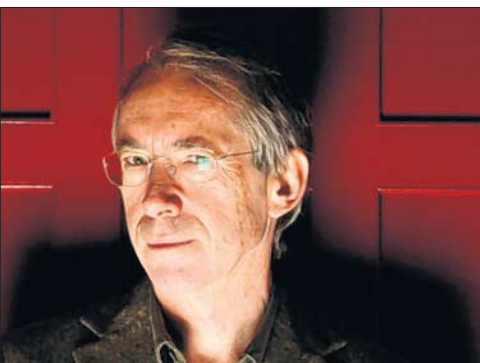


Times House, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1BS
Telephone: 020 7782 5000
Fax: 020 7782 4966
letters@the-tls.co.uk

THIS WEEK

Occasionally in the rear window of a showroom-bright 4x4 can be seen a car sticker carrying the acronym SKINS, the brazen admission that the owner has been Spending the Kids' Inheritance for his or her own selfish ends. Such is the theme of one of Britain's more ambitious election-season books, *The Pinch*, by the would-be future Tory minister David Willetts, who argues that the whole of our baby-boomer generation has been skinning and pinching for years, taking advantage not only of our predecessors who fought in the world wars but also of our children, whom we are condemning to joblessness, punitive taxation and impossibly high house prices. Readers and voters who feel instinctively sceptical of this charge will find both ammunition and satisfaction in the review this week by Tim Congdon, an economist and "wise man" of previous Conservative administrations who is unimpressed by this self-flagellating analysis from his successors.



Generational anxiety is the theme too of *Solar*, the new novel by Ian McEwan (above). Its hero is a Nobel Prizewinning pioneer of renewable energy whose personal life has become a distorted reflection of his ideals. McEwan's Michael Beard represents not only science, says M. John Harrison, but also over-consumption and the constitutional incapability of human beings to keep their habitat in order. Born in 1947, into post-war British ideals of infant beauty which reside, as the author sees them, "chiefly in fat, in Churchillian multiple chins, in dreams of an end to rationing and of the reign of plenty to come", Beard has become, by 2009, a political cartoon. The great glory of solar power is that it will save humanity from itself "without – and here's the important part – requiring any change of habit".

In our coming British election campaign, if any politicians claim to "have a dream" we will know that they are both lying and absolutely desperate. But in ancient times, as Emily Gowers argues, the users of the phrase may have been wholly honest. A message to a sleeper from an absent figure of authority was a great vote of confidence.

PS

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