left, East froze; South had one more Diamond — he knew that — but which one? If dummy's 5 was holding the trick, he must keep the master Heart, but if South is about to win it in hand, he must keep the ♣King. East got it wrong and Ankush made his precious overtrick.



Spring wouldn't be spring without our annual offer from Chateau Musar, that extraordinary Lebanese winery that is the epitome of triumph over adversity. As readers well know, Auberon Waugh and Simon Hoggart — my late, great predecessors as Custodian of the Corkscrew for *The Spectator* — were huge fans of Chateau Musar and I, too, have long been smitten.

Indeed, I'm sure that Fraser's chief concern on handing me the key to the *Speccie's* cellar was that I was as sound on Musar as those who had worn the mighty chain of office before me had been. Well, he needn't have worried. I love mighty Musar and know how much our readers do too. Thanks to Mark Cronshaw of Mr. Wheeler, we've a fine selection here.

The 2018 Musar Jeune White (1) is Musar's entry level vino, a tasty blend of Viognier, Vermentino and Chardonnay from vineyards deep in the Bekaa Valley. Unoaked, it's crisp, clean, fresh and just that little bit different. £12.25 down from £13.75.

The 2018 Musar Jeune Rosé (2) is similarly easy-going. Blended from Cinsault and Mourvèdre, it's a glorious salmon pink and delectably fresh and enticing, with lively wild strawberry notes and a whisper of spice. £11.50 down from £12.75.

The 2018 Musar Jeune Red (3) is a soft, fresh, juicy mix of Cinsault, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, designed to be enjoyed in its youth with little fanfare. Just knock it back and enjoy. £11.50 down from £12.75.

I'll be the first to admit that the 2012 Ch. Musar White (4) is something of an acquired taste, being as it is a blend of Obaideh and Merwah, which sound more like Old Testament prophets than they do ancient indigenous grape varieties. Fermented and aged in oak, the wine is peachy, lemony and creamy and if it's like anything at all, it's like a fine white Rhône. £25 down from £26.50.

The 2017 Hocha Pèrè et Fils (5) is a single vineyard red made from old vine Cinsault, Grenache and Cabernet Sauvignon grown at 1,000 metres above sea level. The result is a wine of power, concentration, richness and freshness, full of plums, damsons, herbs and spices. £14.75 down from £16.50. For those who like to make a statement, the excellent 2015 Hocha Pèrè et Fils (6) is available in magnum at £40, down from £45.

The estate only releases its grand vin

when it's deemed ready to drink and this is the first time that the 2013 Chateau Musar (7) has been offered. A typical sweet/savoury/spicy blend of Cinsault, Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon, it's exclusive to readers of *The Spectator* until April, when it will be offered more widely and more

This extraordinary Lebanese winery is the epitome of triumph over adversity

expensively. Fill your boots! £24.75 down from £28. (Magnums, jeroboams and imperials are also available: call Mark Cronshaw on 01206 713560 if interested.)

We've offered the 2000 Chateau Musar (8) before and Monsieur Hoggart lapped it up, praising its 'soft, velvety, peppery, spicy,

earthy even chocolate quality' on its release in 2007. The years have been kind and there is even more sweet fruit to the fore and succulence on the finish. Offered direct from the chateau at £30.

Finally, the 1997 Chateau Musar (9), of which little remains. It's showing well for its age but needs drinking up. Relish its sweet fruit, savoury edge and mellow softness and marvel at the magic that is Musar. Just £34.

The Musar Collection has two bottles each of the 2000 Ch. Musar, 2013 Ch. Musar, 2017 Hocha Red and 2018 Musar Jeune Red and one bottle each of the 1997 Ch. Musar, 2012 Ch. Musar White, 2018 Musar Jeune White and 2018 Musar Jeune Rosé.

The Musar Vintage Collection contains four bottles each of the 1997, 2000 and 2013 Ch. Musar. Delivery, as ever, is free.

ORDER FORM *Spectator Wine Offer*

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mrwheelerwine.com; tel: 01206 713560; email: sales@mrwheelerwine.com

Prices are per case of 3, 6 or 12 magnums/ bottles as stated below				List price	Club price	No.
White	1	2018 Musar Jeune White, 13% (12 bottles)		£165.00	£147.00	
Rosé	2	2018 Musar Jeune Rosé, 13.5% (12 bottles)		£153.00	£138.00	
Red	3	2018 Musar Jeune Red, 14% (12 bottles)		£153.00	£138.00	
White	4	2012 Ch. Musar White, 14% (6 bottles)		£159.00	£150.00	
Red	5	2017 Hocha Pèrè et Fils Red 14% (12 bottles)		£198.00	£177.00	
	6	2015 Hocha Pèrè et Fils Red 13.5% (3 magnums)		£135.00	£120.00	
	7	2013 Ch. Musar 14% (12 bottles)		£336.00	£297.00	
	8	2000 Ch. Musar 13.5% (6 bottles)			£180.00	
	9	1997 Ch. Musar 14% (6 bottles)			£204.00	
Mixed	10	Musar Collection (12 bottles)		£261.50	£249.00	
	11	Musar Vintage Collection (12 bottles)		£368.00	£355.00	

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Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Payment should be made either by cheque with the order, payable to Mr. Wheeler, or by debit or credit card, details of which may be telephoned. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 11 April 2020.

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Chess

Increment and excrement

Luke McShane

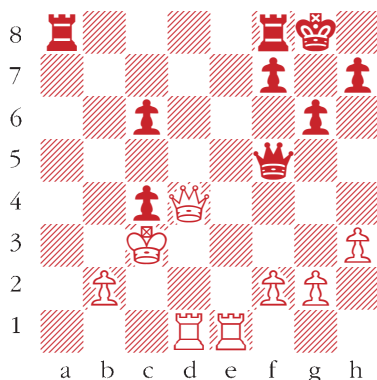
The science-fiction writer Douglas Adams ridiculed our primitive species for considering digital watches to be 'a pretty neat idea'. Digital chess clocks really are pretty neat, because they enable modern competitive games to be played with an 'increment'. For each move played, you earn extra seconds to make the next one, a simple innovation which allows all games to reach a natural conclusion. (By contrast, analogue clocks allot a tranche of thinking time for a series of moves). A lack of increment on the clock occasionally makes for excrement on the board; bashing out 20 moves in five remaining seconds may be physically impossible, but that never stops people trying. Pieces topple like bowling pins and the clock gets thumped like a broken television.

Still, online speed demons get a rush from playing without increment. Two-dimensional pieces don't fall over, it is true, but getting 'flagged' as the last seconds tick away can still induce molten rage in the best of us, especially when the position is completely drawn. That's what happened to Gata Kamsky during a 'banter blitz' match on the Chess24 website last month, against Chilean grandmaster Cristobal Henriquez. In 'banter blitz' the players speak and stream their thoughts as they play. Kamsky, deeply affronted, muttered some unfiltered thoughts and 'rage quit' the match. The icing on the cake, for a mirthful online audience, was when Kamsky called himself a 'famous fucking legend'. Chess24 didn't miss a trick, and clued-in fans can now buy a mug and T-shirt bearing that meme-tastic pronouncement.

Without doubt, Henriquez won fair and square, but Kamsky's immodest outburst did have a ring of truth. A five-time US champion, he was a serious contender for the World Championship in the 1990s, before retiring from the game for several years. These days, ranked just outside the world top fifty, he is still a match for anyone. Sportingly, Henriquez allowed him a rematch last week. Kamsky was replete with contrition and compliments for his young opponent, whom he then demolished with a 5.5-0.5 score.

It tickled me to be paired against Kamsky just a few days later in the German Bundesliga, a team competition. This was a slow game, played over the board, but by dint of our combined ineptness, scarcely more edifying than an internet blitz game. My play was feeble, and Kamsky built up a

Black to play, position after 27 Kc3



winning position with no apparent effort. At move 27, with my king exposed on c3, I was hopelessly lost and waiting for the axe to fall. To our mutual incredulity, it never did.

Luke McShane–Gata Kamsky

Bundesliga, February 2020

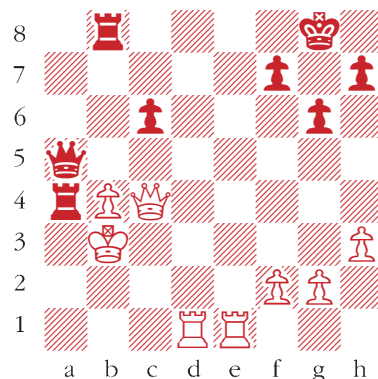
1 e4 c6 2 Nf3 d5 3 Nc3 g6 4 d4 Bg7 5 h3 Nf6 6 Bd3 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Nd7 9 c3 O-O 10 Bg5 Qc7 11 Qd2 e5 12 O-O-O exd4 13 Nxd4 Nc5 14 Bc2 Ne6 15 Nxe6 Bxe6 16 Bb3? Awful. 16...Bxb3 17 axb3 a5! Taking a crowbar to the queenside. 18 Qf4 Qb6 19 Kc2 Qb5 20 c4 Qc5 21 Bf6 Bxf6 22 Qxf6 a4 23 Qd4 Qf5+ 24 Kc3 axb3 25 Kxb3 b5 26 Rhe1 bxc4+ 27 Kc3 (see diagram) Rfb8 27...Qa5+ 28 Kc2 Qa4+ 29 Kc1 Qb3 was simpler. 28 Qxc4 Ra5 29 b4 Ra3+ 30 Kb2 Ra4 31 Kb3 Raxb4+ 32 Qxb4 Rxb4+ 33 Kxb4 Qxf2 34 g4 Qb2+ 35 Kc4 Qc2+ 36 Kd4 c5+ 37 Kd5 c4 38 Rh1 Kg7 39 Kd4 Kh6 40 Kc5 c3 41 Kc4 Kg5 42 Rc1 Qd2 43 Rxc3 Fifteen forgettable moves later, a **draw was agreed**.

The 138th Varsity Chess Match between Oxford and Cambridge takes place on 7 March at the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall, London. Play begins at 12.30 p.m. and spectators are welcome. In a nod to tradition, the match is played without increment. I'm sure the proceedings will be dignified nonetheless.

PUZZLE NO. 593

White to play, a variation from McShane–Kamsky. In the game above, I was hoping to see 31...Qa5, as I had spotted an opportunity to turn the tables completely. What is White's next move? Answers should be sent to 'Chess' at The Spectator by Tuesday 3 March 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...Rd5! threatens ...Qd1 mate and 2 Qxd5 Nf4+ picks up the queen.
Last week's winner Emmet Clarke, London E11



Competition

By George

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3137, to mark the 70th anniversary of George Orwell's death, you were invited to submit a short story with an Orwellian flavour. This challenge was inspired by an entertaining thread on Twitter started by @rcolvile, who asked for ideas for sequels or spin-offs when Orwell's work goes out of copyright next January. Among the suggestions that elicited the most 'likes' were @NickTyrone's 'a sequel to *Animal Farm* in which all the non-pig animals console themselves with the idea that at least they "won the argument".'

An honourable mention goes to Nick MacKinnon, whose twist on *Nineteen Eight-Four* sees Winston consigned to a Room 101 that is the embodiment of his greatest horror, native English culture: 'a Wether-spoons. Winston felt the carpet cling to his shoes, saw old maids in cycle clips drinking halves of mild after Evensong. A bearded giant turned from the fruit machine. "Not the Green Man!" yelled Winston...'

The winners below snaffle £30 each.

The smell was all wrong, though the Victorian façade stood unaltered but for telescreens promoting Victory Ales. Where once the Moon Under Water had welcomed George Blair with a pleasing musk combining tobacco and several distinguishable ales, now there was only the ammonia and ersatz Alpine freshness of cleaning fluid. Formerly distinct bars had been brutally knocked through, creating one vast gastropub. George, its sole lunchtime customer, ordered a pint of odourless brown fizz. It came in a handleless glass from a bored youth in a bootlace tie sporting a lapel badge proclaiming him Manager. George glanced at the menu, a little masterpiece of advertising copy whose promises couldn't have been understood, let alone honoured, by the pub microwave. Belching uncomfortably, after the manner of regulars long vanished from the place, George flashed the Manager his card. 'I'm from the Oceania Pub Company,' He said, remorselessly. 'We're closing you down.'

Adrian Fry

The emporium, saw Winston, was crammed with china memorabilia, sometimes still in its original wrapping. Clothes rails bulged with oddly ripped jeans. There were rows of shoes, scuffed, occasionally a pair.

'Golden days,' said the Head Volunteer. 'They used to sell these knick-knacks in proper shops. Cheap as chips. Bargains.'

'But did people actually pay for these?' asked Winston.

'Oh yes, they were worth every penny, especially after the Recycling Laws. And you were giving to Charity, too, that was when we cared for the elderly and the poor. Before High Streets were abolished. Oh look you've got a Travis CD in your basket, haven't seen one of those for 20 years.'

Winston clicked on Checkout with his ring-

finger. 'Sale,' remarked the Head Volunteer, her image vanishing. The drone arrived seconds later, nudging his elbow in an unfriendly manner. *No think retro*, said its voice, deep in Winston's synapses. *Last warning.*

Bill Greenwell

The Central Barn at America Farm was packed when the now semi-human hog, Trumper, the self-declared King of the Porkies, stood up on his hind legs to address the animals. On one side were the sheep, his devoted followers, wearing human-style red baseball caps with the initials MAFIA, for his slogan 'Make America Farm Immense Again'. The sheep were noisy and belligerent, because Trumper had persuaded them that they were actually elephants, but they remained very dim sheep, agreeing with Trumper's every word. There had been an attempt by the donkeys to dislodge Trumper, but he had explained that since it was good that he was in charge, everything he did had to be good, even if it was bad (he called this 'trample-think') and the sheep believed him, chanting their slogans 'Four Years Good, Eight Years Better', and demanding that the wife of the old farmer be locked up.

Brian Murdoch

With a resigned sigh George Hargreaves brought up the Egolog page on his screen. He thought for a moment then tapped 'Why?' into the search bar. No result found. Egolog could tell you anything you wanted to know but it couldn't answer a simple question. It would, though, log what he had asked. He switched to Pangloss News. Googazon was delivering a speech. George muted the impermeably bland anthrobotic voice but ran the subtitles: '...this world-leading utilisation of human-waste fertiliser means that crop yields are increasing excrementally.' *Excrementally?* He hurriedly played the passage back with sound. The spoken word was 'exponentially'. George's whole body trembled. Someone, somehow had infiltrated the system. It was an act, however tiny, of subversion. More than that, it was another's footprint in the sand. He gave out an exuberant howl. Whatever else now, he was not alone.

W.J. Webster

Arthur Stiggs, curator at the National Museum of Art, studied the painting before him. What had so incensed the Minister for Arts to ask for its immediate destruction? He studied the clouds, the trees, all depicted beautifully. Then his eyes were drawn to the main subject, a horse and cart and their driver marooned in a pond. Yes, he could see it now. This image of incompetence would not be tolerated in a society where everyone had their specified job and was expected to do it well. This representation of neglect of common values should not be seen. He could not stand too long, as his every move would be reported, so he made a quick decision. He beckoned a pair of workmen who on his instruction took the painting down. He hoped the cameras would not catch the tears in his eyes as Constable's 'Hay Wain' went to its end.

Katie Mallett

NO. 3140: CONFESSIONAL

You are invited to submit a poem in the style of a famous poet in which they make a surprising confession. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by mid-day on 11 March.

Crossword

2446:

Spring time

by Doc

Each clue defines the full solution to which the letter-count refers. However, the cryptic wordplay leads to the grid entry, after one letter has been omitted each time it appears in the full solution. The omitted letters in clue order reveal a relevant timely phrase which solvers should include with their entry.

Across

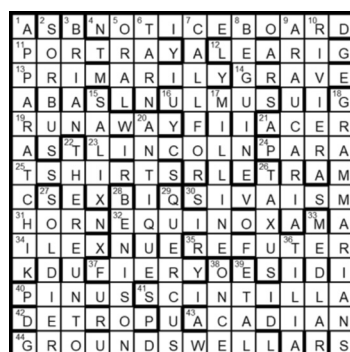
- 1 Helped top-class lad (8)
- 4 150 sects accepting alternative maths aids (11)
- 10 Any reply sorted about church theft? (12, two words)
- 11 Eccentric fellow returns the French novel (7)
- 12 Sit astride stump (8)
- 14 Tooth-shaped, partly bent, oily (7)
- 15 Hired jeans regularly provide fabric (6)
- 16 Holes in English slab overturned (7)
- 22 Rock from joiner and his lad in Kent? (9)
- 23 Thou arranges — in extra brief? (8)
- 24 Dash under in France (5)
- 25 Silly laughs at firearms regularly (7)
- 27 He plays Risk battling Margaret endlessly (8)
- 29 Drummer for The Who and relatives having a moment working (9, two words)
- 32 SW choirs reviewed (7)
- 34 Apply pressure to broken hinge (7)
- 35 Cockney's warmer cafe (6)
- 36 Mail guy ordered on isle (8)
- 37 Hang around holding Catholic, making a bow (7)
- 38 In the depths of Galway Wood, wandering (12, four words)
- 39 The French island supports cubs (11, two words)
- 40 Stick with novelist cycling (6)

Down

- 1 Writers' lists damaged bard's desks (12, two words)
- 2 Wild sidetracked, even (6)
- 3 Community Heath brought about (8)
- 4 Families having rupees for make-up removers (9)
- 5 Leo going round a street twice, is an upholder of a belief (11, two words)
- 6 Count is rioting — causing these? (8)
- 7 Out East, look after artist on plain (6)
- 8 Pertinent associations affecting eleven RCs (10)
- 9 Sidesmen's empty warning (5)
- 13 Antihistamine mixed in talc. Right! (8)
- 15 Greedy folk consuming the same snacks (7, hyphenated)
- 17 Effects of regular use affected arena trade (11, three words)
- 18 Orderly takes time for make up (8)
- 19 Points to Harry's son holding, say, software program (12, two words)
- 20 No measure on trap one — false (11, three words)
- 21 Near relative once from European county (7)
- 26 Opinion poll with different middle note for ancient era (8, two words)
- 28 Star player skates round running tracks (8)
- 30 An artist I upset with US phone number (8, two words)
- 31 Branch of a vein from half live rubber plant (6)
- 33 Rinse out deposit (6)
- 34 Mean little devil left (5)

Name

Address



SOLUTION TO 2443: MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Each unclued light is a genus name of a TREE (i.e. 'middle of the road' = (s)TREE(t)). Cornus was also allowed at 2 Down.

First prize John Honey, Surbiton

Runners-up Ben Stephenson, London SW12;
D. Page, Orpington

No sacred cows

How far should we go to defend free speech?

Toby Young

This week sees the official launch of the Free Speech Union — an organisation that stands up for the speech rights of its members. It's my baby, but a number of people have come on board as directors, including Douglas Murray and Professor Nigel Biggar. I've also had a lot of help behind the scenes from people who got in touch after reading about it in this column. I was on the *Today* programme on Monday to talk about it and have done a number of interviews since. By the time you read this, I'll be recovering from the launch party, scheduled for Wednesday night.

So far, it's going pretty well. About 1,500 people have contacted me wanting to join since I first started talking about it in August and I've managed to persuade some fantastic people to be on the various advisory councils, including Sir Patrick Garland, a former High Court judge; the historians David Starkey and Andrew Roberts; the satirist Andrew Doyle; *The Spectator's* columnist Lionel Shriver; a number of journalists-cum-intellectuals, such as Claire Fox, Matt Ridley and David Goodhart; and 17 academics, including a professor of history at Harvard, the behavioural geneticist Robert Plomin and the feminist historian Zoe Strimpel. Now that the website is live (www.freespeechunion.org), people are signing up at the rate of one every five minutes.



What if the person genuinely does possess toxic views? Would we come to their defence?

There's been some push-back, of course. There was a puerile attack in the *Guardian* in which a columnist pointed out that our name for the basic level of protection extended to all members — 'Sword and Shield' — was suspiciously similar to a far-right German festival called 'Shield and Sword'. As 'guilt by association' goes, that's almost as feeble as the attack launched on Yorkshire Tea earlier this week because Rishi Sunak, the new Chancellor, posed next to a sack of its teabags. After an army of left-wing trolls called for a boycott, the manufacturers had to issue a statement making clear it had nothing to do with the photograph and hadn't been told in advance of Sunak's plans.

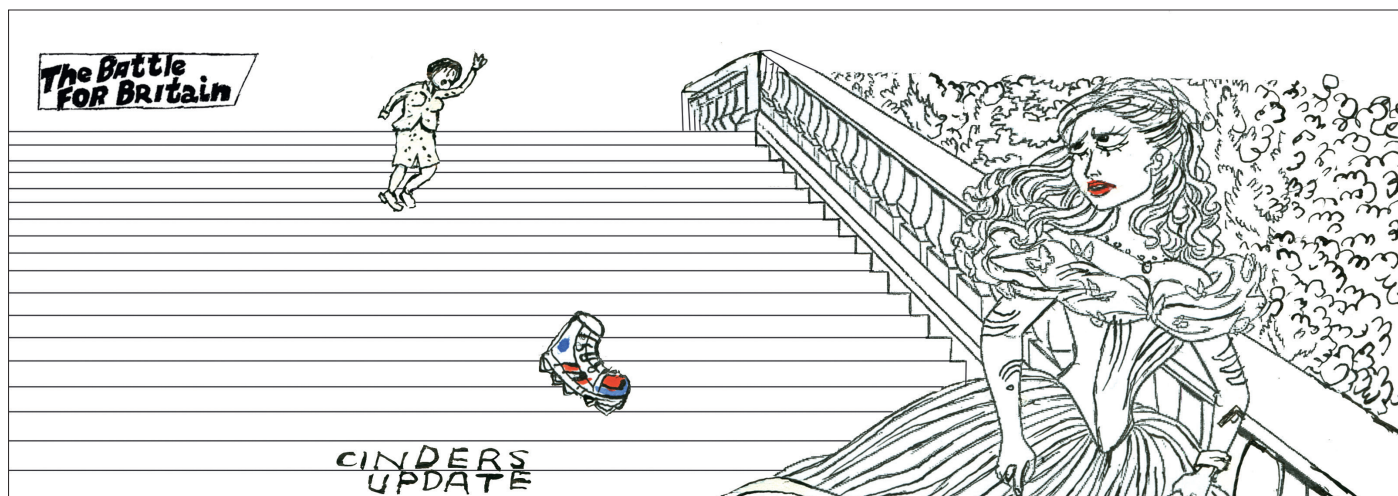
The discussion on the *Today* programme was more elevated, thank God. The presenter Justin Webb set out the standard rationale for restricting free speech: for too long, the voices of straight white men have been allowed to drown out those of marginalised groups and by reining in people like me you're actually making it easier for others to participate in the public conversation. In other words, the people who insist on 'safe spaces' and 'trigger warnings' aren't opposed to free speech; they're just helping to create a level playing field in which everyone feels able to speak.

In response, I quoted Ira Glasser, the legendary former head of the American Civil Liberties Union, who said in a recent interview that it's a mistake to think the historical beneficiaries of free speech have been bigots and patriarchs. On the contrary, without the protection of the First Amendment, civil rights leaders wouldn't have been able to organise protest marches in the 1960s. Defending free speech is in everyone's political interest, he pointed out, and the left would do well to remember that.

A better line of attack is that it's hard to protect people being mobbed on social media, something we're hoping to do, without appearing to be against free speech. After all, when thousands of Twitter users join a pile-on against someone accused of saying something offensive — which happened to Roger Scruton last year — aren't they just exercising their speech rights? OK, in Roger's case his words were taken out of context and deliberately twisted to cast him in a bad light. But what if the person in question genuinely does possess toxic views? Would the Free Speech Union come to their defence? If the answer's 'no', the next question is: well, where do you draw the line? The temptation is to say, 'Provided they stay within the law, we'll defend them', but that feels like a cop-out. In some cases, what looks like a dog-pile will just be an example of vigorous democratic debate.

Clearly, when it comes to defending people from being harassed or worse by the public authorities for exercising their legal right to free speech, we'll go to bat for them. But if our members are attacked in the media — social or mainstream — we'll have to use our judgment. One thing I know: if someone is the victim of a witch hunt, we'll try to make sure they're given a chance to defend themselves and not just presumed to be guilty and tossed to the wolves.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport

Tyson Fury, the colossusweight star

Roger Alton

Thankfully, Tyson Fury is as good at boxing as he is terrible at singing. But he really should pick on someone his own size: he's a colossal 6ft 9in tall and 19st 7lb in weight. And he can punch. And he can weave. And he can feint and dip. And he is unbelievably fast. A three-stone advantage is just not on when the bigger man can fight.

Quite often exceptionally big men can't though. The Russian Nikolai Valuev, now a politician, was known as the Beast from the East when he boxed. He was 7ft tall and weighed more than 23st, the tallest and heaviest world boxing champion there has ever been, but he wasn't much cop. Primo Carnera was much the same: 6ft 7in and 19st, but pretty moderate.

But Fury is big and, boy, can he fight too, and the bout in Las Vegas was akin to a middleweight taking on a lightweight. Maybe there should be a new category for fighters over 19st: colossusweight, titanicweight? And boxing fans eager for an all-British reunification fight with Anthony



He can punch. And he can weave. And he can feint and dip. And he is fast

Joshua should be careful what they wish for. I doubt even AJ will relish stepping through the ropes for that.

A lot of people aren't so keen on Fury. He has had issues with booze and recreational drugs as well as mental illness. He failed a drugs test (he says his high level of testosterone was due to eating uncastrated wild boar), and has battled with obesity and depression. He has also made some choice remarks about homosexuality. And if you're not a fan, you might say he's been given a free pass because of his frankness about mental illness. I would say: give the guy a break. He's a heavyweight boxer from a travelling community who was brought up in a caravan and left school at some ungodly age. He's not a fellow of Balliol. Let bygones be bygones.

Before the world plunges into self-induced psychosis over VAR, we should just bear this in mind: first, the offside rule was introduced to stop goal-hanging, not to measure the amount some nostril hair was the wrong side of the line. And second, VAR was brought in to correct obvious howlers, not for forensic analysis of a move, leading, if at all possible, to the cancellation of a goal. After another weekend of VAR controversy chant, is it time to admit the system is horribly flawed and should be confined to Room 101?

But in the surprisingly good news about football department, what does Pep Guardiola think he's doing by guaranteeing total loyalty to Manchester City? It's hard to get one's head around it, but it restores a sliver of faith in the still beautiful if slightly tarnished game.

Meanwhile, in the typically bad news about football department, the fifth-round matches of the FA Cup will all be held midweek, with no replays: a further dismantling of the tradition that once established the world's oldest soccer competition as the most compelling in the sport. Stand by for the whole FA Cup to be held in a week in February in Dubai.

Everyone who likes sport will have a soft spot for BBC Radio 5 Live. But the station should look to its laurels. The feisty interloper Talksport picked up the blue-riband broadcasting gong at this week's sports journalism awards — and if I know the talented, hungry people who run Talksport, it won't stop there. It will be looking for more talent, and more rights to key sports events. It has already kicked *Test Match Special* to the kerb by bagging some plums on the overseas cricket circuit. The BBC has a rare knack for dropping some of its best talent — Cornelius Lysaght, anyone? — so prepare for Talksport to come aplundering. Seconds out...

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. I adore doing jigsaws and these days there's an added bonus — by posting my progress on Instagram I can share the happy glow it gives me knowing that I'm reducing toxic screen-time habits. Recently I begged to borrow a magnificent 1,000-piece puzzle from a friend — a vast winter scene by Pieter Bruegel. Setting to, I succumbed to the meditative calm and satisfaction of puzzling. After two weeks of hard graft neglecting pretty much all domestic duties, the puzzle was finished, but with a piece missing! This maddening

lost piece is an obscure blob of twiggly branch that nobody could love, but its absence mocks all my efforts. I cannot be sure it was I who lost it. Replacing the whole puzzle is going to cost more than £100 and I feel fairly confident I could return the puzzle to its owner knowing they'll never attempt it again being such a monster commitment. What should I do? — L.O.G., Petersfield, Hants

A. Jigsaw puzzling is the new low-tech virtue-signalling hobby. But you will be held responsible if the next person your friend lends it to is driven mad by being unable to find the one missing piece. Puzzlemakers Wentworth recommend the Jigsaw Doctor (www.jigsawdoctor.com), who can recreate the missing piece. His prices start at £10.99.

Q. My NHS dentist recently had to extract a large gold filling which had been there for many years. She replaced it with a white crown. I did hear a substantial clunk when the gold filling was dropped into the metal tray yet it was not offered to me to take away and I didn't like to ask as it seemed rather a disgusting idea. Also I felt grateful to have an NHS dentist who charged a fraction of what the same thing would have cost in Harley Street. However, I wondered — what is the dental etiquette regarding the ownership of gold fillings? — Name and address withheld

A. Dentists collect gold fillings and sell them as a job lot — which is obviously easier for a dentist to do than a non-professional trying to hawk a tiny nugget. However, the filling legally belonged to you

and technically it should have been offered to you.

Q. A friend presented me with a coffee machine on my 21st birthday. I was thrilled but on closer inspection I realised that it uses non-recyclable coffee pods, which, given my caffeine habit, would produce an ungodly volume of landfill. Can I return the gift on moral grounds? — L.B., London SW6

A. You are right to worry about the footprint left by your vices, but there would be a degree of sanctimony in returning the gift that would likely threaten your friendship. One can buy compostable capsules for all major brands of machine from companies such as Halo Coffee, so you needn't choose between the planet and your friendship.

Food

What waste!

Tanya Gold



Ugly Butterfly is a zero-waste restaurant and champagne bar on the King's Road, Chelsea. The 'champagne bar' addition is so awful as to be pantomime villainous — I think of zero-waste diamonds and zero-waste wars — but perhaps they need this kind of duplicity to seduce the punters, who move so slowly towards wisdom? 'Zero-waste' isn't an advertising catchphrase designed for Chelsea and its constituent tractors and immaculate blondes, unless they are very drunk. It is from Adam Handling, who has six venues, including the Frog in Hoxton and the sustainable deli Bean & Wheat in Old Street.

Ugly Butterfly is pretty, because anything ugly in Chelsea would shrivel through lack of identification. There are white brick walls with cradled wine bottles crawling up them like babies; pale wooden floors; rugs from old coffee sacks; single flowers in glasses; cushions decorated with butterflies; paintings of bombs decorated with flowers; and spindly old-fashioned café furniture, which is called 'upcycled'. I

There is something fierce about this food, as if it exists to seduce, but I like angry food

do not know why people do not say 'second-hand furniture' any more. Perhaps there is no virtue to buying second-hand furniture, and if you are not buying something new, there must be an apology crow-barred on to that decision, with spin. It is performative dining, as at the ludicrous Spring at Somerset House, which has an entire 'surplus produce' menu called Scratch. (Pre-theatre only; the hour of the dead.)

Handling says he wanted to 'prove zero-waste food can be beautiful' and the menu opens with a small manifesto called: Why Waste Waste? 'This menu,' it says, 'is built on the foundations of showcasing food waste, utilising the by-products and leftovers of Adam Handling Chelsea Restaurant on Sloane Street.'

So, for readers new to sustainability, it is not food from bins. Handling is right: it is beautiful. I haven't eaten at the Sloane Street restaurant so I cannot say, but I like to imagine that Handling has created something particularly lovely to prove his point.

The Skins, Skins and More Skins is handsome but it felt like a gargan-

tuan chicken scratching, and that is not a necessary thing, for me at least. I am slightly afraid I would leave a tooth in it; and what would Handling do with that? Upcycle it into a light switch? The leftover cheeseboard doughnuts were glorious though; the 'Feast Fairly' black pudding scotch egg — from an egg considered too small for a Chelsea breakfast egg — is likewise marvellous.

There is something fierce about this food, as if it exists to seduce, but I have always liked angry food. The oxtail and cheese toastie is salty, doughty, spoiling for a fight. The beef and bone marrow cottage pie with meat from Wagyu beef shin is small, intensely flavoured and slightly overbaked, as it should be, with a hefty blob of potato I read, happily, as a rebuke. The chicken and sage agnolotti with chicken fat, meanwhile, is wondrous.

Ugly Butterfly only serves champagne — or water, which I am sorry does not come from a trough, but I once spent a weekend with Saxon reenactors, and slept on a sheepskin rug, and carried a bucket of water up a hill.

Handling says he is willing to operate Ugly Butterfly at a loss, so his restaurants can be sustainable. It is heartfelt, then, and from a very gifted chef. I am slightly worried that Ugly Butterfly is empty. Perhaps such marketing doesn't work in capital's western fashion row; perhaps he shouldn't tell anyone it's a zero-food waste restaurant; perhaps it could be a surprise for people so drunk on champagne that they will forget it is a zero-waste restaurant. Even so, you should try it.

Ugly Butterfly, 55 King's Rd, Chelsea, London SW3 4ND; tel: 020 7730 7161.



'I can't get on the housing ladder.'

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Elbow

Before the Covid-19 scare I never thought that one particular Spanish proverb would come in useful. It goes: 'Los ojos con los codo.' This hardly seems to make sense, 'Eyes with the elbows', but the great 19th-century traveller Richard Ford explains in his *Gatherings from Spain* that the sun's glare on the dusty land may inflame the eyes, which must never be rubbed with the hand, only with the elbow, lest ophthalmia and blindness set in. He also recommends blue gauze spectacles, which I must out.

Now, with the coming of the coronavirus, the public-spirited sneezer will use a pad



of paper tissues in her hand, or sneeze into the crook of her elbow, rather than into her hand, which might then infect Underground carriage poles or escalator handrails.

It is impossible to use the point of the elbow on the eyes; you can't reach. I mentioned the crook of the elbow, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* seems to limit the reference of *elbow* to the pointed, angular part. The elbow is literally the bend (bow)

of the ell (which gives us the obsolete measurement), though the Old English word had an *n* in it: *eln*. That word is related to Latin *ulna* (which we use technically for the bone beside the radius). What the inside angle of the elbow is called, who can say? My husband was useless when I asked him, going on about the antecubital fossa. Some call it the *elbow-pit*, but the *OED* is ignorant of this term.

Someone who hasn't a clue is often said not to know his arse from his elbow. Richard Ford doesn't give the acknowledged Spanish equivalent, but it is *confundir el culo con las*

témporas — can't tell his arse from his ember days. Ember days are more recondite than elbows, being quarterly fast days, to wit: the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following the first Sunday in Lent, Whitsunday, Holy Cross Day (14 September) and St Lucy's day (13 December). The origin of *ember* is most straightforwardly found in the Old English *ymbren* meaning 'revolution of time'. But scholars tell us that *ember* might after all be a corruption of Latin *tempora*.

Digging up reliable etymologies takes a lot of elbow grease. — Dot Wordsworth

THE SPECTATOR

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH/APRIL



WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH

BUDGET SPECIAL

Join Fraser Nelson, James Forsyth, Katy Balls and Rachel Woolf, as they discuss Chancellor Rishi Sunak's first Budget just hours after it's announced.



TUESDAY 24 MARCH

AN EVENING WITH PRUE LEITH

Join renowned chef Prue Leith as she chats about her career in food with her niece, pastry chef Peta Leith, and her nephew Sam Leith.



THURSDAY 26 MARCH

AN EVENING WITH RORY SUTHERLAND

Join Rory Sutherland, advertising guru and *The Spectator's* Wiki Man, to discuss why the best ideas aren't always the ones that make sense.

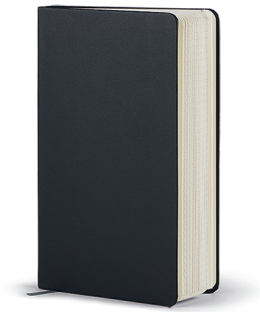


THURSDAY 2 APRIL

AN EVENING WITH SADIQ KHAN

Join Fraser Nelson as he talks to London Mayor Sadiq Khan about his plans for London after Brexit and the future of the Labour party.

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