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# THE SPECTATOR

## Taking over

Isabel Hardman on the nightmare awaiting the new prime minister



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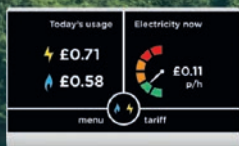
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## Playing chicken

Why is it that free trade, which almost everyone agrees is good when conducted with other European countries, suddenly becomes something to be feared when it is proposed with the United States? What is it about American chicken which means that Britons who eat it happily enough when they are on holiday are supposed to fear it when it is imported? And if Americans can offer world-class, well-priced medical services to Britain through the National Health Service, how is that a threat to our social fabric?

On his state visit to Britain this week, President Donald Trump reiterated his desire to do a 'comprehensive' trade deal with Britain. Given that we are leaving the EU in order to make our own way in the world, this is a prospect that ought to be welcomed. When Trump was asked about the NHS, he said simply that 'everything will be on the table' — to cries of horror from a lot of Tory ministers (and leadership candidates) who should know better. It seems to have sent 'global Britain' Tories into a protectionist spasm. Jeremy Hunt, Matt Hancock and Sam Gyimah were furiously declaring that under no circumstances would our health service be opened up to US firms.

When Tony Blair was prime minister, he spent a good deal of time thinking of ways to lure US health giants to come to Britain and open treatment centres to help the NHS clear its waiting lists for knee operations and hip replacements. Under a supposedly Tory government, these same companies are treated not as welcome investors but as a threat. This fits a trend. Two years ago, Michael Gove shot down the possibility of allowing chicken that has been washed in chlorine (a common practice in the US poultry industry) on to the UK market. Were US officials to try to make chicken a condition

of any trade deal, Gove said that they could 'kiss goodbye' to a trade deal with Britain.

No trade negotiation is going to result in the NHS being dismantled. Trump was trying to be friendly: when questioned about whether the NHS would be on the table, he thought the implication was that Brits wanted it to be there so he said yes. As so often, he was not quite sure what he was

*UK consumers ingest more chlorine drinking water than they ever would by eating American chicken*

saying. Theresa May had to explain to him what NHS stood for, and once he realised the sensitivity he said that America did not seek to pull apart any British public service.

But NHS care is not provided by the state alone. Today, one in every 14 NHS treatments is carried out by private-sector hospitals and clinics. Sceptics might point to the exorbitant price of medicine in the US, but nobody is suggesting we import the whole flawed American healthcare system.

On top of the direct treatments carried out in the private sector, the NHS spends £15 billion a year buying drugs, and billions more buying other equipment and services. It rents clinics and surgeries from the private sector. Some of that money is spent with US firms. There is nothing sinister about the US healthcare sector — parts of which are world-beating and more innovative than the NHS — wanting to access these markets on the same footing as European companies. It is the very principle of free trade.

For years, US companies have been helping to strengthen the NHS. United-Health Group, one of the biggest companies in America, offers services such as medication management and the negotiating of contracts to the NHS. United's for-

mer employee Simon Stevens is now chief executive of the NHS. Kaiser Permanente, a not-for-profit healthcare group based in California, has for years been held up by reform-minded doctors as a model for the NHS. But the Tories are too nervous of criticism to explore the possibilities.

As for chlorinated chicken, the supposed health risks have long since been exposed as a scare story. UK consumers ingest far more chlorine drinking water than they ever would by eating American chicken: indeed, UK salads are routinely chlorine-washed, yet we do not hear Gove talking about them. In fact, once we are out of the EU, lifting the ban on chlorine-washed chicken is something we should consider doing even without a trade deal with the US. On this issue, and many others, it will soon be time to think for ourselves again.

Conservative ministers have been far too quick to appease protectionists whose agenda is to keep US competition out of their cosy European markets. With that attitude, we are not going to get very far towards a trade deal with the US — or with any other country, for that matter. Trade negotiations require concessions. This depends on the government being prepared to look at the bigger picture and accept that, overall, free trade is a benefit. The protectionist finds it easy to forget that free trade is an exchange, a form of mutual co-operation that can only take place when each side profits.

In a few weeks' time, Britain will have a new prime minister, charged with delivering the benefits that come from decoupling our economy from the EU. It's often said that it would be bad for the Tories to fail to deliver Brexit. It would be worse for them to achieve Brexit only to discover that, due to a lack of imagination and courage, they do not know what to do with it.





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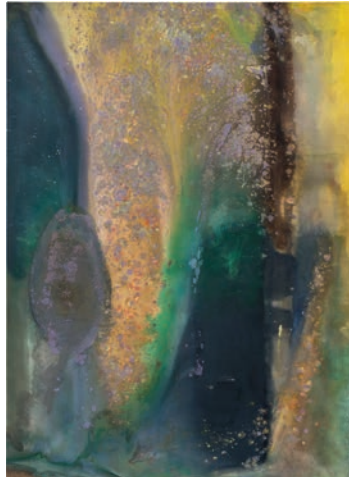
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I long to travel back in time, just for one early summer's day – a rich, titled lady with a barouche, servants and going into dinner two by two, on the arm of a prince.  
**Susan Hill, p11**

The British like calling Trump a Wotsit. The tragedy is: Trump doesn't know what a Wotsit is. He calls them Cheetos.  
**Tanya Gold, p16**

Jan Morris, who lives in Wales, has tremendous contempt for sheep, but writes wonderfully about cats.  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Susan Hill**, whose novels include *The Woman in Black*, *The Bird of Night* and *The Albatross*, was awarded a CBE in 2012 for services to literature. Her diary is on p11.

**Cassandra Coburn** is a former deputy editor of the *Lancet* and a post-doctoral researcher in genetics at University College London. She assesses proton therapy as a cancer treatment on p24.

**Tom Holland**, who discusses western views of Muhammad on p32, will publish *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* this autumn.

**John Burnside**, who reviews the new James Ellroy on p37, is a poet, novelist and memoirist whose recent work includes *Still Life With Feeding Snake* and *Ashland & Vine*.

**Carolyn Larrington** is Professor of English Literature at St John's College, Oxford and author of a new translation of *The Poetic Edda*. She reviews a history of Europe through its epics on p40.



# PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



## Home

President Donald Trump of the United States made a state visit to the United Kingdom, avoiding protesters by arriving at Buckingham Palace by helicopter. He brought quite a few of his family, visited Westminster Abbey and was given halibut and lamb at a state banquet. Proposing a toast, the Queen said: 'After the shared sacrifices of the second world war, Britain and the United States worked with other allies to build an assembly of international institutions to ensure that the horrors of conflict would never be repeated.' Trump joined the Queen in ceremonies to commemorate D-Day. Earlier, Trump had swapped insults with Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, and, asked by the *Sun* about the prospect of Boris Johnson becoming prime minister, had replied: 'I think he would be excellent.' To Theresa May, the Prime Minister, Trump said: 'I think we will have a very, very substantial trade deal.' Although she was resigning as party leader on 7 June, he added: 'Stick around. Let's do this deal.' He arranged to meet Nigel Farage, the leader of the Brexit party, but declined to meet Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader, who had boycotted the banquet. Larry, the Downing Street cat, found a refuge between the rear wheels of the Beast, the President's bulletproof Cadillac.

In one day, 74 migrants were intercepted as they crossed the English Channel on eight boats. Peter Willsman, a member of Labour's National Executive Committee, was suspended from the party after a

recording was published of him saying to a journalist: 'This is off the record. It's almost certain who is behind all this anti-Semitism against Jeremy [Corbyn]. Almost certainly it's the Israeli embassy.' Killdren, a band booked for Glastonbury this month, was criticised by some for the lyrics of its song 'Kill Tory Scum': 'Even if it's your dad or your mum, kill Tory scum.'

After the number of candidates for the leadership of the Conservative party had reached 13, James Cleverly and Kit Malthouse withdrew from the contest. Six of Change UK's 11 MPs left to sit as independents, and Anna Soubry became the leader of the rump. Police said that they were pursuing 'violent dissident republicans' after a bomb was left under the car of an off-duty officer at a Belfast golf club.

Neil Woodford, a fund manager, suspended trading in his largest fund before Kent County Council could withdraw £263 million. Liverpool won the Champions League by beating Tottenham 2-0 in Madrid. Cases of gonorrhoea in England rose by 26 per cent between 2017 and 2018 to 56,259, the most since 1978.

## Abroad

A 39-year-old Iranian imam was sentenced in France to two years' jail for helping migrants to cross the English Channel in inflatable boats, on the sale of which he received a commission, according to the prosecution. Having signed a free trade deal with Mexico on 30 November,

President Trump imposed a 5 per cent tariff on imports, which would rise unless Mexico curbed illegal migration to the United States. Claudia Sheinbaum, the mayor of Mexico City, said that in schools from now on, 'Boys can wear skirts if they want and girls can wear trousers if they want'.

On the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Mike Pompeo, the American Secretary of State, called upon China to 'make a full, public accounting of those killed'. In response, a Chinese spokesman said: 'These lunatic ravings and babbling nonsense will only end up in the trash can of history.' A South Korean newspaper reported that Kim Hyok-chol, the envoy for US affairs appointed by Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea, had been shot by firing squad with four other officials after the failure of Kim's summit with President Trump in February. Twelve people were killed in a mass shooting at a government building in the state of Virginia; a suspect, DeWayne Craddock, shot dead by police, was said to be a disgruntled city employee.

At least 60 protesters were killed when troops opened fire in Khartoum. The Sudanese military cancelled an agreement to make a transition to civilian rule within three years and said that elections would be held within nine months. Eight climbers, led by the experienced British mountain guide Martin Moran, were missing after an avalanche on Nanda Devi in the Himalayas. A fissure opened on one side of the crater of Mount Etna, sending out lava that glowed red by night. CSH



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# DIARY

Susan Hill



Don't you just love garden centres? You have to be mad to go on a sunny Sunday morning in the full bedding-out season but all human life is there, enjoying the full English breakfast or even kippers. They sell everything — sofas, lamps, barbecues, waterfalls, bread, toys, meat, mountaineering gear. Oh, and plants and Growmore and those little windmill things. I went to buy extra geraniums and lobelia because it is a truth universally acknowledged that whenever you buy far more than you can possibly need for your pots, those pots expand when you turn your back. It was a gladiatorial clash of trolleys, and I trampled on several old ladies in fighting for the last ivy-leaved Brilliant Scarlet. I got it of course. I am an old hand.

Victorious, I enjoyed a pot of tea and a cheese scone, before checking out, as well as the garden stuff, a squeaky badger (for the dog), a massive sack of niger seed (goldfinches) a book about the planets (grand-daughter) a sun hat (self), some mint imperials and a birthday card. But you just wait until Christmas — that's when garden centres really come into their own, and not just for the fir trees. If you want outdoor blow-up Santas, 50 varieties of fairy light, flashing reindeer, candles smelling of fruitcake, gnomes or door wreaths made of flamingo pink feathers, look no further. I can NOT wait.

We now have swallows, swifts, flycatchers, chiffchaffs, great tits, finches and treecreepers. There was even a nightingale in the copse for one wonderful night. Every sparrow in Norfolk is nesting in our hedges or under the eaves, one has a wren, and I haven't even started on the heron and egret by the pond. But for the first time, we have no house martins. Friends in other parts of the country say the same. Why? They can't all have been blown off course. Maybe they'll come rushing in at the last minute and it will be non-stop\*. Friends in France have swallows that have returned for 20 years to nest on a beam in their sitting room, so the front door stays wide open from May to September, but *c'est la vie* in rural Quercy.

June is very frothy and royal, flowery frocks and hats and military parades, garden parties, picnics on country house lawns during the opera. The upper classes know how to put on a show and if it's always the same show, that is part of the point — the unvarying summer routine, set in stone since, oh, 1910 or thereabouts. It's fun to gawp at, though I wouldn't care for all that dressing up as one being gawped. But the Victorians and Edwardians did far more parading, strolling in the park in lace and bustles and morning suits, going to

Covent Garden to gawp at one another through lorgnettes. I sometimes long to travel back in time, just for one early summer's day — a rich, titled lady with a barouche, servants and going into dinner two by two, on the arm of a prince. Such daydreaming is not only harmless, it is positively therapeutic. Instead of today's fashionable meditation or stretching, fainting and writhing in coils, everyone should daydream delightfully. It's very productive for a writer, too.

What a horrible term 'dementia' is. It implies crazed insanity rather than memory loss. Can we not find a better one? Most people reading this will have been touched by it, closely or at a remove, as we have all been similarly affected by the cancers. Those are cruel enough, but, unlike dementia sufferers, cancer ones now often enjoy full recovery or a long remission. My mother never spoke the word aloud and when hers was diagnosed, nearly 50 years ago, she was told she had 'ulcers', and had surgery during which one kidney, a large section of bowel and bladder, plus uterus etc were removed. The surgeon told her she would get well (though he told me otherwise) and so she did, enjoying three years of excellent health, until a friend referred to her illness by name. Horrified, she absorbed the truth, then shrivelled and died in eight weeks. Never underestimate the power of words.

In 1988 two daughters, Hannah and Jessica, both 11, went to the first night of a play adapted by Hannah's father from a ghost story by Jessica's mother. We wanted them to be there as *The Woman in Black* was scheduled to run for only six weeks at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, my home town. The girls could have waited, actually. A London producer brought it to several West End theatres, before it landed at the Fortune and we dreamed of a six-month run. This week, we celebrated 30 years there. Stephen Mallatratt died far too young, 15 years ago, so I run on as torchbearer. It's been a remarkable 30 years. *En avant!*

\* *The house martins have come back.*

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# A fractured and crowded field

The remarkable thing about the Tory leadership election is how long it has been coming. When Theresa May blew the party's majority in the 2017 general election, few imagined that it would be two years before she quit as leader. What kept her in place was not a lack of Tory ruthlessness but a failure to agree on who should replace her.

A lack of consensus is the defining feature of this contest. No candidate is pulling ahead in the endorsements, and no one has the backing of most of the cabinet. Instead, the race is as fractured as it is crowded.

There are two sides to this election: full-on Brexit vs the cabinet. On the Brexit side, Boris Johnson is consolidating his position. He has the highest number of MPs backing him and is fighting this contest in propitious circumstances, as he is the Tories' most obvious answer to Nigel Farage and the Brexit party. He has also shown a discipline that Westminster doesn't normally associate with him. Rather than indulging in publicity stunts, he has kept working away on the MPs whose support he needs.

So far, Johnson has kept a low profile, eschewing media interviews. This has frustrated his rivals. They hope that two televised hustings will flush him out and create enough drama for the momentum to shift. But if he is 20 votes or more ahead of Dominic Raab in the opening round, he would be as certain as any candidate can be in such a crowded field of making it through to the final round. One of the cabinet candidates is even considering endorsing the former foreign secretary before he reaches the final two. Parties always overcorrect when picking a successor, and Boris the buccaneer is the opposite of May the vicar's daughter. As one of the ministers backing him puts it: 'We tried going for the safe choice and look what good that did us.'

On the cabinet side of the draw, the situation is more complicated. The order in which candidates are knocked out is going to be crucial. In the first round, Michael Gove needs to be in touching distance of Jeremy Hunt and far enough ahead of Matt Hancock that if Rory Stewart is knocked out, Stewart's support will go straight to him rather than Hancock. Gove also faces a delicate balancing act of appealing to those worried about no deal while also maintaining the Brexiteer support that he still has. Further complicating the picture, Home Secretary

Sajid Javid seems to be finally finding his mojo after a lacklustre start to the campaign.

Hunt's problem is securing the parliamentary backing he needs to make the final two without further damaging his chances in the members' round, if he even makes it that far. This explains his tortured position on whether no deal is suicidal or something that he's prepared to countenance. Opinion in the Tory parliamentary party, as in the country, is polarising on the issue, which makes Hunt's position particularly difficult.

I understand that the cabinet ministers most opposed to no deal have privately agreed to back either Hancock or Stewart in the first round. Some even argue that they should back Stewart because he is the can-

*Johnson's rivals hope that two televised hustings will flush him out and shift the momentum*

didate making a principled argument against leaving without a deal.

Everyone knows there is more than one round of voting. In the first round, many MPs will vote either to make a statement, or, in a surprisingly large number of cases, to help their friend. MPs don't want to see their close colleagues publicly humiliated.

Even before the voting begins, two features stand out. First, there has been more Brexit realism than expected. Candidates aren't proposing ripping up the whole withdrawal agreement. Instead, nearly everybody is talking about targeted changes to the backstop. Even Dominic Raab, widely regarded as the most hardline of the leading candidates, is only proposing a legally binding exchange of letters to give the UK an exit from the backstop.

If the new prime minister were to request



*'Oh no — this isn't Love Island, it's Gove Island...'*

a limited change to the backstop, that would be more challenging to the EU than a crude demand to rip up the whole deal. Despite Michel Barnier's insistence that the only deal available is the one negotiated by Theresa May, some members of the EU would feel nervous about slamming the door in the new prime minister's face. The EU won't abandon the Irish or humiliate Leo Varadkar, of course. There might, however, be more chance of constructive dialogue than expected.

The timings will be difficult, though. The beating that the Tories took at the European elections for delaying Brexit has given 31 October, the new Brexit date, an almost religious status within the party. Boris Johnson is warning that another failure to leave on time could be an extinction event for the party. The problem, however, is that the new prime minister will take over at the end of July, and the next EU Council won't be until 17 October. Even if a new prime minister succeeded in getting the EU to agree changes to the withdrawal agreement at this meeting, which would be impressively quick work, they would have only ten days to get the new deal through parliament and into UK law. This is not a realistic timetable.

The second feature is just how many candidates there are. It is easy to mock the number of people who are running, and it is a sign of how crowded the field is that special rules have been introduced to try to thin it out. But it is actually encouraging for the Tories for two reasons. First, competition drives up standards. Rory Stewart has, for example, made the other candidates better on social media. The second is that while the size of the field illustrates the fact that there is no perfect candidate, it also shows that there is talent in the Tory party. Theresa May has always been wary of ability. Even at the height of her powers she didn't appreciate that cabinet ministers' success was not threatening, rather it reflected well on her. Thankfully, the front runners in this Tory leadership race have a more generous attitude.

Whoever wins this contest will inherit a party in one of the worst states in its history. Nevertheless, the failings of Labour under Jeremy Corbyn mean that they may still have a chance of extending their stay in No. 10.

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# THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

My father Richard, who died last month aged 88, was a profoundly impractical man. He could not drive a car, swim, whistle, use a mobile phone or computer, or play any ball game apart from croquet. One of his most common remarks was (he could not pronounce his *this*), 'Vis wretched fing [a door handle, a light switch, a well-wrapped parcel] doesn't seem to work.' When younger, he would sometimes go out with an unsafe 1840s shotgun in search of rabbits or pigeons, but the only thing he ever actually shot was his little toe, falling down a bank. Although he was extremely clean, he did not, until he married, know how to wash his hair, and would go to a barber for the purpose. Twenty years ago, he lived briefly in our house in Islington. At breakfast once, he announced he would be out all morning because he had to go to the post office to buy some stamps: he knew only one post office in London — in Trafalgar Square — and was unaware that other shops sell stamps.

This impracticality amounted to a cast of mind. In his five years as a journalist on the *News Chronicle* in the late 1950s, he never claimed his expenses for taking contacts out to lunch, because he felt it unseemly. I remember him astounding stallholders in the souk in Marrakesh by saying, at the first price they named, 'Vat sounds very reasonable.' Although never rich, he started adult life with enough. He then got rid of it with persistence and skill — partly by not understanding the difference between capital and income, partly by thinking food must be bought at Fortnum & Mason, wine at Berry Bros and suits at Welsh and Jefferies, and partly by his unquenchable generosity to family, friends and charity. In his nursing home this year, we found him sitting up in bed with his cheque book, making vague signing movements with his right hand. 'Vere must be someone I can write a cheque to!' he cried piteously, worried that he hadn't been well enough to do so for several days. As he waited to go into theatre for the operation from which he never really recovered, he was busy making wishes for the charities he wished to help. He took so long



explaining the glories of Freedom from Torture and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (he was a lifelong, raging philo-Semite) that we feared he would run out of time to name the other beneficiaries of his by now tiny fortune.

In theory, my father might have seemed like a snob. His first recorded remark, aged two, on being shown a picture of 'Baby Jesus and his Mummy' was 'Where's his nanny?' He hated the words 'radio' and 'TV', so our listings magazine was renamed the 'Wireless Times'. He refused ever to roll up his shirtsleeves because it looked 'ravver *ouvrier*'. I asked him, when he was very ill, if he would like a clergyman to visit him, and he replied, 'I fink it would be nice to see ve Archbishop of Canterbury.' In practice, however, Richard treated all human beings the same, always assuming their good nature, their interest and their intelligence. One day, at our house in Sussex, he was helping a 15-year-old girl from the local comprehensive wash up lunch. 'And that,' I heard him say to her as I entered the kitchen, 'is why Lazio, alone of the papal states...' She was flattered by his uncondescending conversation. The hazard lay in the opposite direction — his uncritical reverence for learned persons. Once, after a weary hour with some whiskery professor of his acquaintance, I complained, 'Goodness, what a bore that man was.' 'What can you mean?' protested Daddy. 'He's a great expert on Danish political history.' Ignorance did trouble him. At breakfast when taking my wife to York races (he loved the Turf), they watched the passing crowds. 'It's extraordinary to fink,' said he, 'that perhaps a third of vose people don't know ve date of ve treaty of Westphalia.'

My unworldly father considered himself a failure. He devoted himself to the political party — the Liberals, now the Liberal Democrats — for whom failure is, with a few intermissions, a way of life. He always stood for parliamentary seats he could not win, and I never saw him try to advance his own interest in anything, except perhaps in seeking out good meals. He and my mother lived apart after about 25 years (though remaining married and fond of one another). His lack of the normal acquisitive imperatives which keep the show on the road was maddening for her. In retirement, he was happier than since his Cambridge undergraduate days, because, bolstered by a European parliament pension which even he could not exhaust, he could be benevolent full-time, whether it was taking members of his wider family (a pool of about 35 people) on foreign holidays or campaigning tirelessly for causes he believed were right, such as Remain.

At his funeral in his village last week, it was touching to see how many people understood his truly liberal spirit. As Oliver Letwin said in his perceptive tribute, 'He was ... it has to be admitted, ill-suited to the age in which he lived. But the defect lay in the age, not in him.' At the wake afterwards, Felix, one of his grandchildren, spoke so well of the letter his grandfather had written to him when he (Felix) had transitioned from female to male. It began 'Darling Felix', and then added, 'I know darlings are normally women but my mother used it for all close family and I follow her example.' Felix added: 'Even in my most insecure moments, I would never have thought to take the word "darling" as any sort of invalidation of my gender, which only makes his obvious concern on this point more endearing.' At Christmas, my father always recited the toast: 'Here's to all those that we love, and here's to all them that love them that love those that love them that love those that love us.' I now understand that he took those words literally, in all their ramifications.

# The in-tray of horrors

Theresa May has left a hideous pile of unfinished business for her successor

ISABEL HARDMAN

‘Dear Chief Secretary, I’m afraid there is no money. Kind regards — and good luck!’ Liam Byrne will forever be haunted by the note he left on his desk for his successor in 2010. Both coalition parties made much of what was supposed to be a joke about the difficulties of keeping Whitehall spending in check. David Cameron waved the note around in his victorious 2015 election campaign. Byrne later said he was so embarrassed by his mistake that he considered throwing himself off a cliff.

There’s nothing funny about what Theresa May leaves on her desk for the next prime minister. Rather than just one pithy note, there’s a teetering, disorganised in-tray of decisions the Tory leader has been putting off. For three years, Britain has had a government that has been unable to govern, leaving what is perhaps the biggest pile-up of unfinished business ever created by a peacetime government.

Under May, a nuclear winter descended on UK policy-making. She seemed to think that the best way to tackle the ‘burning injustices’ she named on the steps of Downing Street in 2016 was to pour cold water not on the fire itself, but on any ideas her ministers came up with. At first, secretaries of state were impressed with the shift from chillaxed David Cameron, who didn’t understand the detail of the NHS reform his government was carrying out until it became an enormous political row. May was serious, asking for more information on every policy. Ministers liked this — until they realised she wasn’t really ensuring something was designed correctly. ‘She just wanted to prevaricate for as long as possible,’ says one. ‘Anything to avoid making a decision.’

All the unresolved problems have created opportunities for the leadership candidates. They’ve each picked an issue to grandstand about, hoping their suggested solution demonstrates what sort of Conservative they are. Take Jeremy Hunt. He’s said HS2 is worth pressing ahead with. This, he thinks, marks him out as someone who believes in the

power of the state to do good things for the country beyond London.

Dominic Raab is more worried about the £57 billion HS2 bill, and says he’d review the whole project — while cutting income tax by 1p a year for five years.

As Hunt tells this magazine, he is keen to copy some of Donald Trump’s ‘big business

stop-and-search reforms that she introduced as home secretary have gone too far, while Javid and Johnson want to spend more money on boosting police numbers. Esther McVey promises £3 billion, to be funded (she says) by halving the foreign aid budget. It’s also why so many of them are using the row about Huawei to say they could reverse May’s decision to let the Chinese tech giant build parts of the UK’s 5G network.

In fact, all those now contending for the leadership are far more likely to leave the injustices smouldering away than to solve them. Whoever becomes prime minister could end up swerving around all the biggest crises facing this country, just as May did.

Take social care. Politicians all offer the same pointless platitude about ‘taking the politics out’ of the issue, which is code in Westminster for trying to get as far away from an unpopular decision as possible. A worthy-sounding commission headed by an unelected boffin will spend several years examining the detail which everyone already knows from the past five failed consultations. Then the prime minister

can take a couple more years to read its ear-nest report about how to tax grannies or take away a hard-earned inheritance. And hey presto! There’s a convenient general election or change of leader to distract everyone before a decision is taken.

One of the boldest moments of May’s premiership was when she used her 2017 manifesto to promise proper funding for social care. Unfortunately, she messed up that pledge and caused a majority-crushing row about a ‘dementia tax’, and then was too scared to try again. A green paper has been sitting unpublished in the Department of Health since last autumn. One leadership contender complains that: ‘The problem with social care is that voters think it’s free at the moment and get really upset when we announce plans that involve them having to pay. So you can never ever win.’ Only Rory Stewart, who falls into the category of candi-



cuts in tax’. Sajid Javid wants to bring the top rate of income tax back down to 40p, while borrowing £100 billion for infrastructure projects, mainly in the north.

‘In another era, we’d be the party of low taxes and smaller state,’ says one of the leading contenders. ‘But the issue I’m hearing from colleagues is that the cuts have gone too far.’ Boris Johnson wants to ensure the per-pupil secondary school budget is at least £5,000, which would mean a big boost to most grammars. Hunt, the son of a Royal Navy admiral, suggests taking defence spending to American levels over ten years, which, if he is remotely serious, would mean almost trebling the cost today, the most expensive pledge made by anyone.

Such announcements are, above all, intended to show how different each contender is to May. That’s why all of them seem so interested in crime. Raab thinks the



date who can never ever win, has decided to make social care a key part of his campaign.

Or take energy policy. How will the government keep the lights on following the collapse of the Moorside nuclear power plant deal? What does it have to say about Hitachi suspending its construction of another nuclear station in Wylfa Newydd in Anglesey? For more than a decade, Tories have talked up the wonders of shale gas but they have not found a way past local opposition to fracking. So what's it to be? Will a Conservative prime minister opt for higher state involvement in energy, or might they invite in foreign investors, with all the associated security worries?

Then there's housing. Those writing policy for the main contenders accept that their candidates won't do anything that might upset Conservatives, such as promising to build large numbers of homes. Stewart says he'd build two million new homes within five years but doesn't say how he'd go about it.

*Decisions are needed to solve problems that have festered for years precisely because there are no simple options*

Raab would tweak planning permission and hope for the best. Civil servants have started organising for a planning bill in the autumn in the vain hope that a new administration might cement over more of England's green and pleasant land — though this is bound to cause a fight with the National Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Such fights are necessary. Decisions are needed to solve problems that have festered for years precisely because there are no simple or popular options. It would be all too easy to make the same excuses as May about Brexit taking all the bandwidth. But it's beginning to look as though Tories are developing a phobia of governing — and that voters are beginning to notice. The real question in this leadership contest isn't who has the balls to deliver Brexit, but who has the strength of character to sift through that scary in-tray.

#### SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Alex Morton and Hugh Pym on that nightmare in-tray.



# Could a recession be next?

The omens for the global economy are not good

ROSS CLARK

How can a new incumbent of No. 10 survive without a majority and with Brexit to solve? It defies the imagination. Yet if they do survive Brexit, against all odds, there could be an even bigger horror waiting around the corner: global recession.

For three years the economy has defied doom-laden predictions by aggrieved remainers. Suddenly, though, the economic news is looking ominous. In May, retail sales fell by 2.7 per cent compared with a year earlier. The manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), an indicator which runs a month ahead of Office for National Statistics data, plunged from 53.1 in April to 49.4 in May, where any figure below 50 denotes shrinking activity. It was inevitably blamed by many on Brexit, but the gathering downturn is global. In the eurozone, the PMI for manufacturing has been below 50 for four months — and in Germany it is down to 44.3. It isn't just Germany's industrial sector: the economy as a whole avoided recession in the last three months of 2018 by the skin of its teeth. Italy was not so lucky, although it did succeed in clambering out of recession — just — in the first quarter of 2019.

Last month, manufacturing moved into contraction territory in Japan and South Korea, too. Emerging economies have been stuttering. And now comes Trump's trade war. Trade wars, the President claimed on taking office, are good and easy to win. But perhaps not good and easy enough. The imposition by the US of punitive tariffs on nearly all Chinese goods has unnerved markets, which had so far remained robust. The effect on world trade is beginning to show. In April, the global trade index published by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis showed its first year-on-year fall since the 2008/09 crisis — although it did rebound last month to annual growth of 0.5 per cent. It is a measure on which a British PM needs to keep a very close eye.

There is still no inevitability about a recession, yet they have a habit of creeping up on us every few years with little warning. We have now had what is beginning to look like a remarkably long

period without one. But a recession now would be politically devastating. For the moment, the word 'deficit' has all-but disappeared from political debate. Last year, the government borrowed £23.5 billion — down from £153 billion in 2009/10. In terms of percentage of GDP, the deficit has fallen from an 9.9 per cent to an innocuous-sounding 1.2 per cent. Yet after years of economic growth, public spending ought to be in surplus. Gordon Brown showed how devastating the consequences are if you enter a recession with a deficit: within three years the extra demand on the public purse through rising unemployment and reduced tax receipts sent the deficit soaring from £38 billion to £153 billion. As Nigel Lawson discovered, running even a modest surplus is no guarantee of avoiding fiscal

*The next chancellor could find himself with a ballooning deficit and no political authority to contain it*

disaster — the recession of the early 1990s reversed a surplus equivalent to 1.7 per cent of GDP to a deficit of 5.1 per cent of GDP in three years.

We have just been through a decade of what the Conservatives' opponents have damned as 'austerity' — a term which Philip Hammond has unwisely adopted himself. How will a future Conservative chancellor make the case for restraint in public spending when his predecessor has sanctioned the idea that balancing the state's books amounts to a kind of monkish denial? The next chancellor (Hammond surely cannot keep his job after threatening to bring the government down in the event of a no-deal Brexit) could find himself with a ballooning deficit and no political authority to act to contain it.

It has become commonplace over the past fortnight to claim that Theresa May is leaving office with no discernible legacy. It is also unfair. The lowest unemployment rate in 45 years is surely an achievement worth shouting about. Yet for unemployment to carry on falling requires the economy to carry on growing, and that is far from guaranteed.

# Children of the revolution

When did protest become so puerile?

TANYA GOLD

As the left sinks into psychosis, what remains? The answer is sugar, profanity, snacks and toys. Protest now resembles Clown Town, a dystopic toddler play barn near Finchley Central.

To mark the American President's trip to London this week, the Donald-Trump-in-a-nappy balloon rose again. There was also a Donald Trump robot. It sat on a toilet in Trafalgar Square and farted. 'The fart we couldn't get from him,' said its creator, Dom Lesson, 'so we had to use a generic fart'. Meanwhile, a man mowed a penis shape into a lawn to protest against climate change. He was hoping that Trump might see it from his aeroplane.

The fashion, when faced with a politician you despise, is to attack them with milkshake. During the elections in May, milkshakes were thrown at Tommy Robinson in Warrington (strawberry) and Bury (also strawberry), and at Nigel Farage in Newcastle (banana and salted caramel). On Tuesday, a milkshake was thrown at a Trump supporter, as a woman screamed 'Nazi!' at him.

Others have progressed to solid foods. Remain campaigners buy fairy cakes that say 'Brexit Justice'. Leavers bake their own.

Why? Is it an inversion of a bread riot and so a reminder that things could be worse? Snack-themed insults follow Donald Trump everywhere. At the anti-Trump protests last year, I saw banners that said: GO HOME WOTSITFACE, WOTSHITLER AND WOTSIT HITLER. Many have returned this year. NAZI WOTSIT was actually spelt out in Wotsits. 'I think people need to be reminded of history,' the owner of the WOTSIT HITLER sign told me. 'That is why I use that name.' She was very grave, but I wanted to laugh and ask: if people had only stood outside the Reichstag in 1933 holding signs that said SHITLER made of pretzels, might the outcome have been different? But British leftists like calling Trump a Wotsit because he is orange-coloured like a Wotsit, and it is a class-based taunt of the kind that they depend on. The tragedy is: Trump doesn't know what a Wotsit is. He calls them Cheetos. There is also a popular Jaffa Cake-themed insult: BUGGER OFF YOU NAZI JAFFA CAKE.

Much of the protest is toilet-themed,



from the wreckage of the Dennis the Menace fan club. WELCOME TO LONDON, I PISSED ON YOUR BED. Surely that is a lie? TINY HANDS, HUGE ASSHOLE. TRUMP YOUR NAME MEANS FART. DONALD TRUMP BIG POO POO. There was, inevitably, a man selling Donald Trump toilet paper from a shopping trolley last year, and the toilet paper returned this week, with a hefty mark-up, which I estimate at 600 per cent. Oh, Capital! 'If you're going for a dump,' he said, 'don't forget your Trump. Wouldn't it be funny if we could wipe

*The infantilism of the rage directed at Trump and Farage and Robinson empowers them*

Donald Trump's face on our bum?' Funny, yes, slightly. Meaningful, no. Toilets are not polling booths. They just feel like them.

Supporters say: it's performance art without art, it's circus without elephants, it's satire. Britain has a long tradition of robust satire. 'Our balloon is part of a proud history of political satire in the UK,' says Anna Vickerstaff, who helped raise the Trump baby blimp. Even people I sometimes agree with say it's legitimate to throw milkshakes at people if they are unpleasant, and it's true that it's hard to look at Tommy Robinson decorated as an angry creme egg without laughing. But I fret that I begin with laughing at the politician and end up laughing at

the politics themselves. I thought Nigel Farage looked rather serious with banana and salted caramel milk dripping down his face. At last there was a reason for his previously inexplicable grievances.

'If you can't fight something with humour, how can you fight it?' said Matt Bonner of Trump's Babysitters, who designed giant Trump in a nappy. With debate of course; but that is less fun. 'Humour is my weapon,' said the creator of the Trump robot on a toilet. But you can't campaign with humour, because the only people who will laugh are the people who agree with you. That is the psychology of comedy. I think, rather, that the infantilism of the rage directed at Trump and Farage and Robinson empowers them. They do not instigate this rage. They conduct it, and the more rage there is, the better for them. But I am a liberal with my talk of rational debate and polling booths. I can die under a rock.

Food protest is ancient, it is true. Someone once tried to hit the Emperor Vespasian with a turnip. In 1958, in Greece, so many politicians were attacked with yogurt that a law was passed to ban it. The Russian consulate in Odessa was hung with noodles in 2014 to protest about Russian interference in the Crimea.

Julia Gillard, the former prime minister of Australia, was pelted with sandwiches by teenage boys in 2013. They sought to persuade her to return to the kitchen to make sandwiches, and in doing so they lost all their sandwiches. There is also a group called Al-Pieda who seem to exist to throw pies at the American pundit Ann Coulter. Yet she grows in strength. It is as if she eats them.

I think the act of food-tossing itself exposes its own weakness; in that sense it is art, a metaphor for itself. A milkshake is not a ballot paper. It is mere succour for infants. What makes people look more foolish than reaching for power while covered in milkshake? Trying to stop them with milkshake.

At the anti-Trump protest in London last year, one banner said: THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE. I paused at it, because this isn't what democracy looks like. Milkshakes, Wotsits, Jaffa Cakes and farts? Quite the opposite. This is what losing looks like.



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# How to save the Tory party



How do you feel about the standard of political debate in this country? I ask this question at the very moment two blimps are flying over London. The first attempts to depict President Donald Trump as a giant baby in a nappy and is the property of people who do not like Donald Trump; the other attempts to depict the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, as a kind of transvestite dwarf and is the property of people who do not like Sadiq Khan. Both groups habitually call each other fascists, doing a passable impression of Harry Enfield's Kevin the Teenager. Both groups, I would venture, are irredeemable narcissists with the collective IQ of a block of Cathedral City cheddar cheese. And yet both groups are also very much of their time, with their respective resorts to infantile insult simply because they disagree with the opinions of Trump or the hapless Khan.

Actually, the first impulse of the anti-Trump demonstrators, including Magic Grandpa himself, was to try to stop the US President from coming, to ban him from speaking because they don't like his views. That's very au courant, of course. Last week a livid little leftie quack called Alan Woodall, who describes himself as a 'doctor and a scientist', succeeded in his attempts to prevent the right-ish journalist Julia Hartley-Brewer from speaking at a conference he was to attend. He did that because he thinks he should be permanently insulated from views with which he disagrees.

I do not know the man, but my suspicion is that he is a moron. Not because he and I would disagree about stuff, but because the determination to clamp your hands over your ears when you fear someone might be about to disagree with you is surely the recourse of an imbecile, a four-year-old child, a halfwit. And yet he is scarcely alone in that intellectually stunted mindset.

And then there is Change UK, which seemed, according to news reports, to dissolve exactly 54 minutes before I started writing this article. Set up when the hounds of spring were already on winter's traces, pretty much dead and gone before the roses are out. Six of its defectee MPs have now counter-defected, following the party's hilarious Euro election results and the fact

that everybody thinks they are ludicrous. I think it was Michael Foot who once said you can rat, but you can't re-rat.

Piqued by the behaviour of their own previous parties, Labour and Conservative, they set up a party that shared precisely the values and policies of the Liberal Democrats (and indeed the vast majority of the House of Commons) and thus for presumably psychiatric reasons called it Change UK, when it promised exactly the reverse. What did they think they were doing? Was it pure petulance and hubris which made them think they could gull the public by presenting the same agenda but in a different wrapper? It is a genuine mystery. They are Liberals and should have had the sense and grace to join

*Look at the millions who transferred their votes from Bernie Sanders to Trump. It is no longer left vs right*

the Liberal Democrats — as should, incidentally, half our Conservative MPs and a good third of Labour MPs. Yes, the Lib Dems are led by a self-satisfied hobgoblin, but at least they represent a strand of thought shared by a sizeable proportion of the electorate, especially the affluent bit of it.

The divide in politics today is no longer between left and right. It is between the individualistic and the communal, the liberal and the social. Our parliament does not remotely reflect that new divide, with five-sixths or more of MPs being effectively liberals, whereas the polls suggest that the majority of the population are more socially conservative, traditional and communal.

The liberal view is also grossly over-represented in our institutions, such as the BBC. Perhaps this is why the political debate right

now is so fractious, childish, fraught and fisticularious: the forum for debate is in entirely the wrong place. The goalposts have been removed and set up somewhere else, leaving our politicians kicking a ball around in a stadium from which the supporters have long since departed. But the politicians and our liberal elite cannot quite bring themselves to accept this fact. Hell, look at Europe, and the US. Look at the alliance in Italy between the League and the Five Star Movement, look at the millions of voters who transferred their allegiance from Bernie Sanders to Donald Trump. It is no longer left versus right. It is something else entirely.

So what do the Conservatives do? Become Conservative is the obvious answer, even if it is one which would hurt my party, the Social Democrats. Represent that huge tranche of the population which believes that women do not possess penises and that our children should not be taught the contrary. Represent the overwhelming majority who do not wholly agree with the ubiquitous canard that immigration has enhanced our country beyond all measure and that Islam is a soothing balm which we should all respect and rub into our aching joints every evening. Give a nod to those who do not believe that the UK has been a historical source of untrammelled wickedness and that the idea of the nation state is on the 'wrong side of history'. In other words, reclaim the conservative centre ground and do not be bullied by the liberals. They have power but not hegemony.

Meanwhile, some bloke has already pulled out of the race for the leadership of the Conservative party, actually before I knew he had even intended standing. James Cleverly hoped he might win over some votes by being young! And black! It ain't enough, mate. Brexit aside, the Tories need an ideological route out of their current stagnation and increasing distance from the voting public. The only contender who seems to grasp this, so far, is Esther McVey. A one-nation Tory who understands the difference between male and female genitalia. But I don't suppose she'll win.



*'You had to go and tell him we voted Lib Dem.'*

**SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE**

*The argument continues online.*

# Operation Hunt

Can the 'underestimated' Foreign Secretary become prime minister?

KATY BALLS

When a head of state flies in for a state visit, it's traditional for the Foreign Secretary to lead the welcoming committee. When Donald Trump landed at Stansted airport in Air Force One, Jeremy Hunt was left waiting on the tarmac for a while. Hunt assumed that a tired Trump was 'probably just powdering his nose' after a long flight. It transpired, however, that the Commander-in-Chief was busy tweeting his denunciations of Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London ('a stone-cold loser') — thereby setting the news agenda for the day.

'I found out almost in real time because the President told me about his tweets,' the Foreign Secretary says, when we meet the day after. 'I do think we have to learn from his ability to communicate,' he adds. 'This is the first president in history who arrives to work and the whole world knows what he's thinking.'

But is that necessarily a good thing? 'This is someone who puts enormous effort into communication. It's authentic. I don't think he wakes up thinking: how can I grab the headlines today? I think he is expressing what he genuinely feels. He touched down and was genuinely angry about Sadiq Khan — and expressed it.' For Hunt's part, he told Trump: 'We are going to put on a great welcome for you because you're our best friend.'

The charm offensive worked. After the interview, Trump took time in his press conference to declare that the Foreign Secretary would 'do a very good job' if he were to become prime minister. It's a sentiment with which Hunt agrees. Sitting in his official residence, opposite a portrait of Castlereagh, he



makes his case: he's an experienced politician for serious times. 'This is a moment in our national destiny where we should not turn our nose up at experience,' he says. 'We've got to get things right. Get things wrong, and within six months we could have Corbyn in Downing Street — and no Brexit.'

Or worse. 'We have a more aggressive Russia. A more autocratic China. In some ways, we are going back to a situation much closer to the 1980s where we can't take for granted western values.' His pitch? To make Britain stand tall again, and increase defence spending. But as Trump was at pains to point out on his visit, the US likes allies it can trust, and it's not sure it can trust countries who do business with Huawei, the Chinese tech giant bidding for Britain's 5G network. Would Hunt be prepared to confront Beijing?

'America is our strongest ally, will always remain our strongest ally,' he says firmly. His concerns about China go far beyond the question of Huawei and 5G. There is, he says, a 'strategic question' as to whether Britain should be giving Beijing such business at all. 'China has an industrial strategy which they are quite open about: "Made In China 2025". They want to have 80 per cent market share of telecoms equipment, a 90 per cent

market share of artificial intelligence. You have to ask whether it is wise for any of us to become technologically dependent on a third country for those kinds of technologies, given how important they are going to be.'

If he sounds hawkish on China, it's not because of his Chinese wife but to do with his upbringing as the son of a Royal Navy commander. 'I grew up in the 1980s in a naval family and with a father who spent his

life doing exercises preparing for possible war with the Soviet Union,' he says. 'I just think that the best way to defend yourself is through strength — and we have to recognise when there is a potential threat to our values. In the case of China, I think it's at a crossroads — but we have to prepare for these scenarios.'

Hunt's CV reads like a model Tory application: head boy at Charterhouse and PPE at Oxford before becoming a successful entrepreneur. 'I could have gone for a comfortable job in a consultancy in the City,' he says. 'But I started out on my own, building a business from scratch that ended up employing 200 people.' In 2005, he won South-West Surrey from the Liberal Democrats. 'I'd be the first prime minister in modern times who's won a marginal seat. We are going to need to win a lot of marginal seats if we're going to win the next general election.' Since then, he has served nine years in the cabinet where he became the longest-serving secretary of state for health.

Hunt wants to take inspiration from the time he has spent running start-ups. 'I will be the first prime minister to have been an entrepreneur by background. Building a business is in my blood,' he says. He thinks



## After the Interval

Such disappointment that the celebrated Belgian violinist was indisposed, unable to perform, would be replaced by no one of note. You knew you were fated never to hear him play, though you had waited since 1945. You could have passed on the second half, but — not to waste an evening out — you stayed. And now it's started, the river flowing darkly by the Strand, that flower-summons, Big Ben's harp-harmonics, and cymbal rush hour. 'A London Symphony' you'd never heard before, whose movements send you back to find your blacked-out heart is on its way downstream, towards the unrationed sea.

—John Greening

that one measure of whether Brexit has been good for the country will be if the UK economy grows faster than the eurozone. 'Then people will say Brexit has been a success.'

He would also draw inspiration from America, and its tax cuts. 'Instead of fashionably deriding Trump, we should actually look at the fact that America's GDP growth is double ours,' he says. He wants a 'very aggressive programme of business tax cuts'.

He'd start by cutting corporation tax to Irish levels — down to 12.5 per cent from today's 19 per cent. Then he'd increase the annual investment allowance from £1 million to £5 million 'to promote investment, deal with our productivity gap'. He would also like to cut business rates. And how to pay for these pledges? 'Look at the headroom that we now have in the economy, the £26 billion that we know the Treasury has now, which is keeping a business war chest for a no deal,' he says. 'Well, my argument is that you don't wait for no deal. Use it right away. The best thing that you can do is to fire up the economy! Turbo-charge it so that, whatever challenges we face, our businesses are really motoring.'

Would no deal even be a possibility under a Prime Minister Hunt? He garnered criticism from Tory colleagues last week with an op-ed declaring it would be 'political suicide' for the Tories. He's confident that he can negotiate a better deal from the EU, but what would happen if we were a few weeks away from the 31 October deadline and the EU still refused to enter discussions? 'If there were no prospect of a better deal, I would — as I have said — be prepared to go for no deal,' he says. 'In the end, I've always thought the democratic risk of no Brexit is more dangerous than the economic risk of no deal.'

His detractors — every leadership candi-

date has plenty at this stage — say that he is another safety-first choice who would bore voters and be eaten alive in Brussels. What does he think of those colleagues who call him 'Theresa in Trousers'? He does his best to smile. 'Don't confuse continuity for loyalty,' he warns. 'I have served two prime ministers completely loyally over the last nine years, but I would be quite different to both.'

Would voters view him as another Tory toff? 'Well, all I would say is I have spent my life with people underestimating me,' he replies. 'In nine years I've done some of the most difficult jobs in government. I've faced down our most challenging union, the doctors' union, a strike that lasted almost as long as the miners' strike, I was responsible for the London Olympics with all the challenges that involved. I don't think you can say I haven't been tested in government.'

Brexit has cost the last two prime ministers their jobs. Hunt served under both of them. But when I put it to him that the EU might fancy its chances against a third British PM, he replies, 'They might have a go. But I like to prove people wrong.'

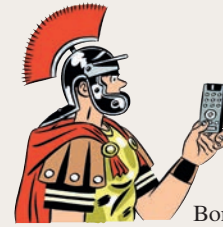
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## ANCIENT AND MODERN

### Seduction and the Boris bus



Boris Johnson is to be tried at the Crown Court on the grounds that, during the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign, he crucially affected the referendum result by arguing that the UK paid the EU £350 million a week, ignoring another interpretation that the sum was only £250 million a week. Ancient Greeks knew all about advocating one side of an issue, as a law suit exemplifies.

Euphiletus was the defendant in a homicide case brought against him by the relatives of one Eratosthenes. The relatives claimed that Euphiletus had murdered Eratosthenes after luring, or even forcing, him into his house as part of a premeditated plan. But Euphiletus's defence (we do not possess the prosecution's case) was that Eratosthenes had been seducing his wife. He had been able to do this because his wife had been sleeping downstairs in order to look after their child, leaving Euphiletus innocently asleep upstairs. This allowed Eratosthenes easy overnight access to her. The truth came out when Euphiletus was tipped off about what was happening by another of Eratosthenes' squeezes, details of which were confirmed by his own slave-girl. Gathering local witnesses by night, Euphiletus 'pushed open the bedroom door to find him lying beside my wife, then leaping up naked'. He tied him up and accused him of seduction. Eratosthenes begged for his life, offering a financial settlement. Euphiletus, quoting a 200-year-old law of Draco's, killed him.

And that was the nub: there were other more recent laws relating to such cases, of which compensation was easily the most common. We can assume that the opposition quoted them, to make clear how unprecedented Euphiletus's action was. But it was up to the opposition to make that point: Euphiletus did not have to.

And so to Boris: he claimed we paid £350 million a week to the EU and stuck to it, feeling no obligation to quote any other figure. But the riposte came that the real payment to the EU was £250 million. So both interpretations were out in the open, and the ball was in the voters' court. Who is to say whether the £100 million difference had any effect on the referendum?

— Peter Jones

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# Hands free

I've joined a new kind of abstinence movement

COSMO LANDESMAN

Eight years ago, I had an erotic epiphany. It was around midnight: I had sex on the brain and porn on my laptop. Suddenly, everything felt wrong and a wave of sadness washed over me. I felt like some sleazy man from a Michel Houellebecq novel. I no longer wanted to be that kind of man. So I made a solemn vow to abstain for at least 60 days.

Back then, I thought I was the only man in the world who had taken such a vow. (And in case you're wondering, I lasted 45 days that first time and now remain free of porn.) Little did I know then that that year — 2011 — was when a forum called NoFap was set up on social media platform Reddit by Alexander Rhodes to support men like me. The name NoFap is meant to be an onomatopoeic representation of the sound of masturbation. Members who abstain are called 'fapstronauts' and women members — they have a few — are known as 'femstronauts'.

Today NoFap has an online community of around 400,000 and describes itself as a 'porn recovery site'. What, you may wonder, are they recovering from? Exhaustion? Sprained wrists? NoFap believes that the use of porn and masturbation together has detrimental effects on your mental, physical and emotional health. The site advocates 'abstinence' for a period of 60 days, which allows the body and mind a natural 'rebooting'.

Over the past decade, an anti-masturbation movement has emerged in America. Groups such as NoFap, Proud Boys (young right-wing nationalists whose hashtag is #NoWank), Christian chastity advocates and writers such as the productivity gurus Tim Ferris and Jordan Peterson are seen as part of it. There are groups such as the Sacred Sexuality Project which warns that 'pornography addiction could quite literally be considered an epidemic in modern culture today' and should be seen 'in a similar light to the abuse of cocaine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries'.

Of course, the British like to think this is some sort of peculiarly American thing, rooted in its puritanical past. But there's a growing number of British men who are joining offline support groups such as Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, where they can find the kind of support that NoFap offers. This

has now become a sub-theme in the American culture wars and the #MeToo movement.

Critics of NoFap come from the left and the right and from feminists and religious fundamentalists. For some conservatives, NoFap is a fellow traveller in the war on men because it perpetuates the myth of 'toxic masculinity' that regards all men as porn addicts in need of treatment. Feminists, however, criticise it because it fails to make that very critique.

But many liberals don't like NoFap either. They see the group as depriving men of not just a human right but a human good as well. To some, only religious bigots, right-wing conservatives and sexually repressed neurotics would challenge the consensus. So, by this logic, NoFap must be suspect.

I don't think either critique is fair. What strikes me after reading numerous postings

*NoFap has an online community of around 400,000 and describes itself as a 'porn recovery site'*

on the Reddit site is the absence of the typical anti-masculine rant that woke #MeToo men usually go in for.

NoFappers are mostly men in their twenties who don't hate pornography for exploiting women and perpetuating sexism; they hate it because, they believe, it can cause erectile dysfunction, leaves you feeling drained, undermines your productivity and can damage your relationships. The websites warn of porn addiction 'rewiring the brain's reward mechanism, which results in apathy or procrastination', a 'loss of attraction for real women' and 'all the other issues that come with any addiction'. For them it's really an issue of health, not morality.

I suspect NoFap appeals to many young

men in the same way that Jordan Peterson does — it provides rules and restrictions that encourage a self-discipline that is the foundation to cultivating what Peterson calls a more 'noble' self. 'I probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for ol' JP,' notes a contributor on the Reddit notice board.

Less serious are the many NoFap members who just like a challenge; men for whom no porn for 60 days is a kind of endurance test. Hence the deep strand of gung-ho guy bonding you find in numerous postings. At times, fapstronauts sound like a band of Navy Seals getting psyched up for a dangerous mission. 'Let's go guys, we can do this' (African Agent 47) and declarations of the laconic 'Count me in' sort.

For thousands of years, men have banded together to fight for noble causes, to scale mountains and fly to the moon — but this? Come on guys, can't we come up with something a little grander? There's an inherent and self-defeating contradiction in the NoFap idea of abstinence. Why bother quitting for 30, 60 or 100 days if you're just going to end up going back to your old habits? Why not, like other addicts, make the pledge to quit?

That said, mocking the mission of these young men is easy. But abstinence is harder than you think for one simple reason: good reasons to stop are hard to find. The scientific claims made by NoFap are either irrefutable or based on suspect science, depending on your view of porn. The church doesn't want to mention sin or damnation as in days of old. No wonder the male default mode is: why not? What's the big deal?

We might say there's nothing wrong with all this — though I think there are good ethical reasons not to use porn — but that's not what we often feel. If there's nothing wrong with it, why do so many men feel embarrassed by the practice? Young men have the choice to actively engage in the cultivation of a higher or better self through self-denial.

Perhaps the final word should go to Mark Queppet of the Sacred Sexuality Project. The world needs more strong and passionate men, he says, but 'sadly, we've never even met many of our greatest leaders' because they are still stuck in their room watching filth on their smartphones. NoFap is a sign that maybe something will change.



*'Is all the rubbish in your head recyclable?'*



# Don't use up all your rhetoric at once



Saturday night, a guest commentator on Sky News sputtered that Donald Trump has ‘normalised white supremacy’. Once the American President has floated off to the horizon after his three-day visit to the UK as an inflatable media punching bag, we will doubtless have been subjected to much further denunciation of this diabolical, fiendish, authoritarian, hate-filled, lying, misogynistic, crass, criminal, moronic, stupid ... sorry, that’s a bit too close to ‘moronic’ ... then, you know, *totally crummy* leader who is also... also... fat! Sadiq Khan made a brave superlative play in labelling Trump a ‘fascist’. Now, that one’s hard to top — which won’t have stopped fellow detractors from trying.

Welcome to the world of impotent hyperbole. That dig about white supremacy is a good example of contemporary word inflation, in some ways worse than what’s happened to grades. (The fetishistic lefty resort to *normalise* deserves parsing as well: the verb seems to decode ‘Maybe it’s not strictly illegal yet but we don’t like it, so it should be illegal’.) Now that *white supremacist* no longer refers specifically to Anglo-Saxons who proudly believe their race is superior, the term means nothing. Granted, Trump may or may not have obstructed justice and he’s hardly Mr Protocol, but Khan has now used up *fascist*. So what will London’s mayor call the President were Trump actually to send in troops to shut down CNN? ‘Injudicious’?

The self-defeating nature of rhetorical overkill was on display for decades in Northern Ireland, where politicians ritually fell over themselves to condemn the culprits behind atrocities as, say, ‘heartless, inhuman animals who have sunk to new depths of depravity and unspeakable wickedness...’. While party leaders’ thesauruses grew rifled and grey from paging for fresh synonyms, for the audience this escalating invective induced a funny linguistic neuropathy. The pols would have been more affecting had they characterised yet another bombing as ‘unfortunate’.

As for Trump, the American left has already thrown *Roget’s* at the guy — the hardback, unabridged — and look at how much good it’s done. Trump is still President, we’re approaching another election

and all the punchy pejoratives are exhausted already. ‘Fascist’? Sadiq, the Democrats impoverished *fascist* before the Donald was even inaugurated.

Brexit has also been a magnet for the lexicon of hysteria. At the weekend, Elton John announced that Brexit has made him ashamed of his country. He declared: ‘I am a European. I am not a stupid, colonial, imperialist English idiot.’ (Note that *English* here is deployed as one more insult.) It’s news to me that Dominic Raab and Boris Johnson are scheming to send the British army on 31 October to retake Kenya.

Notoriously, too, David Lammy deplored members of the pro-Brexit ERG as akin to

*Language inflation has the same effect as the monetary kind: your words grow rapidly worthless*

Nazis and proponents of apartheid. When Andrew Marr invited the MP to moderate his comparisons, he declared instead that the parallels were ‘not strong enough’. I’m curious just how Lammy plans to heighten the opprobrium.

See, rhetorical overkill blows up in your face. Hyperbole depletes your linguistic arsenal, and oratorical crying wolf destroys your credibility. Lammy simply sounded childish. The exaggeration bounced harmlessly off the ERG, while betraying the Labour MP as having no sense of proportion. Language inflation has the same effect as the monetary kind: your words grow rapidly worthless.

Speaking of Lammy and growing rapidly worthless: last month’s Intelligence Squared debate in Westminster was one of my weirder events in recent times. The panel was ostensibly discussing the proposition ‘Identity politics is tearing society apart’. I kicked off with ten minutes for the affirmative, during which I defined what I understood identity politics to mean: an insistence on interpreting history, the arts and the dynamics of the present entirely in terms of unequal power relationships between groups. I contested the very definition of ‘identity’ that the movement embraces. For me, knowing who we are means transcending, rather than clinging to, the social and biological catego-

ries into which we were helplessly born. Pretty much what you’d expect, right?

What I didn’t expect was to be strangely undermined by my own side. I’m a big fan of Trevor Phillips, a sharp, observant broadcaster whose documentaries on political correctness and British Muslim values have been especially courageous. I felt fortunate to have him as second affirmative. But when he concluded, I wasn’t sure I’d heard right. He’d rounded on the point that identity politics is indeed tearing society apart, but that’s a grand thing, because society needs to be torn apart, the better to rebuild it afresh from the ground up. Something of a back door to our side of the argument, to say the least — and at 65 the gentlemanly OBE makes for an unlikely burn-the-whole-joint-down revolutionary firebrand.

In opposition, a *Guardian* journalist diligently expounded on the merits of researching the effects of government policy on various demographic subsets — fair enough, but rather off-point. Then our friend David Lammy (for whom I must also be a pro-apartheid Nazi) delivered a rousing civil rights sermon, part Mandela, part Martin Luther King. Hence in the final wrap-up, I submitted dolefully: ‘If I’d realised that we were really going to be debating the proposition “Racism and sexism are bad”, I might have declined this invitation.’

Somehow the cherry on this melting sundae — throughout which we had signally failed to debate anything to do with identity politics, but had thrown in plenty of Brexit — was being approached afterwards by a member of the audience (black, if that matters, and alas, maybe it does) to please explain my closing remark. I spelled out that racism and sexism being bad is settled, isn’t it? So debating that proposition is a waste of time. She continued to look belligerently incomprehending. I blithered on at greater length. There’s nothing more disheartening than having to tortuously explain a remark whose meaning should have been self-evident, when the remark itself was about not wishing to discuss the self-evident.

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*Writers worth listening to.*

## BAROMETER

### Juncker's perks

The European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker complained that he doesn't have an official residence, unlike the ambassadors who frequently entertain him, and has to live in a hotel room. What are the perks of his job?

- He receives a salary of €306,655 (£271,000), untaxed in his home country and subject only to a low EU tax.
- He gets a residence allowance of €46,000 p.a., equivalent to 15 per cent of his salary.
- He is also eligible for a family allowance equivalent to 2 per cent of his salary.

### The free world

Was Donald Trump's state banquet the most appropriate to boycott? Countries whose leaders have been treated to a state visit in the past decade, ranked by their position on the Human Freedom Index:

HIGHEST		LOWEST	
Netherlands.....	<b>6</b>	Mexico.....	<b>75</b>
Ireland.....	<b>8</b>	Qatar.....	<b>103</b>
USA.....	<b>17</b>	Turkey.....	<b>107</b>
Singapore.....	<b>25</b>	India.....	<b>110</b>
Spain.....	<b>25</b>	UAE.....	<b>117</b>
South Korea.....	<b>27</b>	Kuwait.....	<b>124</b>
South Africa.....	<b>63</b>	China.....	<b>135</b>

### Atheist beliefs

Percentage of people describing themselves as atheists who 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree with the existence of:

Life after death.....	<b>19%</b>
Reincarnation.....	<b>13%</b>
Astrology.....	<b>14%</b>
Objects with mystical powers.....	<b>11%</b>
'That significant events are meant to be'.....	<b>29%</b>
Supernatural beings.....	<b>20%</b>
Universal spirits of life force.....	<b>19%</b>
Underlying forces of good and evil.....	<b>30%</b>
Karma.....	<b>7%</b>

Source: *Understanding Unbelief Project, University of Kent*

### Football vs cricket

How do audiences for the Cricket World Cup and the Football World Cup compare?

— According to Fifa, last year's Football World Cup final in Russia attracted an estimated **1bn** viewers around the world. The matches were attended by a total of **3m** fans.

— The most-watched match in the last Cricket World Cup in 2015 was not the final but a group game between India and Pakistan, which drew **313m** TV viewers worldwide. That, however, was dwarfed by the **558m** who watched the 2011 final between India and Sri Lanka.

As for game attendance, the 2015 Cricket World Cup attracted **1.02m** ticket sales.

# Protons and cons

The jury's still out on proton therapy

CASSANDRA COBURN

It's Asco week in Chicago: the biggest meeting of clinical oncologists in the world. McCormick Place convention centre, the largest in the US, is filled to its 2.6 million square foot capacity with people talking about cancer. And one of the hottest topics being discussed is something called proton therapy, a possible new tool in the anti-cancer arsenal.

But does it actually work? Given that two private proton therapy machines have already been built in the UK, and that two more NHS machines are on their way at a cool £250 million, you'd think we'd know. The sad truth is that, for many cancers, the medical jury is still out as to how helpful these machines actually are.

Proton therapy is a new kind of radiotherapy. Radiotherapy has been successfully used to treat cancer for decades. In essence, it's a way of using targeted energy to destroy tumours, with standard radiotherapy machines using light particles (photons) as their mode of attack.

The problem with using photons is that they're extremely high energy. Unfortunately, the same high energy that allows them to destroy tumours also means that they travel deep into the body, harming whatever comes into their path.

Fortunately the photons' energy diminishes as they penetrate deeper into the body and so, with careful planning, most of the force is spent on the tumour and less hits the surrounding healthy tissue. Nonetheless, radiotherapy can still cause side effects to the healthy tissue. Depending on where the tumour is — for example, in the brain — the side effects can potentially be so harm-

ful that doctors need to think carefully to determine if the radiotherapy will cause more harm than good.

This is why proton therapy appeals. Protons behave in a very different way to photons: put simply, they're less energetic. Therefore, in theory, unlike photons, the protons hit the tumour with almost all of their energy and have very little left to cause damage to the healthy tissue beyond the tumour. This makes proton therapy potentially much safer than normal radiotherapy, but without any diminished loss in cure.

Why the caveats in the last paragraph? The research on proton therapy isn't in

*It's not that the evidence for treating prostate cancer with proton therapy is ambiguous: it's that it isn't there*

yet. Despite there being around 67 proton therapy machines already built worldwide (not including the two new NHS ones currently under construction), definitive answers to the two vital questions of whether proton therapy is better and safer than normal radiotherapy for most cancers aren't known yet.

For some very rare cancers — brain tumours, particularly in children, or in very sensitive areas like the eye — proton therapy is the recommended treatment, predominantly because of the potential damage normal radiotherapy can do. But for the most common types of cancer, doctors are still waiting on the results.

Prostate cancer is a typical example. It is the second most common cancer in the UK, with Prostate Cancer UK estimating that one in eight men will be diagnosed at some point in their lives. The good news is that if the cancer is caught early enough, many men can be cured through a combination of hormonal therapy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. In other words, with the right treatment plan, there is a good chance of survival, meaning that there should be significant new evidence before patients decide to veer off this treatment course.

NHS England recognises this. In its clinical commissioning policy, it states that it has





'carefully reviewed the evidence to treat prostate cancer with proton beam therapy. We have concluded that there is not enough evidence to make the treatment available at this time.'

This cautionary approach is echoed in the guidelines of America's official radio-

*Most treatment providers advertise claims online that are inconsistent with international guidelines*

therapy society, Astro, which recommends proton therapy for prostate cancer treatment only as part of a clinical trial or registry investigation: in other words, as part of the evidence-collecting process. So it's not that the evidence for treating prostate cancer with proton therapy is ambiguous: it's that it isn't there.

So if this is the case, why do patients with prostate cancer in the US form the group of patients who are most frequently referred for proton therapy? Why do private British radiotherapy clinics advertise their proton therapy services using stories of men with prostate cancer?

In other words, why are private proton therapy providers still actively promoting their untested services to patients who already have a good chance of survival?



'Good news, Mr Billingham. I no longer have to refer to you as the "worried well"...'

As always, the answer is money. Proton therapy machines are extremely expensive to build but the incentives they provide can be worth it. Some American proton therapy centres generate profits of \$50 million annually.

The American model, whereby doctors are recompensed according to the services that they prescribe, provides a possible clue as to the increasing number of referrals: it's more lucrative for the prescribing doctors.

Prostate cancer demography also helps. The disease most frequently afflicts older men, who tend to be the most capable of affording to pay out of pocket for medical services. This fact is not lost on those pro-

viders of prostate cancer treatment around the world that are now marketing their services privately.

But these concerns have not escaped the medical press, with leading journals repeatedly sounding the alarm that we need more evidence before spending vast sums on these costly potential white elephants.

Professor David Collingridge, editor of the *Lancet Oncology*, the world's leading cancer journal, commented to *The Spectator* that the 'economic pressures to recoup investment [in proton therapy units] create perverse incentives not based purely on clinical value'. The data backs this up: this year's Asco meeting sees the presentation of work showing that most proton therapy providers' websites contain information and advertise claims that are inconsistent with international guidelines.

Private proton therapy services present themselves as offering groundbreaking new treatment to patients who might fare better by sticking with old-fashioned treatments such as photon-based radiotherapy. But cancer patients, being under great stress, are among those most likely to clutch at expensive straws.

For the moment, there is at least one resounding message: don't pay for proton therapy yourself, no matter how swish the websites might be.

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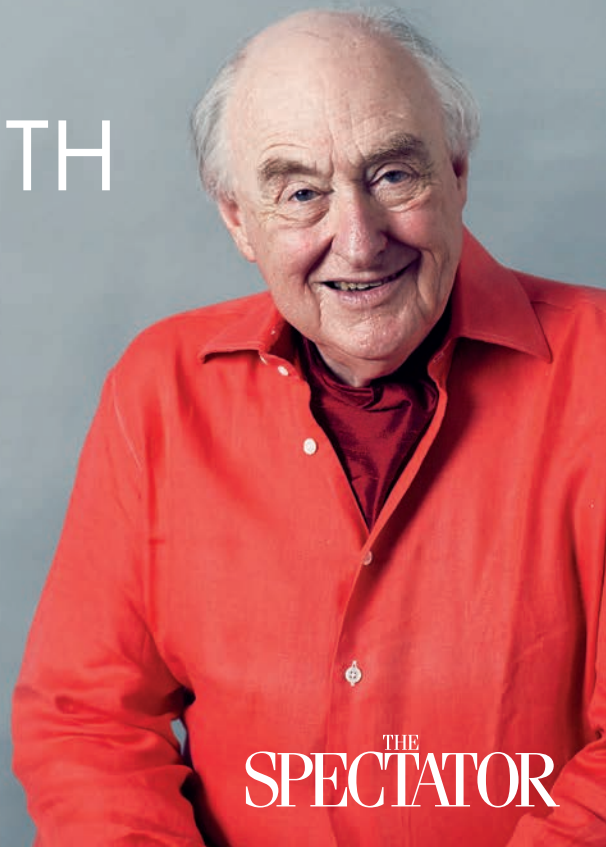
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# How I very nearly became the victim of an online scam



Please don't suppose I'm unaware I've been an idiot. I recount what happened to me last week without expecting your sympathy or understanding, and this account carries only the very slightest plea in mitigation: the suggestion that it could happen to you too, even if you don't think you'd ever be so stupid.

Because I certainly didn't think I was. I'm not IT-illiterate, I'm not particularly slow-witted, I've attended 'take online security seriously' lectures, and I do know about the new ways thieves steal from the unsuspecting these days. I'm forewarned.

So I thought myself proof against such attempts when the landline phone rang on Friday morning. My partner had just gone riding, so when the caller said she was from BT, and believed I was dissatisfied with our fluctuating broadband speeds, I assumed he had made a complaint because he is indeed dissatisfied.

She sounded as though she was in a call centre in India (you could hear a noisy background of calls) and spoke with a thick accent. I could hardly understand her but, then again, one often can't with these call centres. She handed me over to 'my supervisor', a man. He wanted to take me through a few tests of my broadband quality, and did I have a screen I could use? I did, and logged in, holding the cordless phone to my ear. He asked me to confirm my address and the spelling of my name ('so BT can be sure we're speaking to our client') which I did.

He then dictated the URL of a testing website to go to, and I got it on to my screen. First we went (I've retrieved all this information from my Chrome history) to the WC3 Markup Validation Service, then to the Nu Html Checker.

I was getting a bit confused, and from here on my memory begins to tangle. The 'supervisor' was directing me from website to website, including a login to my MyBT website, and I began to lose track of why I was doing all these things, simply telling him what was on my screen. The one that worries me, though, is the last one we went to:

the AnyDesk App for Remote Desktops, which came after the TeamViewer Automatic Download. By this point things were happening on my screen without my intervention — as though someone or something had taken over.

I had now been on the phone for 35 minutes. If when I had first picked up I had known the time or the complication that would be involved, I would have told them to call back later, when Julian could have handled it. But I had been led very slowly into all this, and was beginning to feel that,

*In an IT landscape where I was lost, this 'supervisor' had become my guide, leading me by the hand*

having invested so much time already, we might as well get through to a result.

Also — and this is hard to describe — I think I had become rather passive. In an IT landscape where I was lost, this 'supervisor' had become my guide. He had me by the hand and I was simply doing what I was told — even feeling I was letting him down by being slow to understand his instructions, and taking pleasure from his pleasure when we got the results he was looking for on to the screen.

'We're going to get a conclusion now,' he said. My hands were off the keyboard, and the AnyDesk App for Remote Desktops thing was flashing all sorts of figures and symbols and incomprehensible IT language on to my screen. It did now occur to me that there might be something suspicious going on, but I felt it would sound irrational to tell

him — now, after all this time — that I was going to hang up.

'Scroll down right to the bottom of what's on the screen,' he told me, 'and you'll see the result'. It said: 'Due to client: £386 compensation.' He was apparently looking at the same screen. 'That's compensation for a poor service,' he said. 'BT will be fixing the defective service as soon as possible.'

'But we need to get the compensation to you straight away.' Now I was smelling a rat. 'First I want to confirm your address.' It occurred to me that he already had my address, but I gave it. 'Now can I check we have the right bank details for you?' he said. 'Can I confirm which bank you bank with?'

I was now very suspicious but I told him the bank's name, as this did not strike me as very secret information. 'And I'll need some details from your account,' he said.

Whoa. 'BT have my bank details already,' I said. 'I pay by direct debit.'

'But we need to confirm that the man I'm speaking to is the account holder,' he said — or words to that effect. At last my brain was kicking in. His explanation made no sense. 'No,' I said, and told him so. 'All you need to do is credit my account,' I said. The scales had fallen from my eyes. I hung up.

Immediately he phoned back. I told him to stop calling, but each time I killed the call the phone rang again, so I left it off the hook. On my smartphone I called my bank and agreed that they can block internet access to my account until I've had my laptop checked over for 'malware'. What may these crooks have been able to extract? I have no idea.

For half an hour my hands trembled. I was surprised how shaken it left me feeling. I don't *think* I'd ever have given him passwords or anything, or accessed my account while he might have been able to watch — but I've rather lost confidence in my own sceptical good sense. Could he be watching now?

Yet it didn't and wouldn't occur to me to tell the police. They'd be as far out of their depth as I am. It's the Wild West out there, and we're alone and unprotected. Analogue law enforcement in a digital world.



*'Alexa just informed me that he wants to be known as Alex from now on.'*



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## LETTERS

### Trump and Brexit

Sir: Your leading article ('The Trump card', 1 June) states that 'May's successor should seek to capitalise on Team Trump's enthusiasm for Brexit'.

President Trump — the leader of by far our most important political, economic and military ally — has always respected what most British MPs have chosen to ignore: that the British people voted to leave the European Union. Assuming that the Conservative party wants to survive, it must choose a proven vote-winning leader who is determined to leave the European Union on WTO terms by 31 October this year, unless the EU has agreed by that date to a convincing, substantial improvement to its current offer. If the new prime minister commits to doing that, it's likely that Nigel Farage would join forces with the Conservatives in a general election. And if the Tory party is so foolish as to elect a Remainer, don't be surprised if a vote-winner such as Boris Johnson electrifies the British people by joining the Brexit party. Such an alliance of Leavers would surely win a general election, and handsomely, at a time when millions of Labour and Conservative voters are crying out for no-nonsense political leaders.

Winston Churchill, so admired by millions including Boris Johnson, defected to the Liberal party, then rejoined the Conservatives. Donald Trump, a Democrat, ran for President as a Republican. In politics, as in war, a true leader does whatever has to be done to win. Is it only President Trump who understands this?

*Hugo Anson  
London W11*

### Power to the people

Sir: Jonathan Sumption (Diary, 1 June) states that there was 'not much' that 'British politics could learn from the United States'. In fact, the UK could learn a lot. The US constitution has successfully preserved democracy by ensuring that power remains vested in the people.

In contrast, power in the UK and Europe has been ceded to unelected EU presidents and the increasingly undemocratic Brussels regime. Sumption also says that 'many regard [the referendum result] as an act of economic vandalism by a bare majority of the electorate', and he defends Theresa May in her efforts to limit the damage. This negative perspective emanates from the same political faction which incorrectly predicted economic failure if the UK did not join the euro, and recession in the immediate aftermath of a Leave vote. In referring to Brexit supporters as 'grim fanatics', Sumption

exhibits the disdain of many intellectuals for public opinion, but also for democracy. The British public is highly intelligent and has more insight than any narrow elite. That is why democracy works.

*Tim Martin  
Exeter, Devon*

### Don't give us Gove

Sir: A good many of us hold Michael Gove personally responsible for the fact that Brexit has not taken place ('Can the Tories save themselves?', 1 June). Had he not 'knifed' Boris Johnson we would not have been landed with May. He appears devious — trying to face both ways at once — and he has nothing like the national appeal of Johnson. If people vote Gove, we would more than likely get Corbyn.

*A.J. Snow  
South Cerney, Gloucestershire*

### Leaver vs Remainer

Sir: David Soskin, 'Leavers only, please' (Letters, 1 June), calls for two Leave-supporting MPs to be put to the membership. I believe this is wrong. We

need a Remain-supporting MP on the ballot so that MPs can see the strength of feeling within the party against remaining in the EU. There can be no doubt that the Remain arguments have been rejected by the membership (and the majority of Conservative voters), and MPs have a duty to listen to the membership. Two Leaver candidates would not make that clear.

*David Bell  
Northern Ireland*

### Tinkling felines

Sir: Could the distressing problem of cats exercising their natural instinct of killing birds and small mammals ('Vegans should go cat-free', 1 June) be partially solved by the RSPB sponsoring and promoting collars with small metal bells fixed to them?

*Mark Coley  
Brinkley, Newmarket*

### Why teachers hate Tories

Sir: Toby Young blames teachers' support for Labour on left-wing university staff, as if teachers were passive receivers of other people's opinions (No sacred cows, 1 June). When I entered the profession 55 years ago, teachers were overwhelmingly Tory, to the despair of the Communist party, which ran my local NUT. Continual meddling has caused the change. Two examples of Conservative stupidity and cowardice: the academies' draining of resources from classrooms into the pockets of men in suits, and an unpopular sex education policy which has been foisted on schools. If I were to tell a staffroom that I supported the Tory party, it would be assumed I jested.

*Michael McManus  
Leeds*

### The commentator's curse

Sir: As a cricket fan, I was growing more confident of England's chances in the World Cup, until I read Roger Alton's article last week (Sport, 1 June). While his glowing praise of the 50-over side was largely fair, it placed the journalistic equivalent of the commentator's curse on their chances. There is the small matter of the Ashes looming later in the summer — and a rejuvenated Australian side with a point to prove in both formats of the game is always a dangerous threat to an English team, especially if we are regarded as favourites.

*Daniel Cure,  
Kingswinford, West Midlands*

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# In favour of nationalisation? Take a look at Network Rail



**W**e don't hear enough about Network Rail these days. By that I mean that the entity recently described by the *Sunday Times* as 'synonymous with incompetence and delays' doesn't receive anything like the abuse it deserves for failing to provide the infrastructure essential for a 21st-century railway. I refer you to the Crossrail project, in which the inability of new trains to connect with old Network Rail signalling systems is one reason for the delayed opening that has become a major national embarrassment. I invite you to observe LNER's expensive new fleet of Azuma bullet trains that were due to launch in December but delayed by incompatibility with Network Rail signals. And of course if you're a London commuter, you'll have your own observation of the frequency with which track and signal failures ruin your day.

But I'll bet you don't know who controls Network Rail, or whether it sits in the public or private sector or (as Labour ministers pretended when they confiscated its assets from Railtrack shareholders in 2002) somewhere in between. The answer is that Labour's sham was unwound several years ago, so that Network Rail is now wholly nationalised, its debts sitting on the Treasury balance sheet and its sole shareholder Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling. One consequence of this change is that, when £1.5 billion-worth of Network Rail's property was sold to private equity earlier this year (to the distress of railway-arch businesses whose rents shot up in consequence), the Treasury snaffled most of the proceeds as a contribution to deficit reduction, rather than allowing them to be reinvested in overdue rail upgrades.

Why does this matter, apart from the irritation for rail passengers? Because John McDonnell has plans if he comes to power, as well he might, to nationalise utilities ranging from Thames Water to National Grid, with sub-market compensation for shareholders, and to take train franchises into public hands — and voter opinion on this

issue is reportedly 80 per cent behind him. But voters should take a close look at the one example we have of a large-scale nationalised utility, namely the unfit-for-purpose, half-hidden fiasco that is Network Rail.

## Fallen free-thinker

When the fund manager Neil Woodford was interviewed for *The Spectator* by Jonathan Davis in 2015, not long after he left Invesco to set up his own firm, I headlined the article 'The world is a very difficult place'. That was Woodford's summation of global economic tides at the time, but it's also a fair comment on his own subsequent experience: as his funds' performance failed to live up to their promise, investors gradually fled, causing his flagship equity income fund to shrink from £10 billion in 2017 to £3.7 billion this week, when withdrawals were frozen.

Woodford's reputation as the investment scene's most potent free-thinker, nurtured over 30 years, is in tatters. And that's a shame, because he's also one of the few mainstream London money men who has been willing to put a slice of his funds into smaller, early stage and even unlisted businesses. One such was Oxford Sciences Innovation, a university spin-out in which (under pressure to find cash for redemptions) he recently sold his £55 million stake.

'It's the failure of my industry to understand the needs of the science and innovation community, or even to want to participate in it,' he told us in 2015, 'that is the single biggest factor behind our failure as a country to translate the great science we have into commercial success.' The fall of Woodford is, in that sense, a much bigger loss to UK investment than the implosion of one overhyped fund.

## Trumpets and cinnamon buns

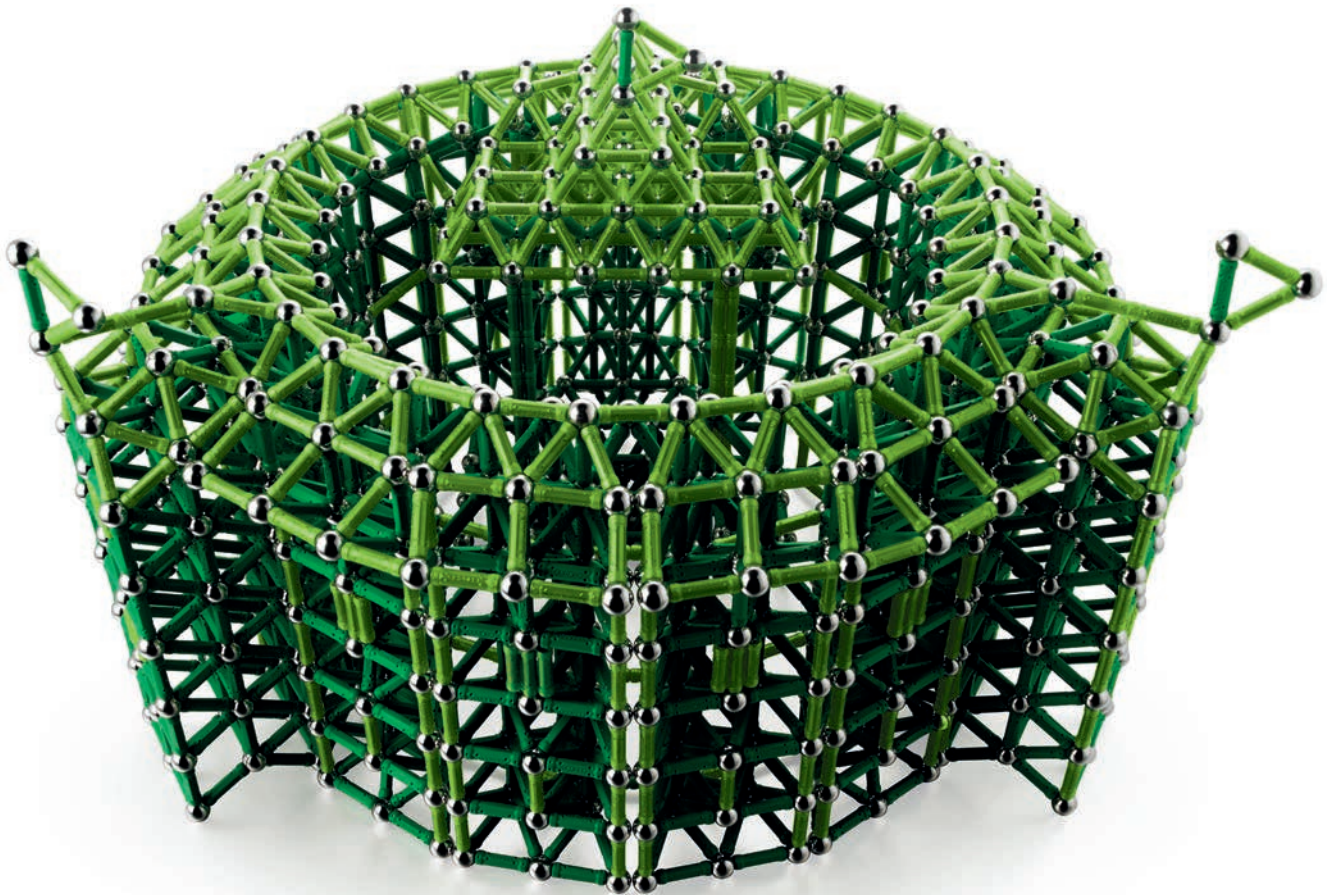
The entry deadline for our 2019 'Economic Disruptor of the Year Awards' is this weekend but there's still time to fill in the form at [www.spectator.co.uk/disruptor](http://www.spectator.co.uk/disruptor) and join

the galaxy of innovative ventures that have already put their names forward. I'm looking forward to meeting some of the entrepreneurs behind them during the judging process — and I'm delighted to report that one of our 2018 winners, Warwick Music Group, maker of the celebrated low-cost plastic trombone, has just received a Queen's Award for Enterprise.

On a related theme, I'm also pleased to have discovered the Green Angel Syndicate, which exemplifies what I regard as the right pragmatic answer to the 'climate emergency' question with which so many of you have recently made mischief. The syndicate is a group of 120 private investors who have together put £5 million into early-stage ventures in various aspects of 'cleantech'. Their portfolio includes Powervault, 'an intelligent battery system for the modern smart home, designed to maximise energy efficiency'; and Swytch, which converts conventional bicycles into electric bikes, encouraging commuters to leave their cars at home. Director David Sheridan says the syndicate's aim is to have 'fun and excitement' while picking green winners. If we can all do that, I'd say the battle's almost won.

Lastly, in this trot around the disruptor track, a tribute to a start-up I described here in 2007 as 'a lesson to would-be entrepreneurs that if you really pay attention to the quality of the product, success will follow, however entrenched the competition.' This was a tiny bakery called Cinnamon Twist: it was so good that folk who muttered that we had no need for a fancy patisserie when plenty of pies were already available in our Yorkshire town of Helmsley were soon found 'daily bargaining each other like bullocks' to buy beautiful bread and pastries from its charming Polish sales girl. Now, hardworking husband-and-wife bakers Mark and Jillie Lazenby have decided to ease back, shut up shop and do something different. How we shall miss them. But it's a reminder that nothing's permanent in the business world — and that the thrill is always seeing who'll be next to shake up the marketplace.

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# BOOKS & ARTS



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*'Abstract No. 2', 1947,  
by Lee Krasner  
Martin Gayford — p46*

**Mark Bostridge** explores  
the juicy, spicy, racy, sexy  
life of Alma Mahler

**John Burnside** enjoys a  
ride through the moral  
mayhem of James Ellroy's  
Los Angeles

**Rod Liddle** wishes he liked  
Morrissey's music more  
**James Delingpole** approves  
of the way they kill the  
doggies in Chernobyl  
**Lloyd Evans** marvels at  
the rich tapestry of

The Starry Messenger  
**Richard Bratby** discovers  
how to do the Ring cycle  
in a chicken shed  
**Carolyn Larrington**  
celebrates Europe's  
epic triumph



## BOOKS

# Revelations about the prophet

For centuries in the West, Islam was condemned by philosophers and pamphleteers as well as by the Church. But there was often a hidden agenda, says *Tom Holland*

## Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today

by *John Tolan*

Princeton, £24, pp. 288

In 2011, when the editor of *Charlie Hebdo* put Muhammad on the cover, he did so as the heir to more than 200 years of a peculiarly French brand of anti-clericalism. Just as radicals in the Revolution had desecrated churches and smashed icons, so did cartoonists at France's most scabrous magazine delight in satirising religion. Although Catholicism was their principal target, they were perfectly happy to ridicule Islam too. If Jesus could be caricatured, then why not Muhammad?

Sure enough, one year after the prophet's first appearance on the cover of *Charlie Hebdo*, he was portrayed again, this time crouching on all fours and with his genitals bared. The mockery would not cease, so the magazine's editor vowed, until 'Islam has been rendered as banal as Catholicism'. This would be, in a secular society, for Muslims to be treated as equals.

Except that they were not being treated as equals. The scorning of Islam was a tradition in France that reached back far beyond the time of Voltaire and Diderot. The earliest European caricature of Muhammad served to illustrate a work by Peter the Venerable, a 12th-century abbot in Burgundy. Peter's *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum* — 'A Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens' — did what it said on the tin. Islam was a monstrous perversion of Christian teachings. Not merely a heresy, it was the sump of all heresies. Muhammad, its founder, was 'the chosen disciple of the Devil'. The caricature of him which accompanied Peter's text duly showed him

as a siren: a monstrous compound of the human and the bestial, luring the unwary to their doom.

This portrayal of Muhammad as a heresiarch, a charlatan who had thrived by twisting the truths of Christianity to his own pestilential ends, was in turn heir to an even older tradition. As John Tolan points out in his new book, condemnation of Islam as a heresy did at least derive from a recognition on the part of Latin Christians that it was not an entirely alien faith: that it honoured the biblical prophets; that it laid claim to a divine law; that it was monotheistic.

It had taken time, however, for scholars in the heartlands of Christendom to attain even this degree of familiarity with the

### *Voltaire's condemnation of Muhammad was aimed principally at his own bugbear, the Catholic Church*

beliefs of Saracens. Initially, the assumption had been that — like the Vikings or the Magyars or the Wends — they were pagans. 'When northern Europeans of the 11th and 12th centuries did hear the name of the Muslim prophet, they often imagined that this "Mahomet" must be the Saracens' god.' In French, 'mahommet' signified 'idol' the whole way through the Middle Ages.

All of which, of course, reveals a good deal more about medieval Christendom than it does about Muhammad himself. In Tolan's expert study, 'Western perceptions of the prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to today' serve him as an index, not of Islam's evolution, but of the West's. Inevitably, the overwhelming impression is of a mingled fear and dislike of the civilisation which, from Spain to the Balkans, provided the Christians of Europe

with the great counterpoint to their own, a doppelgänger no less universalist and potent in its ambitions than Christendom itself. Tolan shows us a Muhammad made of gold, worshipped in Jerusalem as the Antichrist; a Muhammad who tricks his gullible followers by means of assorted bogus ruses; a Muhammad who is variously epileptic, lecherous and stained in blood. Here is the Muhammad condemned by Peter the Venerable as 'detestable'.

Yet this is not the whole story. Had it been, then Tolan's book would not be nearly as interesting as it is. Scholars in medieval and early modern Europe rarely wrote about Muslim history because it was the primary focus of their concerns. 'Many of these authors,' as Tolan puts it, 'were interested less in Islam and its prophet than in reading in Muhammad's story lessons that they could apply to their own preoccupations and predicaments.' Peter the Venerable, when he condemned 'Mahomet' as the prince of heretics, was quite as anxious to reclaim Spain from the Moors as he was to combat the spread of heresy in Christendom itself. In 17th-century England, pamphlets about Islam were invariably disguised polemics about the monarchy, or Cromwell's protectorate, or the Church of England. Voltaire's condemnation of Muhammad as the archetype of fanaticism was aimed, principally, not at Islam, but at that perennial bugbear of his, the Catholic Church.

The result, spanning the course of European history, was a series of engagements with the Muslim prophet that, despite their general tone of hostility, were marked as well by ambivalence and complexity. Increasingly, Muhammad came to serve European intellectuals as a vehicle for their hopes as well as their fears. Even Peter the





Resembling an Old Testament prophet more than the scourge of Christendom, a benign-looking Muhammad reveals the first pages of the Koran. From *La Ciencia y sus Hombres* by Louis Figuier, 1881

Venerable, writing to Muslims, sought to win them for Christianity in a spirit of amity — ‘not as our men often do, with arms, but with words; not with violence but reason; not with hate but love’.

In 17th-century England, in the wake of the civil war, hostility to the doctrine of the Trinity led some Protestant radicals to go so far as to compare Islam favourably with the Anglican church. ‘The Arabians,’ wrote Henry Stubbe, author of the first wholly positive biography of Muhammad ever written by a European Christian, ‘likened him to the purest streams of some river gently gliding along, which arrest and delight the eyes of every approaching passenger.’ A century on, and there were many enthusiasts for the Enlightenment similarly

delighted by the contemplation of a prophet who had scorned both the metaphysical complexities of Christian theology and the entire apparatus of a priesthood. Even Voltaire, towards the end of his life, was prepared to acknowledge Muhammad as the most brilliant founder of a sect who had ever lived.

This, then, is the 1,000-year line of descent in which *Charlie Hebdo* stands. Yet if its editor — like Peter the Venerable, like Stubbe, like Voltaire — was chiefly interested in the figure of Muhammad as a mirror held up to his own preoccupations, then no longer is the mirror quite as distant as once it was. What Tolan coyly terms ‘the furor around the caricatures of Muhammad’ — the murder in January 2015 of

12 of the magazine’s staff by two vengeful gunmen — served brutally to demonstrate that ‘Western perceptions of the prophet of Islam’ no longer exist in isolation from the Muslim world. This, of course, had been glaringly apparent for decades — ever since, on Valentine’s Day back in 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini condemned Salman Rushdie to death for blasphemy. *The Satanic Verses*, the work of a writer obsessed by the interface between the Western and Islamic worlds, was a novel deeply informed by the long history of Christian misrepresentations of Muhammad. But such literary subtleties had cut no ice with the Ayatollah. Unsurprisingly, then, medieval polemics against Islam are a topic that novelists have tended to keep clear of ever since.

Meanwhile, though, in the darker reaches of internet chatrooms and on the stump at far right rallies, they are being given a new lease of life. Tolan, a scholar whose preference is clearly for writing about scholars, avoids concluding his book by exploring just how topical its theme has lately become. Amazingly, he does not mention *The Satanic Verses* at all. The *Charlie Hebdo* killings and the Danish cartoons controversy are touched on in only the most gingerly of fashions. The anti-Islamic blogosphere — which at its most extreme has inspired murderous rampages from Utøya in Norway to Christchurch, New Zealand — is dealt with in a mere couple of sentences.

Instead, we get a chapter on the attitude of various 20th-century Christian intellectuals to Muhammad. Interesting though this may be, it is hard not to feel that Tolan has taken his eye somewhat off the ball. *Faces of Muhammad* is a learned, panoramic and fascinating book. But it is also far more timely than its author seems comfortable acknowledging.





Portrait by Titian of Federico II Gonzaga,  
Duke of Mantua, 1525

## Shaggy dog stories

Wynn Wheldon

### The Animal's Companion: People and their Pets

#### A 26,000-Year-Old Love Story

by Jacky Colliss Harvey  
Allen & Unwin, £14.99, pp. 294

What is it that distinguishes humans from other animals? The default answer nowadays is tediously misanthropic, but a more interesting distinction is that humans keep pets. Why this should be is the subject of this book. Jacky Colliss Harvey investigates the men and women who have owned, doted on, and in some cases mistreated their pets, in literature, painting, the movies and history. This begins 26,000 years ago, when a boy and his dog went exploring in bear caves in the south of France. The evidence was discovered in petrified tracks at Chauvet in the Ardèche in 1994.

Harvey has a scholar's aspiration and she is tremendously erudite, ranging far and wide, from Jacques Derrida ('The animal looks at us and we are naked before it') to *John Wick* (an action movie starring Keanu Reeves, who visits terrible vengeance on the

villains who have killed his dog), half-answering questions about why exactly we have pets.

What is their evolutionary purpose? Do we keep them because we have egos, and like to command? Is it that they bond us to one another? Are pets an antidote to our exploitation of animals? Or, conversely, does keeping an animal reinforce our sense of being masters of nature? Is it because they make us laugh? Perhaps they are merely a kind of accessory? (Cora Pearl, the notorious Parisian courtesan, dyed her dog blue to match a blue dress.) Or, as the poet Christopher Smart had it, was his cat Geoffrey, 'an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon'?

And what is a pet anyway? The word is difficult to define. It comes from northern Britain, and originally meant 'lamb'. The *OED* gives us 'an animal kept for pleasure or companionship', which is accurate but vague. What is a warhorse? A sheepdog? What about a stick insect? Does a pet have to be responsive?

All these questions are put by Harvey, and then, as best she can, answered by means of well-informed conjecture spiced with anecdote. Her beautifully illustrated book is organised thematically and is perhaps best thought of as a series of essays on the various themes that the relationships between kept animals and humans throw up, such as choosing, naming, communicating and losing. However, for all its research into deeper matters, the real pleasure of *The Animal's Companion* lies in its stories. And they come thick and fast.

The Barrison Sisters, a Vaudeville act of the 1890s, used to perform a song entitled 'Do You Want to See My Pussy?', at the end of which they would lift their skirts to reveal a kitten in a pouch over the crotch. According to Shelley, Byron kept, in his house in Italy, 'eight enormous dogs, three monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow and a falcon'. As a boy, Abraham Lincoln had a pet pig and carved a cradle for it. These three stories come on succeeding pages.

Turner used one of his own paintings, 'Fishing upon the Blythe-Sand', as a cat-flap. Emily Brontë nailed the difference between cats and dogs: 'We cannot stand up under comparison with the dog. He is infinitely too good. But the cat... is extremely like us in disposition.' Dickens had three

ravens, all called Grip. Raccoons were commonplace pets in 16th-century Mexico. The word 'tabby' derives from the French *tabis*, the word for the striped silk woven in Attabiya, a district in Baghdad. Hogarth's pug was called Trump — jocular 18th-century slang for 'fart'.

Such anecdotes may sound trivial, but the subject of our relationship with animals is a serious one, and has attracted much

*Byron's menagerie consisted of 'eight enormous dogs, three monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow and a falcon'*

philosophical attention. Harvey shirks none of this — even though the reader may be impatient for the next juicy tidbit.

The assumption that those who love their pets necessarily love animals in general is certainly questionable. Jan Morris, who lives in Wales, has tremendous contempt for sheep, but writes wonderfully about cats. As does Harvey. She describes one of her own, dying, as: 'Quills for bones and thistle-down for fur, a delicate fetish where there had been a cat.'

## A combustible combo

Clinton Heylin

### This Searing Light, the Sun and Everything Else: Joy Division, the Oral History

by Jon Savage  
Faber, £20, pp. 336

Once upon a time there was the archetypal Manchester band — half of which came from Macclesfield, in leafy Cheshire, and a quarter of which grew up in Salford, a city in its own right, full of fans of a famous football club equally confused about its true home. This combustible combo was Joy Division — or it was after they dropped Warsaw, because of its Nazi connotations, adopting instead a moniker given to the brothels in Nazi concentration camps. Not a mass of contradictions, then.

Bathed in such muddy waters, Joy Division remains a band in need of serious re-evaluation 40 years after the release of their debut LP, *Unknown Pleasures*. And Jon Savage seems the perfect choice to do posterity such a service, being one of three national music journalists who lived in Manchester in its post-punk heyday.

Back then, that trio would take turns to champion this band of miscreant public schoolboys and dyed-in-red-wool football hooligans when their music, at least, could barely get arrested. Mick Middles and Paul Morley — the other Mancunian punk pen-smiths, whom readers of *NME* and *Sounds*



devoured in *their* post-punk heyday — shot their own literary wads in 2006 and 2016 covering Division in posterity's dusky afterglow and applying (some spurious) shades of meaning.

Now it's the turn of the esteemed author of *England's Dreaming*. But it is one Savage has consciously abrogated — which is a crying shame. I wanted to read *Savage Does Division*, not the rambling latter-day reminisces of the three survivors of the band, all of whom have already published their own memoirs (the last of which, from the drummer Stephen Morris, came out only a few weeks ago).

It is rare for a writer this good to stoop to co-opting such a slipshod sub-genre. Generally, oral histories — certainly in the punk domain — prove the truth of the maxim that those who can, write and those who can't, compile others' words and call it a history. In reality, it's merely the raw data for history.

The late Brendan Mullen, the loquacious Legs McNeil and self-promoter par excellence John Robb have all published eminently readable oral histories of the punk scenes in LA, New York and England respectively. They have done so with resources a-plenty, there being substantial numbers of embittered blowhards looking to vent their frustrations at the world's iniquities. Like I say, eminently readable.

If almost nothing recorded in Mullen's or McNeil's tomes is actually true, punk was always about perception taking a sledgehammer to inconvenient truths: most of these bands weren't very good and almost none of them sold any records.

However, unlike most of their contemporaries, JD really were very, very good on stage, mustering a tidal wave of noise at the centre of which was the whirling dervish Ian Curtis, apoplectically — or, as it turned out, epileptically — lost in the music. Yet most people lucky enough to have heard Joy Division live — where they were masters of their own domain — would have seen them playing support to the likes of the Rezillos, Buzzcocks and PiL.

Meanwhile, as a self-immolating gesture to punk solidarity, JD did all they could to ensure they sold precious few records. Nothing released in the band's lifetime even set the alternative charts alight, let alone charted in the real world. With Tony Wilson running their record label (on a small bequest from his mother) and a manager who really wanted to be a Northern Soul DJ, they never stood a chance.

The duo of dunderheads they entrusted to make the 'right' commercial decisions duly appointed as their producer Martin Hannett, who frankly should have been with the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. The result was a sound largely appropriated from the likes of Pere Ubu, a band first championed in print by one Jon Savage; a

connection some Stretford smartass noted in the first JD monograph, *Form & Substance*, in 1987.

Herein, though, precedents and antecedents have they none. No one even mentions the pivotal role of the Ubu/Pop Group Rafters show in April 1978. But at least Peter Hook takes issue with Hannett's idea of production: 'There must be only me and Bernard... that don't like Unknown Pleasures, because it doesn't sound like we did live. It's pretty one-dimensional.'

Such insights, though, have to be hewn out of this slightly indulgent exercise, by folk who've already gleaned that something lifelike resides below the surface sound effects and tragic idiot act that brought this story, and the band, to a premature close.

Savage — a writer I greatly admire — has preferred to turn the tape-recorder and/or camera on a small cabal of the usual suspects (most of the interviews being for a recently broadcast documentary). It means the same old, same old: mythology reinforced by men — and a couple of token women — who still can't explain who shot this post-modern Liberty Valance.

## Poisoned paradise

### Tom Smalley

#### Surrender: Mid-life in the American West

by Joanna Pocock  
Fitzcarraldo, £12.99, pp. 309

For Joanna Pocock, a midlife crisis is the moment in which 'bored of the rhythm of our days, whatever those may be... we begin to realise that we have more past than future'. With the approach of her 50th birthday and the onset of the menopause, she is struck powerfully by this notion. Her response is to leave London and to

*In Montana's 'Eden', the rivers are sterile and wildfires have left a blasted, barren landscape*

relocate, with her husband and their six-year-old daughter, to the American West, a place where she hopes 'the fabric of our lives and rhythm of our days would be different'.

It is an idyllic, optimistic premise that ties into the mythos of the American West as being a place where people can reinvent themselves. In the opening pages of *Surrender* — which won the 2018 Fitzcarraldo Editions Essay Prize — she describes the view from her bedroom window suddenly becoming dominated by 'mountains and sky and deer looking in'. 'Montana strikes the newcomer as a sort of Eden.'

Beneath the surface of this Eden, how-



## Life at the Globe

This column concludes my brief series about Shakespeare and the Globe, linked to the summer season of history plays — from Richard II to Henry V — sponsored by Merian. It's been a pleasure to write. And one of the special pleasures it has offered is the chance to explore what Oxford's Professor of Shakespeare Studies, Emma Smith, identifies in her book *This Is Shakespeare* as the Stratford man's outstanding quality: what she calls his 'gappiness'. That is what academics more usually call indeterminacy. (I can see why she prefers 'gappiness'.)

What she means by that is that the plays, rather than arguing a series of political, moral or personal positions, instead leave great gaps into which their audiences can project meaning. It's true of all literary writing, but especially true of Shakespeare. He's king of the implied question mark. It's what Keats (in special reference to Shakespeare) called 'negative capability'. And it's why in even the few weeks I've been writing these little squibs we've seen a Shakespeare who can blow the trumpet for a just war and show its awful costs; who can map out the honourable path to kingship and bring its dishonourable flipside to compelling human life; who can sound like an ardent Brexiteer and a thoroughgoing European.

I'd like to commend to you Emma's conversation with me on our books podcast ([www.spectator.co.uk/emmasmith](http://www.spectator.co.uk/emmasmith)). One of the things I asked her about was something that has long bothered me: isn't it anti-intellectual that in all our curricula, and indeed in our national life, we tend to regard Shakespeare not as one writer among many, but as an isolated monument? Even in undergraduate courses, there's Shakespeare and then there's the rest of literature. It's weird. But you don't need to subscribe to Harold Bloom's slightly batty notion that Shakespeare 'invented' modern humanity to see him as a bit special. It is my admittedly anti-intellectual view — and I hope it is yours — that Shakespeare really was just quite a lot better than everybody else.

— Sam Leith

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ever, the reality is more complex. Run-off from copper mining has left rivers biologically sterile; global warming has caused glaciers to melt; and a million acres of forest are being destroyed by wildfires. In Pocock's evocative descriptions of these events, her grief is palpable. The fires leave behind 'a blasted, barren landscape of blackened trees'. At a polluted creek, 'water the colour of split peas buries standing trees half way up their trunks'.

There is the sense that, in these descriptions of lifeless landscapes, Pocock is also grappling with the menopausal changes within her own body. Perhaps because of this parallel, her rendering of the American West is often framed in a manner both physical and deeply personal. She feels the seasons 'swinging off their axis, in [her] body', as she 'drowns in news of poisoned rivers and melting glaciers'.

Exploring the history of the land and the many existing disputes over how it should be used (and by whom), Pocock delves into the various subcultures that populate the respective extremes of these debates. They range from wolf-trappers and anti-government patriot groups (at a picnic hosted by the latter, she describes how 'almost everybody had a copy of the constitution sticking out of their back pockets, next to their holsters'), to people who have learned to live, often at the very fringes of modern society, in a state of symbiosis with nature.

In the woods of Washington State, Pocock attends a festival for 'Ecosexuals', a group whose philosophy revolves around the idea that you should treat the environment as you would a lover. On the 'sacred hoop' (a Native American 'lifeway', whose adherents migrate, annually, across seven states — subsisting on crops that they plant and harvest along the way), she meets Finisia Medrano, a 61-year-old transsexual rewilding who has lived continuously on 'the hoop' for 35 years. Pocock is drawn to people who, like Finisia, have made what many would consider extreme choices in their efforts to live more harmoniously with nature and who, as she admits, lead 'lives I am not brave enough to live'.

*Surrender* is not just a historical or ethnographic exploration, however; it is also an attempt by Pocock to understand her place in the world, as a woman in the latter half of her life, as a mother and as a human being: 'I was dipping in and out of people's lives; I was becoming infertile; I was watching my child grow up; I had witnessed a lot of death.'

This is a bewitching and deeply affecting book. Pocock's elegant interweaving of the intimate and the expansive, the personal and the universal, culminates in a work that forces us to consider our own place in, and impact upon, a world that could itself have more past than future.



*Alma Mahler: vain, cruel, magnetic, beautiful and sexy*

## The loveliest girl in Vienna

Mark Bostridge

### Passionate Spirit: The Life of Alma Mahler

by Cate Haste  
Bloomsbury, £26, pp. 469

It must be rare for a popular song to have such a lasting influence on a posthumous reputation. However, this is the case with Tom Lehrer's deliciously satirical tribute, 'Alma'. Reading Alma Mahler's obituary in 1964 — the 'juiciest, spiciest, raciest' he'd ever come across — Lehrer was amazed by her matrimonial CV and proceeded to immortalise it in a catchy lyric.

Not only had Alma been married three times, to the composer Gustav Mahler, to Walter Gropius, the founder of Bauhaus, and, finally, to Franz Werfel, author of the runaway bestseller *The Song of Bernadette*, she'd also managed to bag as lovers some of the top creative men in the Europe of her time. Gustav Klimt had given Alma her first kiss, while her relationship with the Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka was 'one fierce battle of love', full of explosive sexual power. It

was people like Alma, Lehrer quipped, who make you realise how little you've accomplished. She was both 'the loveliest girl in Vienna' and 'the smartest'.

Alma has been portrayed in a host of books, plays and films. She has even given her name to a problem. 'The Alma Problem', coined by musicologists and Mahler scholars, refers to the ways in which she falsified and manipulated the written record of her life with the composer to her own advantage in the decades following his death in 1911. Her destruction of all but one of her letters to Mahler makes it almost impossible to determine the extent to which she acted as a nurturer of, and muse to, his genius.

She is problematic, too, as a biographical subject not least because her behaviour is such a mass of contradictions. She never lost the taint of anti-Semitism prevalent from her youth in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian empire and spent a lifetime making startlingly offensive remarks about Jews, fuelled in old age by her daily bottle of Benedictine liqueur. Yet she married two Jews

— Mahler (a convert to Catholicism) and Werfel — and bravely stood by Werfel when his books were burned by the Nazis, following him into exile in America, all the while making it clear that she supported neither the 'bacillus' of Nazism, nor its ideological anti-Semitism.

The Alma of *Passionate Spirit* is a more sympathetic creature than the monster of previous biographies. She may still act abominably, but Cate Haste has wisely forsaken the harshly judgmental tone so often used about Alma, and corrected significant errors that have contributed to the monster legend (for example, the despicable Elias Canetti described witnessing Alma's false tears, 'like enormous pearls', at her daughter Manon Gropius's funeral, even though Alma turns out not have been present at the ceremony).

Haste makes it clear that Alma's overwhelming desire to 'fill her garden with geniuses' stemmed from her idolisation of her father, the court painter Emil Schindler, who died in 1892 when she was 13. Alma had begun to compose on a piano when she was nine. By 19 she knew Wagner's operas by heart and had determined to 'be a somebody'. But at the same time she recognised her own vulgarity and superficiality, and



her longing to bask in someone else's reflected glory.

When Mahler, 20 years her senior, proposed to Alma in 1901 her doubts centred on the dilemma of whether she loved the man himself or 'the wonderful conductor' (she was lukewarm about his music). She also measured him against her current passion, the composer Alexander Zemlinsky, asking herself in her diary: 'What if Alex were to become famous?' This ability to grade husbands and lovers according to a fame and creativity rating established a pattern for the future. When her marriage to Gropius failed, Alma wondered how she could ever be expected to be interested in 'art of a moderate talent'.

Mahler's devastating letter to Alma, weeks before their marriage, in which he told her to give up her own ambitions as a composer and accept her position as a 'loving partner' supporting his work, has rightly been attacked as a monstrous ban on a woman's artistic expression. Seventeen songs by Alma survive in published form and they have won modern plaudits for their gift of melody. Haste writes of music as being at the core of Alma's being; and yet she never returned to composing, even after Mahler's death. For such a forceful, independent personality this is surprising, and it's all too easy to subscribe,

as Haste does in part, to a myth of Alma's own making, that although Mahler 'meant me no murder' he had effectively murdered her genius.

So instead she fed the creativity of others. Werfel couldn't decide whether Alma was his 'greatest joy' or his 'greatest disaster', but there's no doubt that she forced him into becoming a more successful writer. Her power over men lay in their belief that she would make the best of them. She was vain and at times cruel. She was also magnetic, beautiful and sexy.

Kokoschka thought that he couldn't live without her. After their affair ended, he commissioned a doll-maker to create a life-size

*Alma recognised her own vulgarity and superficiality, her longing to bask in someone else's reflected glory*

replica of Alma. The finished doll was as beautiful as Alma, even though its breasts and hips were stuffed with sawdust. Dressed in the finest Paris fashions, it accompanied Kokoschka on rides in his carriage — though he denied claims he took it to the opera. Eventually, doused in red wine, the Alma substitute lost its head at a party — an image, Kokoschka said, of the spent love 'that no Pygmalion could bring to life'.

## Evil under the sun John Burnside

### This Storm

by James Ellroy  
Heinemann, £20, pp. 577

When James Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential* appeared in 1990, it introduced us to a world of blatant corruption, casual racism and routine police brutality that, a year before anybody ever heard of Rodney King, might have seemed fanciful to some. Set in the early 1950s, the novel was a landmark in neo-noir writing, in which historical detail mingled with pacy fiction to conjure up a city that was both highly glamorous and rotten to the core. At the same time, Ellroy's staccato, near-telegraphic prose drove the action relentlessly onwards, with an urgency that seemed designed to swamp not just the reader but also the protagonists themselves with noise, movement and a lowering, inescapable sense of doom.

For Ellroy, this brutal, sleazy world was personal: growing up in Los Angeles, he had not only witnessed its violence first-hand but, at the age of ten, had lost his mother, Jean, in a rape-homicide case that was eerily reminiscent of the infa-



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mous Black Dahlia murder, on which the L.A. Quartet's first volume was based. Now, with *This Storm*, Ellroy redeploys some of his original cast, while adding a whole new layer of sinister figures, including historical players who, in various ways, helped shape the America we know today. (A helpful *dramatis personae* is included as an appendix, offering some provocative home truths about the nature and extent of corruption that has always haunted American political life.)

The book opens, in inimitable Ellroy fashion, with a no-holds-barred alcohol and drug-fuelled party at New Year's Eve, 1941: as America prepares for war, Los Angeles prepares to reap the rewards, of which the most lucrative, for now, is the routine business of relieving Japanese-American citizens of their valuables before dumping them in internment camps. Meanwhile, the city is experiencing an unusually powerful rainstorm that instigates a seemingly routine murder investigation, after a body is washed out of the mud in Griffith Park; it also provokes a naval officer, named Joan Conville, to make some unexpected career changes, after she ploughs into a truckful of Mexican workers while driving under the influence.

From these seemingly random events, Ellroy guides the reader through a series

of strange, sometimes bizarre alliances and accommodations, as his assembled crew of pimps, enforcers, conmen, dealers and shameless war profiteers pursue their several conflicting goals.

Without a doubt, Ellroy aficionados will love *This Storm*. Others may balk at its length and complexity, or at its headlong momentum. Possibly, in an era when many readers complain if they cannot find likeable or 'relatable' characters in a novel, there will be those who dislike the fact that everyone here could be described as morally wanting (to put it kindly). Yet surely it is one of the uses of fiction to explore, if not to rectify, the moral failures of any age. At the end of *This Storm*, a man is brutally and systematically beaten by a pair of Los Angeles police officers; at this point in the proceedings, their superiors

*Aged ten, Ellroy lost his mother in a rape-homicide case eerily reminiscent of the infamous Black Dahlia murder*

have seemingly logical reasons for allowing them to act in this way and they are able to do so in the full confidence that there will be no consequences.

Similarly, in the closing weeks of 1942, a 44-year-old public accountant named Stanley Beebe was beaten so severely while in LAPD custody that he died of his injuries — yet not only were his attackers acquitted, but the authorities even claimed that Beebe's wife had murdered him when he was released into her care after the beating. At the time, the LA police chief, one Clemence B. Horrall (who appears in *This Storm* and in Ellroy's previous novel, *Perfidia*), was widely recognised as irredeemably corrupt; but it took seven more years before he was forced out of office, after perjuring himself before a grand jury investigating the Brenda Allen vice ring. (Allen also appears in a number of Ellroy's novels.)

So it continues, with one sorry tale of power and its abuse dovetailing into another, and gradually we begin to see the patterns, all the ways in which those in high places protect themselves and their lackeys, at least for as long as they are useful. The characters we meet in *This Storm* may not be relatable, but, for those of us still following the news, they are all too often eerily familiar and their methods need to be understood.

What Ellroy shows us, time and time again, is not only the ugliness of corruption but also the shame that infects an entire society when the guilty are permitted to go about their business so brazenly and with such a clear sense of entitlement that we no longer recognise what is right and what is most surely and inarguably wrong.

## Three's a crowd Andrew Taylor

### Shadowplay

by Joseph O'Connor

Harvill Secker, £14.99, pp. 320

'I am very, very pleased,' murmured Queen Victoria in 1895, when she dubbed Henry Irving, Britain's first theatrical knight. He and Ellen Terry, who so often played opposite him, were international celebrities.

Bram Stoker was their intimate friend and associate. He managed Irving's Lyceum Theatre for 27 years and spent much of his career in their shadow. More than 100 years after his death, however, Stoker's name is almost certainly more widely known than theirs, solely because of his most famous creation, *Dracula* (who is believed to have been partly modelled on his employer).

In *Shadowplay*, Joseph O'Connor focuses on the three-cornered relationship between Stoker and the two actors. In terms of structure, the novel purports to be a collection of diary entries, notes, transcripts and fictionalised fragments put together by Stoker near the end of his life.

At its heart is the rambling, leaking world of the Lyceum, both sordid and glamorous. Stoker creates a hiding place for himself in the attic, where he writes the stories that bring him little contemporary success; known as Mina's Lair, the attic also houses something undead in a box filled with earth. In another of the many nods to *Dracula*, he recruits an enigmatic assistant called Jonathan Harker.

Irving, who despises Stoker's literary ambitions, is by turns tyrannical, temperamental and overwhelmingly charming. Both men are more than half in love with Ellen Terry. Stoker, charged with nervous energy, seems constantly on the brink of disaster. He prowls the streets of London by night, and he has lustful thoughts about young men. Suffragettes, Oscar Wilde and Jack the Ripper all have their parts to play, but the novel returns again and again to the emotionally confused *ménage à trois* at its heart.

*Shadowplay* does not set out to be historically accurate. O'Connor takes liberties with everything from the language to the biographical facts. At one point, for instance, Queen Victoria picnics in Green Park, surrounded by a 'squadron of Beefeaters in scarlet and black livery, bayonets drawn', and watched by a crowd of her cheering, flag-waving subjects.

This is a novel you have to take on its own terms — and the rewards for doing so are considerable. Much of it is beautifully written. O'Connor creates a vivid and vigorous world of his own. He makes us believe in his own versions of Henry Irving, Ellen Terry and Bram Stoker, and he makes us care what happens to them. Who needs facts when fiction like this is on offer?

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*Rogue icebergs start appearing at 60° S, making even the most experienced sailors wary*

## The cruellest sea *Katrina Gulliver*

### **Wild Sea: A History of the Southern Ocean**

by Joy McCann

Chicago, £21, pp. 258

'Below the Forties there is no law, and below the Fifties there is no God.' Most sailors know some version of this saying, referring to the dangerous waters more than 40° south of the equator.

In *Wild Sea*, Joy McCann focuses on these waters with a history of the Southern Ocean. The ocean surrounds Antarctica, its northern bound still open to dispute. In the 1928 first edition of *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, the Southern Ocean was delineated by land-based limits: Antarctica to the south, and South America, Africa, Australia and Broughton Island, New Zealand to the north.

More recently, cartographers have tried to limit its scope. UK officials take the position that the Southern Ocean starts at 55°S, while their Australian counterparts still measure the limits of the ocean by its contact with land masses, meaning that it reaches up to the southern coasts of Australia and South America.

When even defining the ocean is difficult, it proves an elusive subject of study. The Southern Ocean is one we don't often think about: it has no famous ports and its cultural influence is diffuse. Some don't even realise it has an identity. (I mentioned it to one friend and he thought immediate-

ly of Tahiti. That would be the South Seas.)

But as an ocean it certainly has its characteristics. As the nautical saying suggests, much of this is rough water. For a vessel heading south, rogue icebergs start appearing at 60° S. The cold gales and ocean currents can make even the most experienced sailor wary. But the risk carries a payoff in speed.

This is thanks to the world's longest ocean current: the Antarctic circumpolar current, which speeds along from west to east with no land masses in the way to slow or divert it. In the 19th century it was discovered that for ships travelling from Europe to Australasia the quickest

*The Southern Ocean, littered with wrecks, contains the point on the globe farthest from any land*

route was to head south after passing the Cape of Good Hope and be carried along by the current and high winds of the Southern Ocean.

It's a strategy still used by round-the-world yacht racers. But heading so far from any land or hope of rescue is extremely risky. The Southern Ocean is littered with wrecks. It contains the oceanic pole of inaccessibility (at 48°52.6 S 123°23.6 W), the point on the globe farthest from any land — more than 1,400 nautical miles. That means days of sailing for any rescue vessel, although now that few of us travel by ship it's easy to forget the scale involved. Readers may remember Tony Bullimore's miraculous rescue from his capsized yacht, at 52°S 100°E: the remoteness of the South-

ern Ocean is real, even given today's satellite mapping and communications.

McCann is an environmental historian and her focus is our growing knowledge of the ocean and its incorporation into our understanding of the world. The first tentative European explorations of the Southern Ocean were made in the hope of finding another great continent (not Antarctica). Circumnavigators dipped into it while working their way round Tierra del Fuego. It was the furthest ocean from Europe, and the last to be charted.

The scientific possibilities were recognised early — the area features species found nowhere else — and the economic value was not far behind. By the mid-19th century, whalers and sealers were heading south to pursue their quarry, chasing them into the currents.

The Southern Ocean contains marine life still being discovered. Today much of it is protected as being part of the Antarctic; but it is not immune from the environmental problems of the rest of the world. Changing ocean temperatures and pollution are affecting it in different ways, and increased tourist traffic to Antarctica creates its own pressures. Its wildness and remoteness unfortunately constitutes part of its appeal.

McCann intersperses her own observations of the ocean with the story of its discovery and exploitation, beginning each chapter with an entry similar to an explorer's journal. But she does not foreground herself, dropping out of sight subtly to adopt the authorial voice, creating an effective and dramatic narrative.



Charlemagne's nephew Roland — in gold armour, with his horn — is killed at Roncevalles in the Pyrenees in 778. The battle is the subject of the great medieval epic, the *Chanson de Roland*

## Myths ancient and modern

### Carolyn Larrington

#### **Epic Continent: Adventures in the Great Stories of Europe**

by Nicholas Jubber

John Murray, £20, pp. 322

Six remarkable stories shape this book. Tracing the trajectories of the *Odyssey* to the Icelandic *Njals Saga*, via the *Kosovo Cycle* of heroic poems, the French *Chanson de Roland*, the German *Nibelunglied* and our own home-grown epic *Beowulf*, Nicholas Jubber's new work is at once a travel journal, a meditation on the idea — and ideal — of Europe, and an exploration of a pivotal moment in the author's own past. Following the 2016 referendum, Jubber sets off to the Greek island of Chios, perhaps Homer's birthplace, and now at the front line of the Mediterranean migrant crisis. After a month volunteering in a refugee camp he works his way west and northwards until he comes to rest on the turf roof of a farmhouse in southern Iceland.

The prose is colourful and vigorous; landscape is frequently described through dynamic verbs and unusual similes. So in Serbia: 'Fast-moving streams played glissandos on the shallow beds, and precipitous meadows dangled above us, like rags pinned to the sky by their sheep.' Jubber's advance from John Murray can't have been over-generous; he sleeps rough, on trains and in doorways, hoarding his resources like

the migrants whose paths so often intersect with his own.

Interwoven with the usual adventures of travel — late-night drinking in smoke-filled bars, quirky conversations, semi-comic mishaps and often terrible weather — is a more profound meditation — indeed much direct reportage — on contemporary and historical ideas of European identity, the notion of homeland and that shining promise of a better life that our continent seems to extend to its neighbours.

The six epics spark Jubber's imagination in different ways. The *Odyssey* triggers thoughts about the bonds between fathers

*Njals Saga isn't really an epic but a tale of local politics and southern Icelandic sheep farmers*

and sons and the loss of his own father. The *Kosovo Cycle*, least known of the six perhaps, is embedded in a series of encounters with Kosovans, Serbs and Bosnians, each of whom has their own disquieting story to tell about the ways in which, 20 years after the last Balkan war, the 14th-century battle of Kosovo Field still resonates with nationalist aspirations and anxieties.

Great epics do not simply relate past stories, but rather, disturbingly, continue to give shape to dangerously powerful emotions. Reminding us of Islam's long history in Europe, both the Kosovan poems and the *Chanson de Roland* feature invading Muslim enemies; the Christians respond with treach-

erous infiltration of the enemy camp and suicidal last stands.

After the macho posturing of these two poems, the *Nibelunglied* offers relief — of a kind. Jubber focuses on Queen Kriemhilt, whose dramatic clash with Queen Brünhilt over social precedence culminates in a bloodbath in which she takes a shockingly active role. Then it's on to Britain — a little awkwardly, since *Beowulf* is set entirely in Scandinavia. Jubber's adventures on home turf try to localise the poem's place of origin, in midland Mercia or the fen fastnesses of East Anglia. Next, he takes ship for Denmark, to the reconstructed royal hall that the monster Grendel sought to destroy. By the time he reaches Iceland, sailing on the notorious Faroese ferry, the *Smyril*, autumn has definitively arrived. Weather and mood have turned.

Iceland's geothermal landscapes are strikingly described, but Jubber himself runs somewhat out of steam here. As he admits, *Njals Saga*, wonderful though it is, isn't really an epic, but rather a tale of local politics and southern Icelandic sheep farmers. The translation cited is 150 years old, yielding some unfamiliar character names and archaic dialogue; contemporary Icelanders' names too are often mangled.

Nevertheless, these chapters not only recount the highlights of two of the most important sagas — *Laxdæla Saga* has an intertextual connection with the *Nibelungenlied* story, but as a bonus, they also consider the *Poetic Edda*, the great anthology of mythological and heroic poetry



written down in Iceland around 1270 and which has a better claim to engagement with epic themes.

Jubber heads to the remote north-east to visit the island's newest literary monument, the Arctic Henge, still under construction. This huge stone circle records the long list of dwarf-names that appears in the *Edda's* very first poem, 'The Seeress's Prophecy'. The *Edda* also offers its own distinctive version of the heroic legends about Sigurðr the dragon-slayer and his fierce wife Guðrún, the Northern reflex of Kriemhilt. These refigure the *Nibelungenlied* material in a mode that is highly critical of the epic ideals of honour and vengeance, increasingly placed under pressure throughout the book. Iceland's relative isolation from the European mainland may have safeguarded the *Edda* as a unique testament to our likely pre-Christian Germanic heritage, but it could not prevent the Nazis from harnessing these poems for propaganda, claiming them as a repository of ideal Aryan heroism.

From this bleak point, at the very edge of Europe, it's time to turn for home. Jubber's journeying has indeed been epic, in scale and in ambition. In this thoughtful travelogue he has woven together colourful ancient and modern threads into a European tapestry that combines the sombre and the sparkling.

## An agonising vigil

Amanda Craig

### Mother Ship

by Francesca Segal  
Chatto, £14.99, pp. 288

Memoirs about giving birth, a subject once shrouded in mystery, have become so popular that another may seem otiose. We are all produced in variations of anxiety, pain and delight: what is the point of labouring labour?

Two years ago, the novelist Francesca Segal gave birth to twins ten weeks prematurely. Her account of their struggle to survive in the neo-natal units of two London hospitals could be mawkish, banal and of no interest to anyone save those who have experienced a similar ordeal. That it is, in fact, as gripping as a thriller and as moving as a love story is testament to her exquisite writing and deep humanity.

Her narrative moves from the joyful and humorous ('we shared a new and urgent interest in anchovies and cottage cheese,' she says of the developing twins inside her) to the appalling: finding herself bleeding in the hospital loo, she tries to clean up the mess before pulling the emergency cord. Her introduction to motherhood feels 'not like a birth but an evisceration'.

Unable to be cuddled or touched, the

babies she initially calls A and B each weigh less than a bag of sugar. Too fragile for clothes, but with their 'fine leaf-veining' visible beneath translucent skin, they are menaced by their immaturity, by the flu virus season and by endless interventions that can go wrong. What can make the difference to a premature baby is the milk its mother must express eight to ten times every 24 hours. Still recovering from abdominal surgery, Segal becomes one of a number of such mothers, attached to a breast pump and experiencing the accelerated intimacies of medical trauma.

What these new mothers call 'the milking shed' is a novel topos, described as 'a place, a state, of grace'. Friendship, jokes, fantasies of arranged marriages between their babies and sympathy transcend class, race, status and education. I have long thought

*Segal's gentle humour makes every setback and advance more affecting during the 56 days of struggle*

that childbirth is the female equivalent of the battlefield, and Segal's account of how people with nothing much in common are bound together by trauma and hope underlines this. In this place, fear of mental or physical impairment shrivel before the fear of death. The privileged north London world she has described so elegantly in *The Innocents* and *The Awkward Age* can never look the same again.

Segal's gentle humour and eye for character are two of the most admirable aspects of her book and make every setback and advance more affecting during the 56 days of struggle. Some useful practical information is woven into her account as Celeste and Raffaella — as A and B eventually become — move in and out of crisis, 'handled like precious relics', but needing to be left every day by their agonised mother.

The state provision of services that would, in other continents, cost many thousands of pounds is something that, as an American, Segal is in awe of. From beanbag hands that retail at \$99 a pair, donated free as effective comforters, to the overworked but compassionate nurses and doctors, these are some of the miracles which we take for granted. *Mother Ship* is a love letter to the NHS, as much as to the babies and women of the milking shed.

Of the 60,000 premature babies born annually, Segal tells us, 85 per cent are (as my own son was) 'moderate to late preterm'. Her twins were squarely in the 'very preterm' box. If you have had any experience of a traumatic birth, be warned: you will burst into tears at what happens here. But Segal's book, like the best war stories, has a happy ending — albeit one that does not forget the tiny 'fallen soldier' who was unable to win through.

## The lust of kings

Diana Hendry

### Lux

by Elizabeth Cook  
Scribe, £16.99, pp. 403

The novel is a wonderfully commodious creature. One might wish they made trousers like it, for it can stretch or shrink to accommodate almost anything, from Ali Smith's *Spring* (part story, part polemic) to Max Porter's prose-poem/fable, *Lanny*. Then there's the current vogue for re-tellings: Margaret Atwood's version of *The Tempest* and Pat Barker's feminist look at the *Iliad*. Penguin even has a 'Modern Retellings Book List', which includes Alexander McCall Smith's reworking of *Emma*. (Why would you?)

Elizabeth Cook was ahead of the game with her *Achilles* in 2001. Her latest book, *Lux*, four times as long, having been 'slow in the making', is a kind of meditative triptych ('Ark', 'Prophet', 'Poet') rooted in the tale of David and Bathsheba. The story has everything a novelist could wish for in its themes of power, lust, love, faith and conscience.

'Ark' introduces us to the children's David, the shepherd boy who kills the giant Goliath with a single stone from his sling. Then he becomes king, lusts after Bathsheba (who in turn becomes pregnant) and very nastily arranges for her husband to be killed by sending him back to the war.

In 'Prophet', David is brought to recognise the abuse of power that has led him to sin against Yahweh. The prophet Nathan foretells that Bathsheba's child will die as a result of David's dishonouring of Yahweh. As penance, David spends seven days fasting and meditating and emerges wiser, kinder and with psalms to sing.

Primarily a poet, Cook writes with impressive empathy for David. There is both a painterly eye and a physicality about her prose. Michael Symmons Roberts's endorsement of *Lux* rightly focuses on its 'striking portrayal of religious belief under pressure'.

The third part leaps forward to the spring of 1528 and to the poet Thomas Wyatt. Henry VIII's desire for Anne Boleyn can be compared to David's for Bathsheba. Henry acquires rich Flemish tapestries depicting the early lovers, and arranges a dramatic pageant to exhibit them, witnessed by Wyatt. The poet is familiar with the story and the psalms, and David's seven songs of penitence have 'long inhabited him'. He has time while in the Tower to remember and 'English' them — making them, one critic has said, penitential in matter and a penance for the reader. The connection between David and Wyatt seems to me a bit precarious (Cook did the same with Achilles, linking him to Keats). Wyatt's falcon is depicted on the cover, symbolising both freedom and light.

## ARTS

# Ring without the bling

Richard Bratby on the company that broke the mould for summer opera

At Longborough Festival Opera, Richard Wagner is on the roof. Literally: his statue stands on top of the little pink opera house, surveying the Evenlode valley from beneath a stone beret. He's not alone, mind. A figure of Mozart looks up indignantly. On the other side of the pediment stands Verdi, arms folded, glowering huffily at the floor. But Wagner is on top: a permanent reminder that this is the company that took on the greatest musical-dramatic challenge in the operatic universe, and in 2013 staged a full production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in a converted barn.

And next week, they're going to start all over again. The 2019 Festival opens with *Das Rheingold*, with a full cycle scheduled for 2023, the year that the company's irrepressible founder Martin Graham turns 80. It's a brand-new production: LFO isn't the kind of outfit that can afford to maintain warehouses full of mothballed sets. To create a new *Ring* from scratch less than a decade after the previous production — when the challenge of mounting a single *Ring* has been known to break national opera companies — is pretty unprecedented. And since LFO has little left to prove (Michael Tanner called its 2017 production of *Tristan und Isolde* 'one of the most exalting experiences I have had in the opera house'), you might be tempted to ask why. To which

there's no more eloquent an answer than attending a performance for yourself. The spirit of the place wells up from Graham's boyish devotion to Wagner, coupled to his wife Lizzie's organisational genius. A sense of shared, incredulous delight to be doing this at all pours out of everyone you talk to: tuba players, conductors or the ladies serving the interval tea.

Second time round it's also a question of how. Surprisingly, direction of the whole massive project has been handed to Amy

*LFO staged a complete Ring cycle in a former chicken shed — and is about to do it all over again*

Lane, a newcomer to Longborough. But Lane worked as associate director on successive revivals of Keith Warner's Royal Opera *Ring*, and has been formulating her own plans for nearly a decade.

'In 2012, when we'd just finished the cycle at Covent Garden, my next job was in Paris working on a musical. I had to get Wagner out of my system, so I spent my spare time designing what I thought my ideal *Ring* cycle would be, if someone ever asked me. I never thought in a million years that anybody would ask me. Then I got a phone call from Lizzie Graham saying, "Would you like to discuss some Wagner?" And she dropped the *Ring* cycle on the table. That was quite a

moment — as soon as she mentioned what it was, it was a "yes" from me. Then the terror of the undertaking catches up with you — pretty quickly, but in the best way. I mean, what a gift.'

For some directors that terror would only be intensified by the bare-bones practicalities of Longborough's 500-seat theatre. When you're working in a former chicken shed — even one with a Bayreuth-sized orchestra pit — you can't simply install a three-storey spiral of liquid fire, as Warner did at Covent Garden. Lane has embraced Longborough's animating principle: that practical obstacles spur creativity. 'The limitations of the stage I found completely appealing,' she says.

'Even the train journey from London to Moreton-in-Marsh: you leave the city behind, the air changes and the landscape changes and you suddenly have a horizon. That's pretty Wagnerian on its own. And then you go into the theatre: there are no wings, you can't fly anything and I just fell in love with it because it removes any form of trappings. That is why a text-driven, score-driven *Ring* cycle sits perfectly here — there isn't much room for trickery. I'm thrilled with our designs: we have a very clean, clear statement space. I believe we've found a way of travelling through all of Wagner's worlds that Longborough won't have seen before, and which allows the story to live.'





MATTHEW XU/WWW.SPECTATOR.CO.UK

*Richard Wagner stands on top of the little pink opera house at Longborough, flanked by Mozart and Verdi*

Such innovation doesn't sit entirely easily with the stereotype of summer opera in the UK — a world of picnics and novelty cummerbunds, where the prospect of artistic change is about as welcome as wasps on a Fortnum's vol-au-vent. Longborough, built from the ground up over three strenuous decades, has never really been like that. Polly Graham — Martin and Lizzie's daughter, who's worked as a staff director at Welsh National Opera and became artistic director of the family firm last year — has described the 'tropes of country house opera' as 'damaging', and you can see her point. Longborough's hillside setting is almost inappropriately pretty. The orchestra's brass section plays gigs in the village pub, and you might spot the general manager scooping up a stray chicken five minutes before curtain-up. (Full disclosure: I made a smallish donation to LFO this year because, like Klingsor's garden in *Parsifal*, it's all just so damnably seductive.)

But the fact remains: if your core business is serving bubbly to the green welly set, you don't stage a *Ring* cycle. 'I really don't

think that's who we are,' says Polly. 'It's not a grand country house, it's a new-build in a field, and next to it is an agricultural barn that was converted into a theatre. That's the extent of any kind of grand estate. All that's there is an amazing view and the determination to create great work.' Martin, with his impromptu pre-show speeches, is certainly not your average châtelain. ('Tell

*Such innovation doesn't sit entirely easily with the world of picnics and novelty cummerbunds*

*The Spectator* that I was a dodgy builder,' he insists — his first career was as a property developer.) As LFO moves from its early years as upstart overachiever, Polly aims to broaden repertoire and (the real challenge) access; a production of Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen* next season will involve sizeable community participation.

And perhaps, two *Ring* cycles in, it's tempting to see LFO's achievement as something established, rather than a continuous process of taking risks, backing hunch-

es and assuming that no door is locked until it's been given a vigorous shove. The Grahams's determination to trust their artists has led to misfires: a grim sci-fi *Fidelio*, and a 2015 *Tristan* in which body-stocking dancers simulated sex during the Act Two love duet.

Other gambles have paid off tenfold. Longborough's long-serving music director Anthony Negus — who worked with Rudolf Kempe at Bayreuth, and has welded the LFO orchestra into an instrument of formidable passion and power — spent much of his career in staff roles until the Grahams gave him that first *Ring*. He's the element of continuity in this new cycle. 'We are obviously entering a new period of development,' he says. 'But it's important to build upon what we've achieved already, and not do what they do so often in Germany, when a whole team moves out of a theatre, leaving nothing behind. This is definitely going to be something new — the most technically ambitious Wagner we've ever done.'

*Das Rheingold is in rep until 11 June.*





*Accidental hero: one of the Chernobyl liquidators*

## Television

### Blast from the past

James Delingpole

How many people do you think died at Chernobyl? 10,000? 50,000? 300,000? The correct answer, according to the never knowingly understated World Health Organisation — in a thorough report released nearly 20 years after the 1986 explosion — was ‘fewer than 50’.

Ah, but what about all the mutant babies who ended up with two heads and webbed feet? What about the inevitable epidemic of cancers? Well, yes, it’s true that 4,000 more cases of thyroid cancer were loosely attributable to Chernobyl, mainly in children and adolescents. But the survival rate was 99 per cent.

Because I’ve long been familiar with these facts — mainly as an antidote to all those lefties, like the late historian Tony Judt, who fell for the green anti-nuclear propaganda that many people still believe — I was initially very wary of *Chernobyl* (Sky Atlantic/HBO, Tuesdays). How could any fictionalised version resist the tempta-

tion to go with the scary myth rather than the more nuanced truth?

But scriptwriter Craig Mazin has found a cunning line between the two, at once conjuring up all the apocalyptic horror of a nuclear-reactor explosion and its aftermath, while yet largely accepting that the facts of the story are so strange and horrible and disturbing that they really need little embellishment.

A good example of this is the *Spartacus* moment at the end of episode two, where the Soviet bosses demand that three volunteers undertake a suicide mission for the salvation of the Motherland: they must enter the melting reactor and drain the water in order to avert a second explosion that will surely kill millions. But the radiation to which they will be exposed will be so great that they will never survive.

It makes for a powerful scene: a roomful of bolshie, more-than-my-job’s-worth workers not daring to meet one another’s eyes as the request goes out. One man raising his hand, then another, and another: an exchange of glances — ‘So it’s us three?’ they seem to say. The donning of the pitifully inadequate protective suits. The Geiger counter crackling manically as they shuffle and slosh deeper into the flooded basement,

lined with leaking pipes. Then, just when you think it can’t get any worse, the sudden plunge into total blackness as their crappy Soviet-issue torches all fail...

He’s good on his classic movie tropes, is Mazin. Besides *Spartacus*, that scene very effectively invokes the gnawing tension and jump-cut fear — and labyrinthine pipework — of *Alien*. As Mazin said at a pre-launch conference: ‘*Chernobyl* will be a horror movie, it will be a war movie, it will be a political thriller and a courtroom drama’ — and that’s exactly what it is. To his list I’d add ‘reluctant buddy movie’, as seen in the growing camaraderie between nuclear physicist Valery Legasov (Jared Harris) and Soviet apparatchik Boris Shcherbina (Stellan Skarsgård) as they find themselves reluctantly embroiled in the most important and last (because of the fatal radiation exposure) mission of their lives.

Yes, it’s a compendium of clichés: if you want to ruin *Chernobyl* for yourself, have a look at the website ‘TV tropes’, which takes it brutally apart: ‘Bambification’, ‘Bothering by the Book’, ‘Everybody Smokes’, ‘Kind-hearted Cat Lover’, ‘Naked People Are Funny’... Not without reason, though, *Chernobyl* has now topped the film and TV database IMDB’s greatest shows ever charts with a record rating of 9.7. Mazin has shaped the historical narrative to create a miniseries that pushes all the viewer’s emotional buttons.

But what *Chernobyl* doesn’t mention — for why alleviate the relentless depression? — is that those three doomed volunteers (Boris Baranov, Alexei Ananenko and Valeri Bezpálov) actually survived for years after the incident and that two of them are still alive. Similarly, the Soviet general, Pika-lov, we see driving towards the burning core because it is so dangerous he won’t order his soldiers to do it died in 2003 at the age of 78.

Does it matter that the helicopter didn’t really crash because the crew had suddenly been zapped by radiation? Or that the expert nuclear technician played by Emily Watson never existed but is a composite character there, presumably, to add female cast interest and to shoehorn in that vital ‘plucky, outspoken female in a sea of useless, hidebound men’ trope?

Mostly, I don’t think it does. This is historical drama, not documentary. And I think Mazin was right to take liberties in order to reach the deeper emotional truth. To take another example, the heartbreaking rounding up and killing of all the abandoned pets in episode four was handled by professional exterminators, not raw squaddies. But that would have denied us the much more satisfying dramatic arc: the innocent volunteer drawn into the company of hard-drinking yet tender Afghan war veterans; the gang of oh-so-sweet doggies he’s required to kill in the apartment; the wiser, dirtier, more brutalised man-come-of-age we see at the end of that first day.



## Theatre

### Poetic and profound

Lloyd Evans

#### The Starry Messenger

Wyndham's Theatre, until 10 August

#### Rutherford and Son

Lyttelton Theatre, in rep until 3 August

Kenneth Lonergan, who wrote the movie *Manchester by the Sea*, shapes his work from loss, disillusionment, small-mindedness, hesitation and superficiality, all the forgettable detritus of life. *The Starry Messenger* is about Mark, a disappointed astronomer aged 52, who gives public lectures at a city planetarium. He loves his subject even though it let him down and every week he tackles the daft questions of his pupils with superhuman patience.

The same two pests always raise their hands. One is a burly misanthrope who disbelieves all experts, the other is a high-flying oddball who craves attention. Mark starts a slow-burn affair with Angela, a single mum who needs a role model for her nine-year old son: an expert on the stars and interplanetary travel is just the ticket. Back at home Mark is cared for by a kindly wife who

*Its rhythm is attuned to the heartbeat of the everyday, like the broken tap that beats a tattoo in the sink*

prattles about sofa beds and dry cleaning. In the basement lurks a teenage boy miserably thrashing at an amplified guitar.

Lonergan's amazingly naturalistic dialogue captures the beating essence of every human being he creates. And his walk-on characters are as vivid and quirky as the central figures. Angela nurses an old man whose cancer is in remission. 'I preferred you when you were dying,' says his prickly daughter. Mark's son, who is never seen, is revealed to be more than just an angry little maniac. He's a decent, courteous lad in need of emotional nourishment. At the close of Act One, Mark's chief tormentor lingers after class to deliver a critique of the lecture course and to award Mark grades — 'poor', 'adequate' and so on — for various sub-disciplines of the teaching profession. Mark endures this insolent cross-examination in silence and then bids his pupil farewell. He's left alone in the lecture room. 'Fuck you,' he says, then he frowns and swipes a palm sideways to erase the expletive from the universe.

From such tiny threads, the rich tapestry of this show is woven. Some have carpentered at the lack of pace. But that's the point. Its rhythm is attuned to the heartbeat of the everyday, like the broken tap that beats a tattoo in the sink. And although Lonergan is a meticulous documentary realist he's

not above using the conventions of farce. He deploys the 'amorous clinch witnessed by shocked innocents' device no fewer than three times. Matthew Broderick delivers a flawless performance as the low-rent academic who compensates for his professional failings by taking up with a younger woman. He knows it's wrong, he does it anyway, and it doesn't help. Something poetic and profound underlies this play. A flawed human tries to explain the mysteries of the cosmos to his uncomprehending tribe and yet he judges himself by the pettiest of all earthly indicators: success.

*Rutherford and Son* is a brilliant proto-feminist drama by Githa Sowerby (1876–1970) which opened at the Royal Court in 1912 and transferred to the West End and New York. Not many of the Royal Court's current crop of playwrights are likely to repeat that feat.

The setting is a glassworks in the north-east run by 'the gunvor', Rutherford, a brilliant businessman whose touch has deserted him. His son, John, was sent to Harrow to become a gent but the upper crust sneered at him because he said 'thank you' to servants. John is a talented chemist who has discovered a formula that may save the firm from bankruptcy but he demands that his father pay the full market price.

Rutherford refuses and tries to obtain the formula by subterfuge. Other siblings vie for attention. Dick is a wet curate who wants to become a preacher in Blackpool. Janet, unmarried at 36, is covertly entangled with Martin, the clerk of works, but when Rutherford learns of their affair he evicts her from his house. Martin is no better. He's happy to tryst with her on the sly but when their dalliance becomes public knowledge his position is threatened. Grubbing two shillings from his pocket, he sends her packing.

This fascinating play blazes with a quiet fury. Sowerby wanted to castigate Rutherford and Martin for their mistreatment of Janet but she would have known that the auditorium at the Royal Court would be full of Rutherfords and Martins. There would have been Janets in attendance as well but they wouldn't have paid for their tickets. Polly Findlay's fine production includes wailing singers (somewhat superfluous) and a dark, oaky Edwardian sitting room with the lights set to 'battery-save' mode. The gloom may be accurate but it does little to cheer the spirits.

Roger Allam, concealed behind a monstrous beard like a petrified cataract, brings touches of cordiality and even sweetness to Rutherford. Justine Mitchell is a graceful and deadly earnest Janet, and Sam Troughton is wonderful as the strutting buffoon John, who thinks he's hit the jackpot. Word of warning: everyone talks like Gazza. Non-native Brits may need to do some homework in advance.

## Radio

### She hasn't stopped dancing yet

Kate Chisholm

It's not often you hear the voice of a 104-year-old on the radio. You're even less likely to hear one so clear in thought, so spirited and full of enthusiasm for life. Eileen Kramer's voice crackles with age, with the years she has lived, but from what she says, and the energetic way she says it, she could be at least 30 years younger. 'I don't know how long I will go on living,' she says, but she's still excited by the present: 'There's so much going on. I'm living in that period when a lot is being discovered about everything.'

Kramer is a dancer, artist, performer, famed in Australia for her expressive, idiosyncratic style of movement, and she's still choreographing new works, although difficulties with balance have meant she has only just given up joining the dancers on stage. In *Art of Now: Breath of Life* on Radio 4 (produced by Eleanor McDowall) Kramer recalls how, aged 22, she went to see a performance by the Bodenwieser dance group and experienced a moment of recognition. Next day she went to watch

*Kramer remembers being taught to do the twist by Louis Armstrong*

them in rehearsal and then asked Madame Bodenwieser if she could join the company. 'Life with her opened up your feelings,' says Kramer. 'The importance of feeling, the importance of expressing feelings.' Bodenwieser had been forced to leave Vienna on the last train to Paris after the invasion by the Nazis; her husband, a theatre producer, had been arrested and died in a concentration camp. Kramer says of the experience of first meeting her, of the impact she had: 'You have all this in you, and someone comes along and shows you how to express it in dance.'

After Bodenwieser died, Kramer left Australia and went to live in Paris where she worked as an artist's model, at the same time as Jean-Paul Sartre and his friends were having their existential conversations at the Café de Flore. She remembers going to a ballroom where Louis Armstrong was playing and being taught how to do the twist by him. Kramer's gift for life, her ability to tap into the essence of what really matters, shone through a programme that was skilfully, vividly produced. We could feel Kramer's excitement as she explained that feeling of waiting in the wings and taking in her first breath as the music begins. The dance, she says, begins with that intake of breath. She was probably rather a char-

acter when in her prime but has weathered into someone quite remarkable. ‘You can fall in love at 80,’ she says, speaking from experience.

‘As a listener how should you prepare yourself for this?’ asked Sean Shibe at the end of the first programme of his new Sunday-night series for Radio 3, *Sean Shibe’s Guitar Zone* (produced by Sarah Devonald). He began conventionally enough with John Williams and Julian Bream, a bit of Rodrigo’s famous concerto and the notoriously difficult tremolo study by Francisco Tarrega. But then, a classical guitarist himself, he admitted to being sometimes daunted by the range of effects and extended techniques available to electric guitarists. To prove his point he gave us the last three minutes of Tristan Murail’s ‘Vampyr!’. I listened to a preview first thing one morning and was jolted awake by the ear-splitting chords — not in a bad way. Murail is a classical composer who studied under Olivier Messiaen in Paris but ‘Vampyr!’ (written in 1984) sounds like Jimi Hendrix on speed.

In just an hour Shibe took us through seven centuries and the great diversity of guitar music. He’s chatty but also knowledgeable, assured but also personable, drawing us in and making a connection as he shares his enthusiasm. Rodrigo, he says, never really understood the guitar, in spite of the popularity of his *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The most difficult passages to play, requiring hours of practice, are buried beneath the orchestral sound because the guitar has so little carrying power. Shibe also gave us the source of that universal earworm, the Nokia ringtone, which comes in the middle of a light, innocuous tune by Tarrega written in 1902. Whenever a guitarist plays ‘Gran Vals’, says Shibe, there’s always a laugh or ripple of applause from the audience at that moment when those few notes resonate.

Somehow *PM* on Radio 4 has managed to rise above the political shenanigans and retain a sense of balance and normal living while also developing several new strands that run through the daily editions creating a more magazine-y, less political feel. Evan Davis, who presents, can incorporate the lighter side of life without sounding embarrassed or off-kilter while the tone is always intelligent without being off-putting. *Planet Puffin*, for instance (designed as a podcast but none the worse for that), takes us every few days to the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth to report on how the puffins are doing. It’s a remarkable place to see seabirds and the puffins are not just an extraordinary example of endeavour and determination but also a barometer of how our seas are doing.

Last week Emily Knight and Becky Ripley were up to their elbows down puffin burrows, looking to see whether an egg had been laid. It took us a long way from Westminster.

## Exhibitions

### The possibilities of paint

Martin Gayford

#### Frank Bowling

Tate Britain, until 26 August

#### Lee Krasner: Living Colour

Barbican Art Gallery, until 1 September

‘The possibilities of paint,’ Frank Bowling has observed, ‘are endless.’ The superb career retrospective of his work at Tate Britain demonstrates as no words could that he is correct, and that the obituaries of this perennial medium — so often declared moribund or defunct — are completely wrong. This presents more than half a century’s virtuoso exploration of what pigment on canvas can achieve.

After his first decade of work, Bowling (born 1934) became what is called an abstract artist. But that is a vague and unsatisfactory category. His early, figurative pictures such as ‘Cover Girl’ (1966) could be labelled ‘pop’. It features an image of a Japanese supermodel garnered from the front of the *Observer* colour supplement — plus a very different silkscreened photograph of

*The ten-foot high multi-hued waterfall has something of the sublimity of a late Turner*

a shop in New Amsterdam, Guyana, which was the artist’s childhood home.

In other respects, however, the picture — like all good ‘figurative’ paintings — is quite abstract, mixing sharply edged stripes and soft, cloud-like patches of colour. Later on, after he had ostensibly crossed the frontier into abstraction, Bowling’s pictures still continued to be powerfully evocative of the physical world. ‘Towards Crab Island’ (1983) has the feel of a waterland by Monet. The Great Thames series from the late 1980s, painted in a Docklands studio, suggests the ooze and ripple of the river nearby.

The ten-foot high multi-hued waterfall of ‘Aston’s Plunge’ (2011) has something of the sublimity of a late Turner (though in a much funkier vein). Bowling is aware of his great predecessors. He has talked about the challenge of working in London, ‘Turner’s town’. A touch of Constable is visible too, side by side with Mondrian and Jackson Pollock.

Pairing the Bowling show with *Van Gogh in Britain*, downstairs at Tate Britain, is unexpectedly apt. Of course, the Dutch master made the journey from the cool north to the hot colourful south and dreamed of going further, to the tropics. Bowling journeyed in the opposite direction, sailing from what was then British Guiana to Britain, where he arrived in 1953.

What makes his trajectory unique, however, is that he then moved on to the New

York of Andy Warhol and Barnett Newman. I can’t think of another artist who has inhabited all three of these environments: Caribbean heat, foggy London and modernist Manhattan. Bowling’s majestic ‘map’ paintings from around 1970, in which the outlines of the continents of Africa and South America emerge faintly from sumptuous oceans of colour, perhaps hint at his personal Odyssey.

Another link with Van Gogh is that both he and Bowling are enthralled by the possibilities of paint: the rich glutinous substance itself in all its variations of thickness and thinness, transparency and opacity. At various times Bowling has — in addition to applying the stuff in a conventional manner with a brush — thrown it, flicked it like sea spray,



*‘Iona Miriam’s Christmas Visit To and From Brighton’, 2017, by Frank Bowling*





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and used it to stain his surfaces in translucent veils. The zinging red, blue and yellow of 'Tony's Anvil' (1975), gyrating wildly like the graph of an earthquake, were produced by controlled pouring.

*Bowling inhabited Caribbean heat, foggy London and modernist Manhattan*

Master though he clearly is, Bowling has been neglected for prolonged periods. The work of Lee Krasner, another important, long-overlooked abstract painter, is on show at the Barbican. In both cases, vagaries of art fashion have been partly to blame. Bowling turned to abstract painting just as it was

going out of style. Krasner (1908–84) found herself as a gestural abstract expressionist exactly when that idiom was being replaced.

Krasner was probably both helped and hindered by being married to Jackson Pollock, one of the greatest innovators in 20th-century painting. When they met, she was the more senior artist. But it was Pollock who made the inspired leap into abstract expressionism: his flying pigment free, rhythmic and pulsing all over the canvas. It took Krasner ten years to assimilate this revolution. She described how she was completely blocked, unable to produce anything but 'grey slabs'. When she did break through, it was by first physically cutting up her own work, then recycling it in the form of collage — thus forcing looseness and freedom on herself.

In 1956 Krasner was just getting going, when Pollock was killed in a car crash. Grief-stricken, afflicted with chronic insomnia and working in Pollock's old studio, she battled on. A few years later she produced her masterpieces — 'Polar Stampede' (1960), for example, and 'Another Storm' (1963) — powerful pictures, suggestive of a wild sea breaking over rocks, throwing up plumes of spray.

By that date they looked a little passé to the art world of the day. But what seemed cutting-edge in 1960 is now irrelevant. Today's newspapers, it is often said, are the first draft of history. In the same way, contemporary judgments are only an early draft of art history — and equally subject to being revised. Each of these exhibitions does just that.

*Frank Bowling's work is also on show at Hales Gallery until 22 June.*

**Cinema**  
**More, please**  
*Deborah Ross*

**Late Night**  
15, Nationwide

*Late Night* is a comedy starring Emma Thompson as a chat-show host in America whose ratings are in decline and who hires her first female writer. This is Molly, who is welcomed by the bank of male writers, not. They initially mistake her for someone who has come to take their food orders and greet her with: 'I'll have the soup.' So it's that. And then it's quite a lot more of that, one way or another. And, you know, good. A woman-centred comedy that satirises the white male stronghold on comedy? Count me in! And it does have its terrific moments, plus Thompson is absolutely superb, and clearly having a ball.

Directed by Nisha Ganatra, the film is written by Mindy Kaling, who was the only female writer on the American version of

*The Office*, so she knows of what she speaks, and she also stars as Molly. Molly works in a chemical plant but is desperate to break into comedy and through convoluted plot shenanigans that would suffer more in the retelling than they even did in the watching, she ends up working for Katherine Newbury (Thompson — Kaling wrote this part specifically for her). Newbury has been a titan of television for the past decade but her audience has fallen off a cliff and the new boss of the network (Amy Ryan) wants to replace her with a young male dude. Newbury has short-cropped hair and a fabulous wardrobe of mannish clothes and veers away from jokes about abortion or menopause. The suggestion is that she has lost touch with herself as a woman, and who she really is. Will Molly put her back in touch? Seriously, you have to ask? Although we mustn't hold that against it. You would, if it weren't funny enough, but generally it is.

Newbury's writers' room is staffed entirely by white men, and at the first writers' meeting, where Molly is asked for the soup, there is no seat for her, so she has to sit on an upturned trash can and then proceeds

*A woman-centred comedy that satirises the white male stronghold on comedy? Count me in!*

to do that female apologetic thing: 'It's more comfortable than a chair!' (I laughed.) And she is not just a woman; she's also a brown woman. 'I wish I was a woman of colour so I could get any job,' hisses one of the writers. 'We've talked about this. You can't say that,' hisses one of the others, sadly. Poor fella. You really feel for them... not.

Look, some of the jokes don't quite land, the turnaround of the chat show is rather lame, and there is a subplot to do with Newbury's marriage that doesn't quite come off. Still, her husband is played by a scene-stealing John Lithgow, whose character is a professor emeritus somewhere or other but, as he explains to Molly, 'Emeritus' isn't that big a deal. 'It's what happens when you're not dead yet but they don't want you to come in.' (I laughed.) There are plenty of cracking lines, in fact, as when Newbury is told to smile for the press: 'Katherine, use the same fake smile you used when you lost the Emmy to John Oliver.'

So the meat is strong, and Thompson is to this film what Meryl Streep was to *The Devil Wears Prada*. Her character can be fabulously cruel, but is never one-dimensional, as Thompson brings real heft. At one point she says, desperately: 'They're taking my show away and I don't know what to do. I'm a woman in Hollywood in her fifties, what am I going to do?' And you properly feel it. So, while this isn't flawless, it is a start, and it has verve and energy and pathos and quite a few white, entitled men running scared. More, please.

## Opera

### Sunny delight

Richard Bratby

#### The Bartered Bride

Garsington Opera, in rep until 30 June

#### Don Giovanni

Garsington Opera, in rep until 21 July

So it's the start of the summer opera season at Wormsley and we're sitting there in evening dress in the middle of the Getty estate, looking at a beautifully detailed replica of a rundown English village hall. It's superbly done: the canvas chairs and austerity-drab paintwork in Paul Curran's new production of *The Bartered Bride* could surely have been found in any number of church halls in this corner of the Chilterns, at least in the 1950s when this production seems to be set. And then, having gone to painstaking lengths to relocate this definitive Slav national opera to rural England, Garsington flips our expectations straight back at us and has it sung in Czech.

Well, it wouldn't be country-house opera without a few absurdities. The choice of language was, I believe, the preference of the conductor Jac van Steen, and a less dogmatic maestro you'll never find. Smetana said that *The Bartered Bride* was 'only a toy', and it'd be a joyless soul who didn't come away smiling from Curran's sunny, vividly peopled world, with its gauche vicar, industrious district nurse and Brylcreemed rockers. The set for Act One provides both a public space for maypole dancing and matchmaking and a separate kitchen for more intimate confessions, generally delivered while buttering corned-beef sandwiches. Act Three's circus stage, meanwhile, could have come straight out of the most traditional of Prague productions (the circus performers themselves sent the post-picnic audience wild).

My only major reservation, barring some splashy brass playing from the Philharmonia, was that all this activity left you unsure where to look, at least in the choral and dance scenes. It snapped brightly into focus whenever the young lovers Jenik (a bluff, hipster-bearded Brendan Gunnell) and Marenka (Natalya Romaniw) were together. Romaniw's lustrous voice, in particular, was at maximum wattage; this bride was not going to be bartered without a fight. She brandished a breadknife, vamped it up with the stammering Vasek (Stuart Jackson, whose character would nowadays get a slot on *The Undateables*), and who came across here as wholly lovable) and stormed off to the kitchen to take out her frustration on a Victoria sponge.

The nearest she came to meeting her match was in Joshua Bloom's marriage-

broker Kecal — a beady-eyed operator in brown and white brogues whose glorious, all-engulfing bass tone was one of the evening's many sonic treats. His final defeat felt very temporary, while Jenik's reunion with his estranged father supplied just enough real emotion to convince you that it all mattered (*The Bartered Bride* isn't an opera that admits very much darkness). Van Steen kept it skipping along; Lara Marie Müller as the circus girl Esmeralda was as nimble in her upper register as she was on her pins, and by the end — with lovers united, acrobats stacked four high and the audience yelling for more — it felt as though we'd just seen the ideal summer opera.

Michael Boyd's new production of *Don Giovanni* opened the following night, and we learned from the souvenir silk scarves in the gift shop that it was to be — and you didn't see this coming, did you? — a #MeToo *Don Giovanni*. In reality, it was nothing of the sort. Boyd's Giovanni is a Young British Artist, first seen flinging buckets of paint at a white canvas. Leporello is his studio assistant and Elvira appears (at first, anyway) to be an artistic collaborator. It's car-

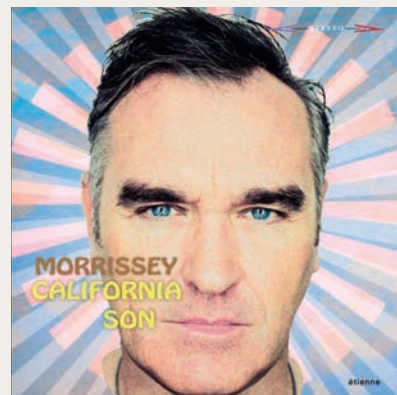
*With lovers united and acrobats stacked four high, it felt as though we'd seen the ideal summer opera*

ried through with economy and wit (the final banquet is a KFC meal deal), but other than placing Elvira (Sky Ingram, plangent and touchingly sincere) front and centre, this was a fairly conventional interpretation. The final scene was cut altogether, ending the opera on Giovanni's doom: a jarring reversion to Victorian practice, half-heartedly excused in a surtitle with a disingenuous reference to the opera's première in '1788' (trust me, you don't want to go there).

At the outset, Giovanni had killed the Commendatore by spraying him with red paint. Amusing, but without seeing the Don commit at least one act of believably shocking violence the character loses much of his darkness — not a mortal sinner at the threshold of damnation, just a bit of a knob. Decide for yourself if that matters alongside the fact that the singing and characterisation was, for the most part, very enjoyable. Mireille Asselin (Zerlina) was bright and pointed, Trystan Llyr Griffiths floated his tenor sweet and high as Ottavio and Camilla Titinger was dignified, if underused, as Anna. Douglas Boyd's bouncy period-instrument orchestra rippled with colour, and the central relationship between Giovanni — a cocksure, steel-eyed Jonathan McGovern — and his put-upon wingman Leporello (sung with comparable style but discernibly more warmth by David Ireland) was a bromance for the ages, never more believable or entertaining than in their boisterous joint recitatives. That, at least, is usually a good sign.

#### THE LISTENER

#### Morrissey: California Son



#### Grade: B

Rock stars who utter something a little gamey, something a tad right-wingish, are usually coerced by the lefties into a cringing apology before you can say a-wop-bop-a-lu-bop. This is not a new thing — it happened to Eric Clapton after his 'Enoch's right' outburst in 1976 (which very quickly spawned the Socialist Workers Party-led Rock Against Racism movement). The message has always been: get with the programme, right-wing scum, or we'll hate you and your career will be over.

Credit, then, to Morrissey for refusing to resile from his belief that England is ceasing to be the England he knew and loved and that there are too many foreigners in the country. I kind of agree with him, up to a point. But the liberal bullies will have their way. Posters for his new album are already banned by Merseyrail (in that vast repository of acquired victimhood, Liverpool) and *California Son* has been spitefully panned in the *Guardian* and by the ageing adolescents at the *NME*. I doubt either review would have been so vitriolic if Morrissey had been Billy bloody Bragg.

My problem is that I don't much like Morrissey's somewhat histrionic music, either with the Smiths or since, much though I admire his singular refusal to conform. This is an album of covers of, in the main, not terribly good songs. He is fine tackling Roy Orbison — his alter ego from a previous life — and 'Wedding Bell Blues' captures some of Laura Nyro's sweet lilt. But his inflection is all wrong when handling Joni Mitchell and Dylan. And why cover a Jobiath song? Still, keep annoying them, Steven.

— Rod Liddle



NOTES ON...

# Hats

By Camilla Swift

‘Thank goodness for racing,’ says Rachel Trevor-Morgan. She is a milliner — a hat maker — so it’s no surprise she’s grateful. Without weddings and race days, many milliners would be out of business.

If you want to gain entry into the Royal Enclosure during Ascot week, a hat is non-negotiable. And it’s not just any old hat: the rules dictate that your headpiece must have a base of at least 10cm in diameter.

The Ascot ruling was brought in in 2012 to put a stop to the trend for tiny fascinators, essentially just twiddles of feathers and fluff that perch above the hairline. For the very latest in fascinators, look at Ivanka Trump during the Trump family visit to Westminster Abbey. Sitting above her right eye is a sort of felt bedpan designed by milliner to the stars Philip Treacy. Thank heavens a new generation of hat-makers are making proper hats fashionable again.

There is something about the wearing of a hat, especially for formal occasions, that’s particularly British. But why? As with so many British traditions, the royal family is in part behind it. Royal protocol dictates that women must wear hats to all official occasions because up until the 1950s upper-class women rarely showed their hair in public.

In this country, we hang on to our sartori-



GETTY IMAGES

al traditions. A British man might still wear a top hat to Ascot or a wedding even though it’s more than 200 years since toppers first made an appearance. In 1797, a haberdasher called John Hetherington ventured out in a hat in the shape of a stovepipe. Within a short time, the story goes, a large crowd had gathered around him. Women fainted, children cried and dogs barked. There was such chaos that the ‘officer of the law’ grabbed Hetherington by the collar and summonsed him before the court. He was accused of disturbing public order and fined £500.

The hat-maker relied in his defence on

the right of every Englishman to place what he wanted on his head. The *Times* wrote the following day: ‘Hetherington’s hat points to a significant advance in the transformation of dress. Sooner or later, everyone will accept this headwear. We believe that both the court and the police made a mistake here.’

The *Times* was right. Hat manufacturers in England made a substantial amount of money from this ‘extravagant construction’. Some also poisoned themselves: the phrase ‘mad as a hatter’ came about because many hat-makers were adversely affected by the mercury in hat felt.

Our hat manufacturers and sellers are still making a mint. An antique silk topper in good condition will sell for anything up to £2,000. Men’s heads tend to be bigger nowadays, too, and the price goes up accordingly.

Young milliners such as Jess Collett, Vivien Sheriff, Cara Meehan and Emily Baxendale now incorporate brightly coloured veiling, sequins, feathers and huge flowers into their designs to bring their hats into the 21st century. And London is still king as far as the hat is concerned. Philip Treacy, Stephen Jones and Jane Taylor are all based in the city, and the London College of Fashion and Kensington and Chelsea College are still turning out the world’s best milliners.

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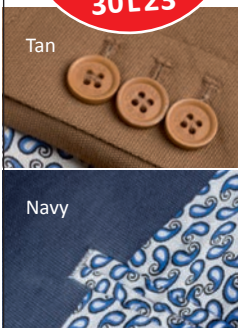
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*Sex is aerobic, it lasts ten minutes  
(if you're English) and, unlike jogging,  
ridiculous clothes are optional*  
— **Rory Sutherland**, p61

# LIFE

## High life Taki



They were putting the finishing touches to the giant tent as I drove up to Schloss Wolfsegg after an hour's flight from Gstaad to a tiny nearby airport. With me were my son and two good friends, and the Pilatus felt like a Messerschmitt 109 cutting through the clouds and landing on a dime. The Pilatus is a great airplane. It can cruise for seven hours at 280 knots, and land at less than 500 metres. It seats six people very comfortably. The only man who has complained about this aircraft is my old friend Charlie Glass, who like a true lefty whined about the lavatory's headroom. (I told him to try EasyJet next time, but lefties like to fly private and not mix with hoi polloi.)

The house party at the castle consisted of about 75 people, and the occasion was the 'heilige Taufe' — holy baptism — of Antonius Alexandros Edouard Maria, my grandson. Before I go on, a word about how good it feels to be far away from the vulgarities of today's politically correct world. Civilisation matters a hell of a lot, and one is reminded of it in places such as my son-in-law's schloss. Here we are, with nearly 1,500 years of achievement in philosophy, poetry, architecture, science, music, art and religion behind us, yet we allow cultural troglodytes and other such 'cool' types to set the agenda.

Western civilisation was basically the creation of the Church. It was believers such as Charles Martel in 732, Duke John in Lepanto in 1571 and Jan Sobieski in 1683 who defeated the invading Muslim hordes and safeguarded the Christian continent. Western civilisation was built on a Christian foundation, and the chivalric respect for women grew from the Church's devotion to Mary. The art that followed was an expression of that faith.

Mind you, the spiritual emptiness of the modern world was absent for the weekend at Schloss Wolfsegg. Friday night's dinner was at a wonderful local inn with traditional Austrian food and lotsa wine. Too much, in fact: early Saturday morning, in

the beautiful tiny church within the castle, the grandfather was feeling his age. 'Panis Angelicus', the hymn by César Franck, woke me up and inspired me to listen closely to what Monsignor Hermann Pachinger and the perfectly named Dr Markus Himmelbauer had to say. Heaven should be right here on earth, said the good priest. Live a good Christian life and you don't have to worry about what happens afterwards. I looked around me and saw men and women, old and young, all listening to the message while my little grandson, dressed up in his great-grandmother's silk white baby dress, looked happy and rather curious at the goings-on. No one promised virgins in the afterlife and no one encouraged anyone to go out and kill people.

A great lunch followed in the tent — a very liquid one, I might add. I sat between Fiona, a beautiful young blonde, and my friend Ludmilla Habsburg, a grande dame whose political opinions and mine are diametrically opposed. We talked only politics and laughed a hell of a lot and not a single bitter word was exchanged. It was similar to arguing with a young Corbinista about climate change. (And if you believe that, you probably think Philip Green is an aristocrat.) Then came my Waterloo.

At the dinner that evening, my son-in-law's best friend, Prince Altenburg, gave a very funny speech, although he was quite gone, if you know what I mean. This encouraged me to do the same after some people called for me to speak. I could see the mother of my children, who recognises the symptoms, squirming. But speak I did and made the most disastrous after-dinner speech ever. People were kind, but it was embarrassing as only drunken speeches can be. The only relief was more oblivion, but I made up for it the next day by announcing during lunch that Alexandra and I were expecting a happy event, finally drawing a laugh.

Because of the surroundings and the people present I was transported back to a more civilised era. But I was brought back to the present when Prince Altenburg's baby boy, born three days apart from my grandson, was brought in and placed next to little Antonius. The babies looked like blond, blue-eyed twins. But my grandson took exception to the new addition to his crib and screamed like those dreadful women do against Boris or Trump, or whatever. Territorial imperative, I presume; it starts early on. One day, they'll be the best of friends like their fathers is my guess. I then piled

everybody into the Pilatus and flew back to Gstaad, only to come down with the hidden virus I had drowned for three days, the one I carried over from the Bagel.

In last week's column, I mentioned Carlo di Robilant, the father of my friend Edmondo, in a not very nice way. I regret this because I got it wrong. The Robilants have never been fascists at any time, before, during or after Mussolini. Perhaps because my father and grandfather were supporters of the Greek dictator Metaxas (and I still am) I didn't realise my comments would be taken as an insult. I like Edmondo and Maya di Robilant and did not wish to hurt their feelings, especially as the family was anti-Duce.

## Low life Jeremy Clarke



Of course the varifocals I bought online were a waste of money. When they came in the post and I first put them on I could see the world up to and including my fingernails but anything beyond was a blur. I should have guessed that emailing a photo of my face with a credit card fixed to my forehead, as directed, was too rough and ready a guide to the correct measurements. If the glasses had been right it would have been more of a surprise. Being poor is always more expensive in the long run. I'd have been better off spending the £200 on some class As and a hat and going to a party.

These were the second pair of glasses I'd bought online whose only possible use was as an executioner's blindfold. Add to that about three pairs of magnifiers at £30 each, which worked with the text examples in the shop but nowhere else, and for the total amount of money spent I could have gone to a high street optician. There I would have been fussed over by young women and been ordered to gaze deeply into their eyes, and with a final guarantee that I would eventually walk out of the shop able to see. In the long run it would probably have worked out cheaper.

So I made an appointment with a local optician to be tested and measured up for a

pair of frames and the best varifocal lenses money could buy. They would cost approximately nine times the *Parker's* guide price of my car. Was 3.40 on Friday afternoon OK? To raise the money I sold three silk handkerchiefs. They had escape maps printed on both sides and were given to servicemen and pilots serving in North Africa during the second world war. I had inherited them from my great uncle, an anti-aircraft gunner, who, in his own words, was 'up and down that bloody desert like a yo-yo'. Being largely housebound, I was looking forward to getting out and having my eyes tested and face measured as much as Kenneth Noye must be looking forward to his release date in August.

Friday came. I showered and shaved and ironed a shirt. I was about to leave when my mobile burbled. The mother of my two grandsons. 'All right?' she said. 'Yes, thank you,' I said. 'You know you were going to pick up the boys tomorrow?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Well, can you pick them up this afternoon instead?' 'No,' I said. 'I've got the opticians at 3.40. Why?'

'I've got to go down to the hospital and calm a relative down,' she said. 'She's lost it again and beaten up her boyfriend. At least, they think it's that way round. He probably started it — she's black and blue — but she probably finished it, knowing her. She's been on a bender up in Aberdeen. Found

*I'd have been better off spending the £200 on some class As and a hat and going to a party*

some mates. The police want me to have her here. No flaming way, I said. Not with the kids here. So I've got to go round to the hospital and talk some sense into her. Calm her down so the police can leave and go and fight crime instead of babysitting a nutter. Between you and me I think she's bipolar.'

'Oh yes? What's that?' I said. 'You know! They're up one minute and down the next. So can you come over right away and fetch the boys early so I can go down to the hospital and give the police a break?'

'Look,' I said peevishly. 'What's the matter with you all? It's one thing after another. You're all drama queens who imagine you're starring in the nation's favourite soap opera. All you are interested in is stimulating the pleasure centre of your brains. You're like a lot of nematode worms.'

'What are they?' she said, genuinely interested.

'They represent 80 per cent of all animal life on earth,' I said, 'and they have a very simple brain devoted to eating and excreting, also an elementary pleasure centre that can be endlessly stimulated with the sharpened point of a pencil.'

'Wow,' she said, impressed.

'Your nematode worm of a relative goes off on one again,' I continued, warming to my theme, 'and look how many people are

sucked in: coppers, nurses, ambulance drivers, medics, hospital administrators, social workers, solicitors, you, me and my eyeballs, at least one optician, and even my mother, left asleep in the chair at home for longer than is ideal.'

Of course this was all hypocritical baloney. I've been a nematode worm all my life. But I had been looking forward so much to my visit to the opticians. I was feeling peevish and just couldn't help myself.

## Real life Melissa Kite



No sooner had the builder boyfriend finished digging for no good reason in the basement than his attention turned to the old but perfectly good downstairs loo.

I don't know why he does this. I didn't want the basement dug and I certainly did not want anything done to my downstairs loo. It is, or should I say was, a rough but functional affair just off the kitchen, accessed via a small step down into the utility and larder area — turn right at the fridge, et voilà. Well, we all love an en suite.

The idea that you can move seamlessly from one enterprise to another, perhaps taking out the milk to make a cup of tea with the sound of the flush ringing in your ears, ought not to be seen as a problem in my view. In fact, I call it flow.

And the flow didn't end there. The downstairs loo led seamlessly into the coal hole. Behind, or more accurately beyond, the loo, like Narnia, there was a small hatch door which, if you could squeeze past the bowl, led into a part of the cellar where the logs and coal are stored.

Again, I don't see this as a bad thing. I found it appealing that one could be sat there on a chilly winter evening and suddenly be reminded that the fire needed lighting.

And remembering this, one could simply step from the loo through the hatch into the coal hole to fill a bucket with coal and it was then just about possible to crawl back through the hatch and round the loo to get out carrying the coal bucket, stopping only at the fridge, perhaps, to take out the mince to make dinner.

This was open-plan living at its very best.

But the builder boyfriend thought otherwise and I came home one day to find the loo in the front garden and him banging and crashing.

'It had to come out!' he shouted irrita-

bly, as I stood in the doorway by the fridge complaining that he had destroyed a perfectly good loo. 'It was leaking,' he claimed, improbably. 'I think I would know if the loo was leaking,' I said.

But never mind that, what was he doing to the hatch behind the loo, which was now not a hatch at all. He had half bricked it up. He informed me the loo should not be sideways on. 'I like the loo sideways on.' 'It's ludicrous.' 'It's feng shui!'

But he was bricking up the hatch to fit a new loo backwards to the wall. No climbing past it to the coal hole. That would now be accessed via the main cellar entrance. 'I liked my Narnia loo coal hole,' I told him. He told me he didn't care. A leaking loo fitted sideways next to a hatch to a coal store was ridiculous.

'Whereas not having a downstairs loo in a house with four floors and the nearest available convenience two floors away from the kitchen is not ridiculous?' I asked.

'You'll get a new loo by the end of the week,' he claimed. And a small part of me — the part that remains girlishly optimistic, naive, trusting and full of optimism about the world (in other words, a nanoparticle of me) — believed him.

It took him three days to finish bricking up the hole. And then it took him three more

*The builder boyfriend brought home various loos, all of which made me scream*

days to tile the floor, after ripping out the nice worn lino.

Then it took a further week to bring home various loos that made me scream, including one with a plastic seat and one with a button flush. Eventually, he brought home a loo that looked inoffensive and had a flush handle.

Then it took him another week to work out that this loo did not fit the complex sanitary pipe situation, which he now realised was a decades-old botch that came out of the floor wrong.

The two of us then spent a week arguing so badly that we ended up not speaking. I went up and down the two flights of stairs to the main bathroom swearing increasingly foul-mouthedly, then I crawled ostentatiously, then I staged a childish protest with a bucket.

And when he still didn't fit a loo, I waited until he had gone out and got the plumber round. The plumber looked at the piles of toilets heaped up in the garden and promised to come back.

The builder b and I are in such bad odour with each other I have told him our relationship feels perilously close to going down the pan. And if it does, it will be a busted flush for good this time. Whether or not you want to call any of that toilet humour is all the same to me.



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## The turf

### Robin Oakley



There is a danger that memories of the 2019 Epsom Derby will be swamped by statistics. By training his seventh Derby winner in Anthony Van Dyck, the self-effacing Aidan O'Brien equalled the totals set by Robert Robson, John Porter and Fred Darling between 1793 and 1941. The first of Aidan's Derby successes, Galileo in 2001, has sired four of the winners since then. No fewer than seven of the 13 runners in this year's scurry over Surrey for the Blue Riband of the Turf came from Aidan's Ballydoyle team and five of them were in the first six past the post. John Magnier, the driving force of the Coolmore team, has now had a share in the ownership of ten Derby winners, nine of them trained at Ballydoyle.

But in a sense all that is for the anoraks. What made this year's Derby such a delight was the pulsating nature of the contest and the characters involved in the drama. When Anthony Van Dyck flashed past the post first, after being driven through a gap to deliver his run along the rail, there were three horses just half a length behind him on the outside and it took the camera to determine that it was Madhmoon who had held on for second, a nose ahead of Japan, who beat Broome into fourth place by a short head. A single horse blanket would have covered the three. You could not have contrived a more exciting finish or a more enthralling advertisement for the joy of watching horse racing.

The Queen has no doubt about those pleasures. She has never won the Derby herself but since her Aureole finished second in 1953, she has only twice missed seeing the race and before racing began on Saturday she unveiled a life-size statue of the man who has his own remarkable set of Derby statistics: Lester Piggott rode in the race 36 times and won it nine times. A more than averagely loquacious Piggott called sculptor Willie Newton's bronze 'marvellous'. Better than the time a biographer asked him for his thoughts on his greatest Derby winner. After a two-minute pause, the full response was: 'Nice 'orse'. Former jockey Jason Weaver, the shrewdest analyst of an ITV team who have brought both zest and humanity to racing's most vital shop window, hit the button as usual when he said of Piggott: 'When he came here [to Epsom] he didn't let the nervous energy of the place affect him — he just took it all in and didn't transfer it to the

horse.' And it is that capacity to keep calm — and keep your mount calm, too — that is so crucial, with split-second decisions having to be taken in the hurly-burly of the Derby.

The Coolmore operation have no doubt about what is the most important race in the world. As Aidan put it: 'We have to pinch ourselves every day. We're working with the best people, the most incredible horses with unbelievable pedigrees and physiques in the best facilities. The Derby is the ultimate test: it tests their speed, their stamina, their agility and mentality. This race is so tough to win every year, that's why we run so many horses.' But even 'the lads', as Aidan describes the operation headed by John Magnier, Michael Tabor and Derrick Smith, don't know in advance which of their four-legged team members is going to deliver best on the day. This year their No. 1 jockey, Ryan Moore, was on the favourite Sir Dragonet, who finished fifth. Aidan's precociously talented but tall son Donnacha, who will only have so many Derbies before weight forces him out of the saddle, was on the second favourite Broome, who came fourth.

But Coolmore have strength in depth in the saddle too and there was no doubting their obvious pleasure that the man in the plate on Sir Anthony Van Dyck was their long-time squad member Seamie Heffernan, now 46. Aidan trusts his team — remember Pdraig Beggy, who won the Derby on the 40-1 shot Wings of Eagles in 2017 on only his ninth ride of the year — and the team trust Aidan. Asked if he had expected to win on his 12th Derby ride, Seamus locked his tongue firmly in his cheek and noted: 'It was only a matter of time!' Pointing out that no other yard in Ireland could have provided him with a dozen Derby chances, he added: 'I'm into the last ten years of my career. I was second on the favourite one year and second on a 150-1 shot the next, so you never know where they'll finish when Aidan trains them. I'm lucky I don't have the choice [of which one he rides]. If you did, and got it right 51 per cent of the time, you'd be doing well.'

Seamie Heffernan's association with Coolmore, as their supersub, has brought him plenty of big wins and Aidan was happy to remind the world's media that his first Derby success was no one-off: 'He is an unbelievable feller — and a world-class jockey.'



## Bridge

### Janet de Botton

Stefan Skorchev, young Bulgarian international, has given us another top tier annual pairs tournament to put in our diaries — the Acol Invitational Pairs. Superbly organised and offering big prize money, this year it was won by Thor Erik Hoftaniska and Gunnar Hallberg, a Norwegian/Swedish partnership that was invented at the rubber bridge table the night before! Thirty-two pairs competed and around 100 boards were played over the weekend. Let me say right now — I didn't play it and that's not because I was NFI. I was. Honest!

Let's watch Gunnar in every bridge player's favourite hunting ground — 3NT.

Dealer East

N/S vulnerable

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

♠ J 9 7 5  
♥ J 4 2  
♦ J 9 6 5  
♣ A Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

♠ A Q 10 3  
♥ A K 7  
♦ Q 10 8 3  
♣ 10 7

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

West elected to lead a small Heart. Declarer put in dummy's nine to muddy the waters, and won in hand. Next he went to dummy in Diamonds and played a Club to his 10 and West's Queen. This underused play very often makes something good happen, as it did this time when West tried a Spade. Happy with his catch, Gunnar started to cash out his presumed 11 winners, but on the Diamond to the King, East unexpectedly showed out. Declarer cashed his Spades and Hearts and ended in dummy (with three cards left) to have a think.

Had West started with Jxxx in three suits and scored the singleton Queen of Clubs?

Gunnar went through what had happened in the Heart suit, coupled with the fact that East hadn't flinched on the first round of Clubs, and came to the conclusion that West's hand was probably as above. He ended this terrific piece of card reading by endplaying West with the Ace of Clubs to lead into his Diamond tenace for 11 tricks and a near top.

Special thanks to Stefan and the Acol Club — and count me in next year!





We've four wines from Château Belles Eaux this week, one of the leading lights of the Languedoc and a long-standing favourite of mine. I remember a very jolly visit to the estate in the days when it was in the hands of AXA Millésimes, the vineyard-owning arm of AXA Insurance that's led by the canniest of canny old foxes — Christian Seely.

CS is celebrated for snapping up and turning around under-performing estates and making them great again. Given that the AXA portfolio currently includes such top-notch properties as Quinta do Noval, Ch. Pichon Baron, Ch. Suduiraut, Ch. Petit-Village, Domaine de l'Arlot and Disznókó, you will have some idea of the company Ch. Belles Eaux has been used to keeping. Seely/AXA bought the estate in 2002, invested heavily, planted extensively, turned it around and sold it in 2015 to Les Grands Chais de France, one of the world's largest drinks companies, which has continued the good work.

The 100-hectare estate lies in the hills of Caux near Pézenas. It's wild country here, with dry, rocky, gravelly soil, the heady scent of herb scrub and a constantly blazing sun. The estate has an enviable microclimate, too, thanks in part to the many springs — the Belles Eaux themselves — that thread the property, giving freshness and nourishment to the vines.

I love the whites of the Languedoc and the 2018 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Blanc (1), from the estate's middle range of wines, is one of those that I could drink all day long and probably would if Mrs Ray wasn't keeping such a close eye on my consumption at the moment.

A blend of Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Vermentino and Roussanne (part of which spends time in oak), it's full flavoured, rich, creamy and complex. There's plenty of vibrantly fresh white peach here and something tasty that I can't quite put my finger on. Baked apple maybe and something faintly spicy. Either way, it's darn tasty and — I know such things shouldn't matter but they do — comes in a very pukka-looking bottle that belies its modest price tag. £10.00 down from £12.75.

The 2018 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rosé (2) is similarly classy although I have

to say that the bottle ain't quite so posh. A blend of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre, it's a beguilingly pale, pale peony pink thanks to swift pressing and no maceration. Stainless-steel fermentation and a brief maturation in steel vats has led to a delicious-

*I love the whites of the Languedoc  
and this is one I could drink  
all day long*

ly fresh and appealing pinkers, full of wild strawberries, peaches and herbs. If grown-up rosé is your thing, you'll love it. £9.50 down from £11.75.

The 2017 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rouge (3) is a similar blend to the rosé but a wildly different wine of course. Fermented in stainless steel and concrete to preserve freshness, the wine was then steeped for six weeks or so to give depth and colour before the cuvée was split into two, with one half

being aged in French oak for 15 months to give structure and body and the other half being rested in concrete vats to ensure freshness of fruit. The result is a red wine of quite some depth and robust complexity, full of ripe black cherries, liquorice, spice and herbs. It's one for the barbecue all right. £10.00 down from £12.75.

Finally, the 2010 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rouge (4) a fully mature example of the above. The extra bottle age has softened the tannins and given an earthy, meaty, mushroomy, tobacco-laden core to it. There's still plenty of fruit and it's wearing its age lightly. Slosh into a carafe or decanter and enjoy. £11.00 down from £14.50.

These are ideal summer wines and corking good value given the generous discounts we managed to squeeze out of Mr W. Get stuck in and enjoy!

The mixed case has three bottles of each wine and delivery, as ever, is free.



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Prices in form are per case of 12

			List case price	Club price	No.
<b>White</b>	1	2018 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Blanc, 13.5%vol	<del>£144.00</del>	£120.00	
<b>Rosé</b>	2	2018 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rosé, 13%vol	<del>£132.00</del>	£114.00	
<b>Red</b>	3	2017 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rouge, 14.5%vol	<del>£144.00</del>	£120.00	
	4	2010 Ch. Belles Eaux 'Les Coteaux' Rouge, 14.5%vol	<del>£159.00</del>	£132.00	
<b>Mixed</b>	5	Sample case, three each of the above	£155.25	£121.50	

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Issue no. .... Signature .....

Please send wine to .....

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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 or faxed. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 15 July 2019.

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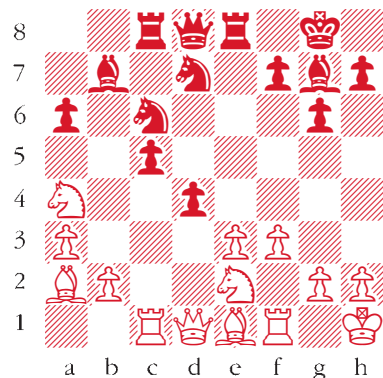
## Chess

### Spirited

Raymond Keene

An unusual tournament has taken place at the Lindores Abbey Whisky Distillery in Scotland, namely a double-round competition between four of the world's elite, including world champion Magnus Carlsen. The final scores out of six were as follows: Magnus Carlsen 3½, Ding Liren and Sergey Karjakin 3, Viswanathan Anand 2½, and this week I focus on the decisive games from this most imaginative event.

#### Carlsen-Anand: Lindores Abbey Stars 2019



Anand, as Black, had doubtless prepared a defence against the dangerous-looking 21 Qb3. In fact, after 21 Qb3 Black can defend with 21 ... Rb8 22 Qxf7+ Kh8 23 Nxc5 Nxc5 24 Rxc5 Ne5 with strong counterplay. By inverting the move order of his attack against f7, the reigning world champion gains a significant advantage. **21 Bxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qb3+ Kf8 23 Qxb7 Rxe3 24 Ng3 Nce5 25 Bd2 Rd3 26 Ne4** Black's king is exposed and his queenside pawns are weak. **26 ... Rb8 27 Qd5 Rxd2 28 Nxd2 Nd3 29 Rc2 Qe7 30 Ne4 Nf4 31 Qc4** Black resigns

#### Ding Liren-Karjakin: Lindores Abbey Stars 2019 (see diagram 2)

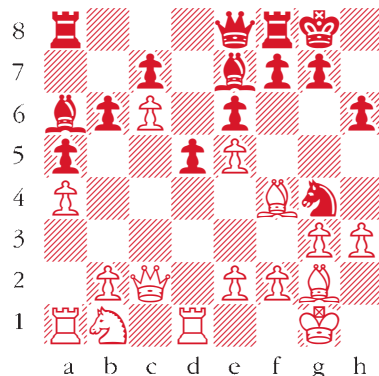
The f2 and f7 squares are notorious weak points in the army of every chess player. Black now spots an opportunity to strike at this sensitive target but sadly for him this turns out to be an occasion when White can defend. **17 ... Nxf2 18 Kxf2 Bc5+ 19 Be3 Bxe3+ 20 Kxe3 f6 21 exf6 Rxf6 22 Bf3 Qe7 23 Kd2 Qd6 24 Kc1** White avoids

#### PUZZLE NO. 557

White to play. This position is from Ding Liren-Anand, Lindores Abbey Stars 2019. Here White played 1 Rb8 which lost a piece to 1 ... Rdb3. In fact White has only one move to avoid ruinous material loss. What is it? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 11 June 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.

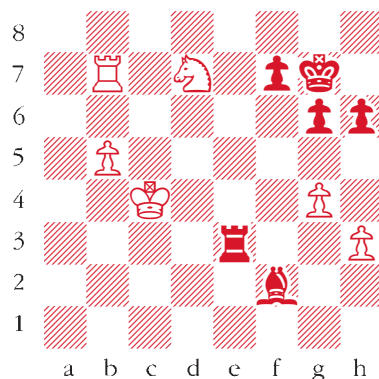
**Last week's solution** 1 ... Rxf1  
**Last week's winner** Harry James, Mamhilad, Pontypool, Monmouthshire

Diagram 2

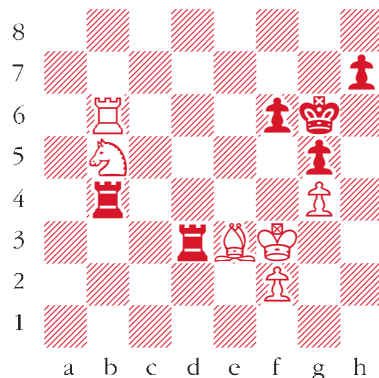


the greedy 24 g4 which is refuted by 24 ... Rxf3 25 gxf3 Qf4+ mating. **24 ... Qxg3 25 Ra3 Raf8 26 Nc3 Kh8 27 Nb5 Bxb5 28 axb5 Qh4 29 Kb1 Rf4 30 Re3 R8f6 31 Bg4 Rc4 32 Qd3 Rb4 33 Bxe6** Black resigns

#### Karjakin-Anand: Lindores Abbey Stars 2019



Here 50 ... Re7 would pin the white knight and hamper his attempt to make anything of his passed b-pawn. **50 ... Rxh3 51 Ne5** Black's materialist 50th move enables White to coordinate his position and the b-pawn soon wins the game. **51 ... Kf6 52 Kd5 Kg5 53 Rxf7 Be3 54 Rg7 Kf4 55 Rxg6 Kg3 56 b6 Rh1 57 b7 Rb1 58 Rg7 Bf4 59 Nc4 Rd1+ 60 Kc5 Rc1 61 Rf7 Rb1 62 Kc6 Bb8 63 Rf8 Rb4 64 Rxb8 Rxc4+ 65 Kb5 Rc1 66 Rg8** Black resigns



## Competition

### New 'New Colossus'

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3101 you were invited to compose a contemporary take on 'The New Colossus', the 1883 sonnet by Emma Lazarus that is inscribed on a bronze plaque on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty.

Written as part of an effort to raise money for the construction of the 89ft pedestal, the poem has spoken powerfully to successive generations. Today it is often invoked as a counterpoint to Donald Trump's inflammatory rhetoric, in particular the famous lines:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free

Most of you ran with this idea and produced accomplished if sometimes predictable entries. The best are printed below and earn their authors £20 each. Commendations go to Ann Drysdale, Frank McDonald, R.M. Goddard and Ray Kelley, who all came at the challenge from a more oblique angle.

The goddess Libertas is poised erect,  
 Copper beneath her sheath of verdigris,  
 An emblem of two nations to respect  
 The true, republican equality  
 Inscribed in both their founding documents.  
 The vivid dream that lights her torch is noble —  
 To banish tyranny and ignorance —  
 Her cause compassionate, her vision global.  
 Who now desires to reaffix the chains  
 That lie inert and shattered at her feet?  
 Take Liberty away, and what remains  
 But an oppressor swollen with conceit,  
 A monstrous ego-wish devouring all,  
 Whose monument's no statue but a wall?  
*Basil Ransome-Davies*

The Giantess has turned a ghastly green;  
 sick-visagèd and unwelcoming of those  
 ill-fated folk who've taken to their toes.  
 Yet if their bloodline manifests a gene  
 our Lady craves, they're honoured with a keen  
 acceptance; thus she strives to ever close  
 the door on creed and hue which might impose  
 a demographic shift from what has been.

'Take heed!' she cries. 'I'm sealing off this land.  
 Oh fiery torch, deter the migrant ship!  
 This beacon is a cudgel in my hand,  
 this rigid grin a sneer upon my lip;  
 for pale-faced Evangelics are the brand  
 I choose to brave the trans-Atlantic trip.'  
*Paul Freeman*

Brazen (though not a giant, not at all),  
 Scoffing and sneering at all men and lands,  
 A self-important orange figure stands.  
 His nickname (his real one is rather small)  
 Is very, very easy to recall:  
 It's 'One Mean Mother'. His miniature hands  
 Uplift a middle digit. He commands  
 The building of an immigrant-proof wall.  
 I'll make our country great again, tweets he,  
 So keep your wretched riff-raff well away,  
 Let teeming masses stay beyond the sea  
 Or let them huddle by the Mexique Bay.



I'm in charge, not old lady Liberty.  
They can't afford my hotels anyway.  
*Brian Murdoch*

Like a loud, brazen slut for wealth and fame,  
Helpless astride what he can't comprehend,  
He's weak and ignorant, but must pretend  
He's got the strength and smarts to win this game.  
Atop a wall gold-lettered with his name  
He plants vast sculpted feet as if to send  
The message, 'I will quickly put an end  
To anyone who contradicts my claim  
That Mexicans do every sort of crime  
(And other Latin gangster types as well).  
We've built this wall bad hombres cannot climb.  
Our country's locked like one vast prison cell.  
Newcomers once found welcome in a rhyme,  
But we don't want you now, so go to Hell!'  
*Chris O'Carroll*

Usurp this outsize woman with a flame  
That lights the poor and needy of this land,  
I seize the torch, this portal must be manned  
By one of giant stature, not a dame.  
The huddled masses I intend to tame  
As by the harbour, manspreading, I stand;  
The wretched refuse, foreigners, are banned  
And with a wall I'll curb the beaners' game.  
Then once I've quelled the threat from Mexico  
I'll look to ancient lands across the sea,  
Bring an official end, I'll lay them low.  
I am the new colossus, I decree,  
I raise my torch; its lustrous gleam will show  
My godlike form, revealed for all to see.  
*Sylvia Fairley*

If you were sailing past this wave-worn plinth,  
Its old words might have seemed mere platitudes  
When speeches bloat around you, news is synth,  
And the brave new world is in some nasty moods.  
Unchiselled for the mean time, here are subs:  
If you like malls, come in and have an eyeful;  
Come in, if you like narcissistic clubs;  
Enter at will, for an over-the-counter rifle.

Bombastic slogans, short-fuse rhetoricians,  
Enough to go around; and redneck preachers.  
America First! We don't need your permissions.  
If you are foreign now, you suck like leeches.  
If things change, call. Right now there is no  
muddling,  
And as for your masses, please quit all that  
huddling.  
*Bill Greenwell*

Stop giving us your tired, your poor;  
We'll only make them poorer.  
Your huddled masses looking for  
Free air just make us sorer.  
An exiled mother at the door?  
We'll snatch her kids, ignore her.  
Obamacare? There'll be no more —  
Just pay a health insurer.  
Let wretched refuse quit our shore,  
And welcome, rich off-shorer!  
But if you're tempest-tost, unfed,  
Here's our advice to you: Drop dead!  
*Sylvia O. Smith*

**NO. 3104: TAKE THREE**

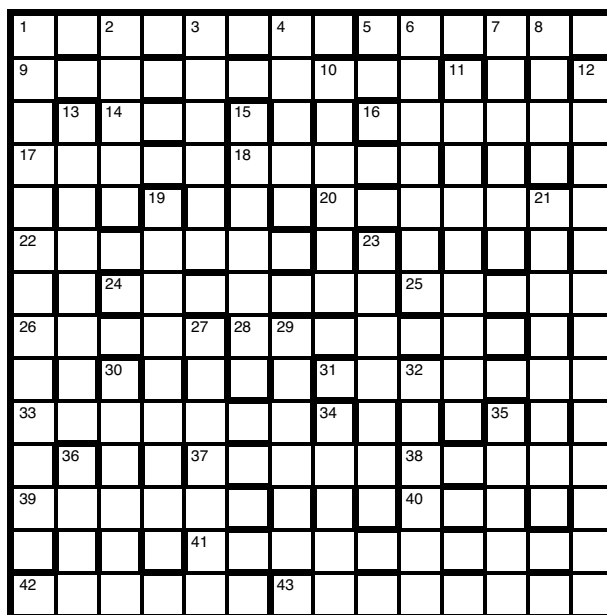
You are invited to encapsulate the life story  
of a well-known person, living or dead, in  
three limericks. Please email entries to [lucy@spectator.co.uk](mailto:lucy@spectator.co.uk)  
by midday on 19 June.

**Crossword**  
**2411: Left out**  
*by CheeseCracker*

Clues for ten thematically  
linked entries (all single words)  
have been left out.

- Across**
- 9 Hot-rod awry? — fancy not being this (10)
  - 14 Jackass regularly rejected 60s music (3)
  - 18 Behind in award, finally going ahead (5)
  - 20 Get better poet to enter competition (7, two words)
  - 22 Venture around the City, not much of an area (7)
  - 24 Extremely engaging men in ladies' underwear — crikey! (7)
  - 25 Worries about ship holding water capsizing (5)
  - 26 Fight animals back, avoiding river (5, hyphenated)
  - 28 Enduring a lot of cobblers? (7)
  - 31 Turned towards one's love — British poetry (7)
  - 33 Emphatically, anybody feels no wrong (7)
  - 37 Model with a group of stars (5)
  - 39 Chap, deft worker with no energy, died (6)
  - 40 Diner picked up letter overseas (3)
  - 41 Semi-pro air unsettled show manager (10)

- Down**
- 1 Offer, ultimately limited, outsider can't change (13, two words)
  - 2 Left in vile European city (5)
  - 3 Runs over girl in African republic (6)
  - 4 Polish uniform capped with head of US vulture (5)



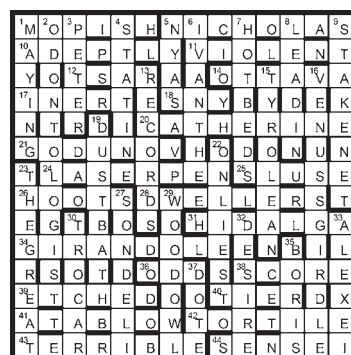
- 6 Secretive folk revel noisily, heading off on Sabbath (7)
- 7 Casual clothing has tenor briefly ill-tempered (6, hyphenated)
- 8 Indeed, no time for result (4)
- 10 Bullet used by bounty hunter, say (6)
- 12 Bias of private school over meeting about sons (13)
- 13 Unknown Frenchman cutting cake, one from a particular range (8)
- 21 Women in colleges see without judgement (8)
- 23 Scarf worn by Tom finally lost in sailing vessel (7)
- 27 Outdoor broadcasting now about training (7, hyphenated)
- 29 Brief brawl before quiet strike by Spenser (6)
- 30 Muscle cut badly in unguarded press (6)
- 32 Nun against admitting wife in old English society (6)
- 34 Primarily wrapping up porcelain (5)
- 35 Spread food around bottom of bowl (5)
- 36 Initially knew all the answers in Japanese exercises (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 24 June. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2411, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

Address .....

Email .....



**SOLUTION TO 2408: END OF THE LINE**

Unclued lights are TSAR (12) NICHOLAS (5A), his son ALEXEI (33), and his predecessors PETER (3) and CATHERINE (20) THE GREAT (23), BORIS (35) GODUNOV (21) and IVAN THE (6) TERRIBLE (43).

**First prize** Miriam Moran, Pangbourne, Reading  
**Runners-up** Jack Shonfield, Child Okeford, Dorset;  
Vincent Clark, Frant, East Sussex

## No sacred cows Budweiser flags up its new-found virtue signalling

Toby Young

Maurice Bowra, the flamboyant warden of Wadham College from 1938 to 1970, once argued against the legalisation of homosexuality on the grounds that it would take all the fun out of it. Without the risk of being picked up by the police, cruising up and down the Cowley Road at one in the morning would become rather tedious. He referred to the secret club of powerful homosexuals in the British establishment as the 'homintern' and prided himself on being a high-ranking officer. He liked the fact that there was something exotic and clandestine about his sexuality and dreaded the risk of embourgeoisement if the law was changed.

Easy for Bowra to say, of course, protected as he was by wealth and privilege. And he may not have really meant it. But you can't help wondering what he would have made of Pride, the month-long celebration of LGBT identities that now takes place every summer. Talk about gentrification! Every element of the festival is plastered with a corporate logo, so desperate are multinationals to convey how on board they are with the 'equality, diversity and inclusion' agenda. Procter & Gamble is celebrating its 25th anniversary of 'LGBT+ inclusion', while Virgin Atlantic got the jump on its less-woke competitors by



*Being LGBT is now the height of respectability, while being a white 'cishet' male is morally suspect*

announcing earlier this year that it would be replacing the second world war pin-up girl that has adorned its planes for 35 years with a more diverse group of figures, including a gay man wearing a one-piece red bathing suit.

But the rainbow-coloured biscuit must go to Budweiser UK. The lager manufacturer has decided to produce a range of plastic beer cups with Pride's nine official 'flags' on them, each representing a different section of the LGBT community. There's 'Genderfluid Pride', for instance, a combination of pink, blue, white, purple and black, and 'Asexual Pride', where black is for 'asexuals who don't feel sexual attraction to anyone' and white represents 'non-asexual allies'.

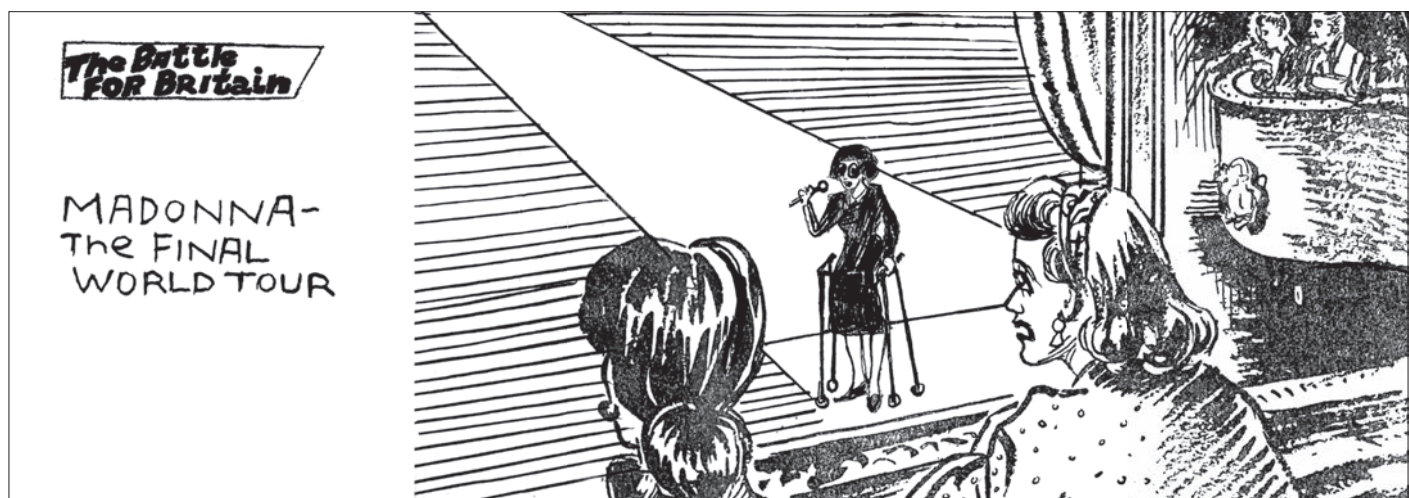
As a marketing exercise, Budweiser's 'Fly the Flag' campaign cannot be aimed at those people who happen to fall into these categories because there simply aren't enough of them. In the US, the Williams Institute estimates that about 0.66 per cent of the population is transgender, but that is a voluminous number compared with some of the more niche groups represented by the Budweiser cups. For instance, the black stripe on the yellow, white, purple and black cup symbolising 'Non-Binary Pride' is intended to represent 'those who feel they are without gender entirely'. Another flag labelled 'Intersex Pride' is aimed at people 'whose biological sex can't be classified as clearly male or female'. About one person in 2,000 fall into that particular medical category.

So is the target audience beer drinkers whom Budweiser thinks will approve of the support it's showing to these groups? I doubt the company has done any research to establish how

large that demographic is. Rather, it's a mandatory exercise in virtue signalling, something every large company now feels it has to do to demonstrate its alignment with progressive orthodoxy. But why? To attract woke applicants from good universities? Because someone in the corporate and social responsibility department has suggested it and no one dares contradict them for fear of being labelled homophobic, transphobic or bi-phobic? Because the fiftysomething CEO wants to be able to tell his blue-haired 16-year-old daughter that he's doing his bit to fight bigotry and oppression? Or is he planning to give a set of the rainbow cups to his wife so she can show them off to her friends at the local country club?

Probably all of the above, but there's also a strong hint of religious observance in it, with all members of the Brahmin class, and those aspiring to join, feeling obliged to express the same progressive pieties. Which brings me back to Maurice Bowra. Over the past 100 years, the attitude of polite society towards homosexuality and other expressions of sexual and gender non-conformity has shifted 180 degrees. Being LGBT is now the height of respectability, while being a white 'cishet' male is morally suspect. These days, a man is more likely to get into trouble for making a pass at a girl than a boy, particularly if he works for a woke corporation like Budweiser. It's easy to become a bit Bufton Tufton about this, but perhaps men like me should take a leaf out of Bowra's book. It's time to start thinking of ourselves as a glamorous, underground minority who can only reveal our sexual preferences in private. Welcome to the 'heterotern'.

## MICHAEL HEATH





## The Wiki Man

### It's easy to sex up the business of paying tax

Rory Sutherland

To fund the war against Napoleon in 1813, Princess Marianne of Prussia invented an ingenious tax-raising scheme. Wealthy Prussians were called on to hand their jewellery to the state; in exchange they were given iron replacements for the gold items they had donated.

Stamped on the iron replicas were the words 'Gold gab ich für Eisen'. The phrase has a double meaning, the iron referring to the iron of the replica, but also to the 'iron' your donation had bought as armaments. At Prussian balls thereafter, iron jewellery carried more status than gold. Gold merely proved your family was rich; iron proved you were not only rich but patriotic.

Why does no one try such ideas today? As Adam Smith observed, 'The chief enjoyment of riches consists in the parade of riches'.

Just as the British Legion would raise far less money if it stopped handing out poppies, the DVLA seems to have lost millions when it stopped handing out tax discs. Perhaps, without the bizarrely enjoya-



At Prussian balls, iron jewellery carried more status than gold

ble annual rite of unperforating and displaying your tax disc, people feel short-changed? To promote honesty and altruism, it helps to provide some small selfish gain in return.

For years I have advised public health professionals to stop recommending we engage in 'ten minutes of aerobic exercise, three times a week'. Phrased like that, it sounds deeply boring. 'Why don't you encourage people to have more sex instead?' I asked. After all, it's aerobic, it lasts ten minutes (if you're English) and, unlike jogging, ridiculous clothes are optional.

In the same way, why not make it more interesting to pay tax? Some people say we pay too much tax. Others say we pay too little. But the current tax system is flawed for another reason: it is psychologically tone-deaf. There is no attempt to create any compensatory feel-good factor at all.

The Treasury's hatred of hypothecated taxes is one problem. As every charity knows, people are far happier giving to a specific cause than to an ill-defined one. Economists assume that the pain of writing a cheque depends only on the amount and not the destination. That is nonsense.

For another thing, cutting the tax rate is emotionally wasteful. We soon become accustomed to the new rate of tax and forget about it. More interesting would be to hold the tax rate constant, but to refund tax cuts annually in a lump sum. It would then be

valued year after year, rather than becoming invisible.

By rebating people's taxes annually and simultaneously you can also borrow from Princess Marianne's playbook. It is hard to get people to volunteer to pay more tax. But it would be far easier to get people to accept a lower tax rebate. A month before the annual rebate was due, we could be invited to donate a proportion to causes of our choice: 50 per cent back to the NHS, for instance. People who gave 50 per cent or 100 per cent could have their names published online.

This would silence those annoying people who constantly drone on about how we should pay more tax while avidly trousering every tax break they can find. If your pinko friends had spent their despised tax break on a holiday to Machu Picchu, you could call them out.

Better still, social pressure, unlike legislation, is sensitive to context. Nobody would begrudge the young, say, or a low-earning family, for keeping their rebate. But anyone with money to spare could reasonably be nudged into contributing more.

The window tax was in some ways the perfect tax. You could avoid it if you needed to, but you couldn't hide the fact that you had.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy UK.

#### DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My mother died a few months ago. Her collection of colourful clothes, hats, shoes and an immense amount of costume jewellery was donated to various charity shops in nearby Devizes. Consequently, I now see a diverse range of ladies wearing one of my mother's 'little numbers'. If I bump into a friend festooned in these purchases, what is the right compliment to make?

— N.C., Stanton St Bernard, Wilts

A. Say nothing. Part of the joy of vintage clothing is the mystery

of its provenance. The buyer can fantasise — surely it must have cost a fortune originally! It's so chic it might even have belonged to Catherine Deneuve? Or Coco Chanel herself? Don't let daylight in on magic. Just take quiet comfort from this posthumous proof that your mother must have been very much on your wavelength if her tastes have harmonised so clearly with those of your living friends.

Q. I have just been to a wonderful wedding and want to write a thank you letter, but when the parents of a bride are divorced and both remarried to new partners, which parent do I thank? Also, do I include the new partner in the salutation of the letter? Although it might seem weird to include the partner when they have had nothing to do

with the bride either genetically or financially, surely it could equally be rude to exclude them, especially if they did a lot behind the scenes to make the event the success it was. Please advise.

— E.B., London SW10

A. The etiquette is that you should thank whoever's name was on the invitation as the person/people inviting you. You will probably find that you were invited only by the two biological parents. Since the parents of this bride no longer live together you will have to write separate letters to thank them. But there is no need to include the partners in the salutations.

Q. I smoke 20 cigarettes a day and always make sure I carry a packet with me. What annoys me is that, whenever I bring one out at a social event, there will be a

rush of people flocking towards me like gannets all saying that they gave up decades ago but they suddenly really fancy a cigarette and would I mind if they asked for one. Well the answer is yes I would mind. If everyone has one then I will be left short myself. How can I say no without creating an unfriendly vibe?

— G.N., London W1

A. When you go out take a full packet concealed about your person and another with only two cigarettes in it. Even if the first person is selfish enough to take one of your 'last two', no one would dream of taking the 'last one'. In this way the demand will adapt itself to the supply and the group craving will subside. Meanwhile, you can secretly top your packet up when their backs are turned.

## Drink

### Let the wine do the talking

Bruce Anderson



We had all said everything there was to say about Brexit a hundred times over. So the conversation took different routes. We discussed D-Day, Philip Hammond, clichés and President Trump. D-Day: what an awesome concentration of men and materiel — what a magnificent expression of military, national and moral resolve. A youngster made the sort of point beloved of smartass youngsters down the ages. What about the Eastern Front; what about the Kursk salient? Should all that not put D-Day in a diminished perspective?

No, he was told, for two reasons. Without D-Day, the Soviet empire would have extended a lot further west, reaching the Rhine if not indeed the Channel. Equally, with some exceptions, especially when the Waffen SS were in action, the war in the west was as civilised as war can be. In the east, the earth and its inhabitants were ravaged by hell-driven barbarism.

Another question arose. Moral resolve: these days, could we as a nation ever mount an operation simi-

*I felt we should all give the Brune et Blonde five minutes of undiluted concentration*

ilar to D-Day? Let us hope that we never have to find out. Morals led us on to Philip Hammond. General agreement broke out among a group who are normally allergic to agreement, that there is no more honourable man in the front-rank of public life. In an era of illusion and fantasy, he is a tough-minded realist. Yet there would be no point in his running for the Tory leadership, a contest which Boris Johnson might win. This is not to the Tory party's credit.

'Philip's not much of a politician,' someone observed. 'No,' said I: 'he has the defects of his qualities.' That was immediately hailed as a brilliant remark. I swiftly rebuffed the compliments. A few decades ago, I had to delve into the minor political literature of the 1890s. In those days, 'defects of his qualities' would have ranked as an arrant cliché. At some stage, it disappeared into a linguistic culvert, from which it can now emerge, refreshed and renewed. Let us hope that the Tory party can undergo a simi-

lar transformation, in a shorter period, and under a leader who does not revel in the defects of his defects.

I called the meeting to order. We had been drinking an excellent Rhône red, a Brune et Blonde 2012 from the house of Guigal, a superb grower. I had recently experienced disappointments over Guigal's ordinary Côtes du Rhône, which was merely trading on the name: not nearly as good as its equivalent from Saint Cosme. But the Brune et Blonde was delicious, and could indeed withstand plenty more years in the bottle.

I felt that we should all give it five minutes of undiluted concentration. We have all been guilty — I more than most — of being so caught up in talk that a good wine slipped unobtrusively across the palate. That Guigal deserved better, even if not as much as a '09 La Turque, from the same stable. I shared a bottle a few weeks ago. It was worthy of a 21-gun salute.

Less worthy, President Trump received one. Which is more dispiriting: his opponents' childishness or his determination to come down to their level? In the words of the late George Brown, he should treat Sadiq Khan, Jeremy Corbyn and Vince Cable with a complete ignoral. In their turn, they should remember that he won because his opponent came from a family that give sleaze a bad name. Few Americans have been as different as he and T. S. Eliot. Yet Eliot captured the President's character: Apeneck Sweeney. But if the Democrats choose, as seems likely, a candidate who seems ill at ease in most of America west of Manhattan and east of Hollywood, Apeneck will stay in the White House.



*'Darling, you must meet the Carters! Neither of them is standing in the Tory leadership contest!'*

## MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

### Artichoke

My husband has been growling: 'You cross-legged hartichoak.' He tries it on obstructive pedestrians hypnotised by their mobile phones. He thus hopes, optimistically, to utter insults while avoiding any -ism that could get him into trouble.

This imprecation *hartichoak* he took from the mouth of Young Tom Strowd, a Norfolk man, in *The Blind-Beggar of Bednal Green*, a play from 1600 by John Day (a Norfolk man) and Henry Chettle (in and out of debtors' prison). The artichoke jokes went down so well that two sequels were performed, though their text, sadly or not, does not



survive. *Artichoke* displays a modest degree of folk etymology. It came into English in the 16th century from words already obscure in their derivation. We borrowed it from the northern Italian form *articiocco*, in which *ciocco* was taken to mean 'stump'. In reality the word had come, via Spanish *alcachofa*, from the Spanish Arabic *al-karsufa*.

The meaning of the Arabic is not apparent, beyond the prefix *al-*, 'the', as in *alcohol* and *algebra*.

As soon as the plant received a Latin name, etymologising variants appeared such as *articoctus* or *articactus*, suggesting it was something to be cooked, or resembling a cactus. The French called it *artichaut* or *artichaud*, as if it was essential to eat it warm.

Not to be outdone, the English assimilated the first element, *arti*, to *hearty*, like a lettuce, and the second element to *choke*, since that is what you would do if you ate the thistly centre. Don't.

The edible part used to be called the *card*. This derives, like *chard* and *cardoan*, from the Latin *cardus*, 'thistle, artichoke or cardoon'. It's amazing how these

plant names shift, considering how rooted the vegetables are.

From its enjoyment of the seeds of thistle, artichoke or cardoon, the goldfinch got the Latin name *Carduelis carduelis*. Remarkably, another Latin word for thistle, *silybum*, produced the Spanish word for goldfinch, *jilguero*, after more than one phonetic transformation. Yet I've seen it claimed on the internet that *jilguero* comes from *sirgo*, 'piece of silk', since the bird's plumage is as bright as silks. Popular etymology is still at work trying to give transparent meanings to obscure words.

— Dot Wordsworth



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