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THE SPECTATOR

THE MYSTERIOUS
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PATRICK MARNHAM

RETURN OF THE
NORSE GODS
JOANNE HARRIS

GO TO HULL!
JAMES WALTON



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By Harry Mount, Rod Liddle
and James Forsyth



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Victims of hysteria

This week, 49,000 gay men were granted posthumous pardons. Had Harold Macmillan's government taken notice of this magazine in 1957 that number would have been far smaller. After the Wolfenden Report, we called for decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults and at the time we stood out among Fleet Street publications in taking this view, earning us the appellation 'The Bugger's Bugle'.

It would be tempting to think that the pardons, which form part of the Policing and Crime Bill, mark the end of a dark chapter. No longer, we are invited to believe, could good people like Alan Turing — himself pardoned in 2013 — be hounded to their deaths by misplaced and misapplied hysteria.

Yet our legal system still struggles to cope with sex offences. Issuing posthumous pardons for gay men is the easy bit for ministers — it costs them nothing to apologise for the actions of distant predecessors. What is far harder, but more urgent, is to apologise to the innocent people who have been hounded after being falsely accused of various sex offences in the febrile atmosphere since Jimmy Savile's crimes were posthumously exposed in 2012.

Sixty years ago, the (many) critics of *The Spectator's* stance argued that the law should reflect public opinion, rather than seek to steer it. If the consensus was that homosexuality should be punishable in the courts, that's where the matter should end. In a front-page article, we argued differently: no national mood or newspaper moralist can justify keeping an 'irrational and illogical' law which was passed late one night in 1885 without discussion and possibly by mistake. Furthermore, when judges and policemen are expected to relax or intensify their efforts based on public opinion, the conditions are set for a witch hunt. The last few years have demonstrated the truth of this.

Lord Bramall, former chief of the defence staff, deserves to have his innocence recognised as firmly as that of Alan Turing. When accusations of historic child abuse were made against him, his home was raided by 20 police officers. The accusations were at once put in the public domain — though not the identity of his accuser, which remains secret. What the Metropolitan Police were less keen to advertise was that the allegations soon turned out to be groundless. The investigation continued for months after it had been officially halted. Lord Bramall's wife died without knowing that her husband had been cleared. At first, the Met insisted that it had nothing to apologise for. Then, when it was eventually forced

It is urgent that the innocent people who have been falsely accused of various sex offences receive apologies

to apologise, it did so without any public acknowledgement of the wrong.

There is a long list of men who have been treated in the same way as Lord Bramall: Cliff Richard, Lord Brittan, Harvey Proctor, Nigel Evans, Paul Gambaccini. Gambaccini was needlessly kept on bail for 12 months after a police investigation began and he has calculated that he was left £200,000 poorer as a result of legal bills and lost earnings.

All these cases have the same root cause. Following the Savile revelations, police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service sensed that public opinion over past failures was running so high that sex offences must be made a special case. The usual guards of legal process could be lowered in order to satisfy the public clamour for prosecutions. Accusers were automatically described as 'victims', who had a right not just to be taken seriously, but to be believed. The hysteria reached a peak in 2014 when a Metropolitan Police officer described allegations of a VIP paedophile

ring as 'credible and true' — effectively trying to prejudge the outcome of any resulting criminal case. It later turned out that the accusations, made by a man known only as 'Nick', were neither credible nor true; but not before public figures such as Lord Bramall were dragged through the mud.

Homes of the accused have been raided in police operations designed to attract as much publicity as possible. When searching Cliff Richard's Berkshire home, the police tipped off the BBC, which launched a helicopter. Police have excused this kind of behaviour on the grounds that the publicity encourages 'other victims' to come forward.

Unquestionably, there are many historic child sex offences which have gone unpunished, but the manner in which the recent investigations have been conducted has also encouraged fantasists and compensation-hunters. Payments have been made to alleged victims of Jimmy Savile merely on the grounds that they were in a situation in which they could have been abused by him — with no evidence required.

That is not justice but a travesty of it. Little has been done to redress the imbalance. On the contrary, the government perseveres with an inquiry into establishment child abuse which lurches from one crisis to another. Little consideration has been given to the iniquity whereby the names of the accused are broadcast far and wide while accusers are granted lifelong anonymity — even if it emerges that they are lying.

It is 60 years since Lord Wolfenden recommended the decriminalisation of homosexual acts and 50 years since this was acted upon. We hope that it will not take so long to acknowledge the overzealous and damaging way in which alleged sex offences have been investigated, and the inexcusable reluctance of politicians and the police to apologise and clear the names of those falsely accused.



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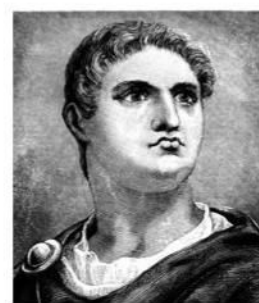
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CONTRIBUTORS

Simon Courtauld was deputy editor of *The Spectator* under Alexander Chancellor, and writes an appreciation of him on p. 15. He also wrote *To Convey Intelligence*, a history of the magazine.

Gwyneth Lewis was Wales's first poet laureate, and wrote the words that stand, in Welsh and English, outside the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff. A new poem (in English) is on p. 32.

Martin Gayford's latest book is *A History of Pictures*, written with David Hockney. He writes on p. 33 about Michelangelo and on p. 45 about modern prints; one of them is of him.

Joanne Harris's books include *Chocolat* and two based on Norse mythology, *Runemarks* and *The Gospel of Loki*. She reviews Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* on p. 34.

Michael Beloff is a QC and a former president of Trinity College, Oxford. He considers the politics of America's Supreme Court on p. 36.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Trump news

Theresa May, the Prime Minister, let it be known that she was 'very happy' about having extended an invitation from the Queen to Donald Trump to make a state visit to Britain. An online petition calling for its cancellation had attracted more than 1.7 million signatures and a rival petition supporting it also gained enough signatures to warrant a Commons debate, scheduled for 20 February. Mrs May had left Washington in a brief interlude of happy achievement after being the first head of government to meet President Trump formally at the White House. The day before, in Philadelphia, she made a well-regarded speech on foreign policy to Republican congressmen, in which she said: 'The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over.' At a press conference with Mr Trump she announced that he was 100 per cent behind Nato and he said that, although he thought torture worked, he would defer to James Mattis, his defence secretary, who opposed it. Mrs May and Mr Trump were photographed hand in hand as he negotiated a declivity in the West Wing colonnade; the press suggested that he suffers from bathmophobia, a fear of steps.

But while Mrs May was in the air speeding towards Turkey it became known that Mr Trump had signed an executive order under the heading 'Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals' that suspended for 90 days the entry of citizens of seven countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

It also blocked admittance for refugees from Syria indefinitely and the entry of all refugees for 120 days. On the first day 109 people in transit were denied entry and 173 were stopped by airlines from boarding an aircraft to the United States. When, at a joint press conference with Binali Yildirim, the prime minister of Turkey, Mrs May was asked thrice about Mr Trump's move, she replied: 'The United States is responsible for the United States' policy on refugees.' Her announcement of a £100 million contract to sell fighters to Turkey was rather overshadowed by the controversy.

As Mrs May returned to Britain, No. 10 said of Mr Trump's actions: 'We do not agree with this kind of approach.' Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, ascertained that British people with dual nationality did not fall under the ban. Mr Trump sacked Sally Yates, the acting attorney general, appointed by Barack Obama, after she ordered justice department lawyers not to enforce the executive order. Mr Trump nominated the conservative-minded Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court.

President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico cancelled his meeting with Mr Trump after suggestions from the US President of ways in which Mexico could be made to pay for a wall between the two countries.

Trump-free news

Mps debated the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. Tesco agreed to buy Booker, Britain's biggest food wholesaler. The Duke of

Cambridge and Prince Harry are to commission a statue of their mother, Diana, Princess of Wales, who died 20 years ago. Sir John Hurt, remembered for playing the Elephant Man, Quentin Crisp and a spaceman through whose chest an alien bursts, died aged 77. Alexander Chancellor, who transformed *The Spectator* as its editor from 1975 to 1984, died aged 77. Unusual numbers of migrants, such as waxwings, appeared in eastern counties during a cold spell on the Continent.

Six Muslim worshippers at a mosque in Quebec were shot dead, and a French-Canadian student, Alexandre Bissonnette, aged 27, was charged with murder. US commandos attacked an al-Qaeda stronghold in Yemen, killing 14. Houthi rebels attacked a Saudi frigate off Yemen, killing two. Members of al-Shabab, the Islamist terrorists, attacked a Kenyan military base in southern Somalia and said they had killed more than 50 soldiers. Austria decided to ban full-face veils in public places, such as courts and schools, to placate the right-wing opposition.

Wildfires destroyed the 1,000 houses making up the town of Santa Olga, Chile; 5,000 people fled. Ukraine prepared to evacuate 8,000 from the eastern town of Avdiivka amid renewed fighting with pro-Russian rebels. The Boy Scouts of America welcomed transgender children who think they are boys. To lessen smog in Beijing, the Chinese government appealed for restraint in celebrating the Year of the Cock: 'Let us enthusiastically take action by not setting off, or setting off fewer, fireworks.' CSH

DIARY

Matt Ridley



A Bill to confer power on the prime minister to notify, under Article 50(2)...'. When it comes to the House of Lords, some of those trying to amend or delay the bill will be paid pensioners of the European Commission. Peers are obliged to declare any interest that 'might be thought by a reasonable member of the public' to influence the way they discharge their parliamentary duties — unless it is an EU pension. In 2007, a Lords subcommittee said that because their contracts oblige them to support the EU, an EC pensioner who made 'intemperate criticism of the commission' would have contravened their obligations under the Treaty of Rome 'and therefore could in theory damage his pension'. Nonetheless, the subcommittee concluded, in a magnificent non sequitur, 'There was no doubt of the integrity of the members of the House who had served as EU commissioners and it would be distasteful to call on them to declare their interest when speaking.' Distasteful!

From the time I worked in Washington in the 1980s, five good friends have now died far too young — Stephen Milligan of accidental suffocation, David Blundy shot by a sniper in El Salvador, David Hatendi of a heart attack, Christopher Hitchens of cancer, and now the incomparable Alexander Chancellor of a stroke. Alexander was once prosecuted for driving while many times over the limit in (I think) Alabama. His lawyer tried the long-shot argument that as a naive Brit, he felt unable to refuse his hosts' hospitality. It worked. The judge promptly halted the trial and apologised profusely on behalf of America.

Along with Baroness Meacher, I am pressing the case for humanist marriage. It is a bizarre anomaly that religious people can be married by a civil registrar or by a representative of their religion, however obscure that faith — whereas, except in Scotland, non-religious people have no other option but a civil registrar. They can have a humanist ceremony, but it is not official marriage. In another obscure campaign, last week I led a delegation of two MPs and two peers to see the excellent health minister, Nicola Blackwood, to point out the absurdity of the ban on 'snus', the popular Swedish

alternative to smoking. A sort of miniature nicotine teabag you press against your gum, snus is the reason that only 5 per cent of Swedish middle-aged men smoke compared with 22 per cent in Britain, and that Sweden has the lowest lung, oral and oesophageal cancer and heart disease rates in Europe among men. (Swedish women are less keen on snus for some reason.) Snus is banned in the EU except in Sweden — presumably lest it save non-Swedish lives. This is known as the precautionary principle.

Every day brings a new shock from the White House. The wall, torture, refugees. What next? I worry that Trump may discredit the one thing I agree with him on: that the threat from climate change is exaggerated. Before he implodes, I hope we find out what's been going on at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other agencies to create 'alternative facts' that support the climate-industrial complex. Frustratingly for the alarmists, global warming over 30 years is about half as fast as the models predicted. NOAA tries to ignore the satellite data sets, which show even less warming, and focus on the surface temperature data sets, which are 'adjusted' in poorly explained ways. The supposed global temperature in 1910 has been mysteriously cooling over the past eight years, while that of 2000 has been mysteriously warming — which creates a steeper curve, though still not steep enough. This is known as fake news.

The bicoastal elite might be more effective in opposing Mr Trump if it weren't obsessed with the persecution of anybody who says the wrong thing. 'While you self-involved fools were policing the language at the Kids' Choice Awards,' raged the broadcaster Bill Maher last week, 'a madman talked his way into the White House.' This new puritanism must explain why some feminists make common cause with Islam. One of the Women's March organisers was Linda Sarsour, a defender of sharia law, which is misogyny incarnate. She said on Twitter of Brigitte Gabriel, a feminist critic of Islam, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a victim of female genital mutilation and of death threats for apostasy, 'I wish I could take their vaginas away — they don't deserve to be women.' So she's a pussy-grabber too. She has since deleted the tweet.

The mistle thrushes are in song in Northumberland, always the first harbingers of spring. For much of January it has been warmer than in London, as sometimes happens in winter; never in summer. A reminder, if we needed one, that London is closer to the Continent.

Matt Ridley is a Conservative peer and a Times columnist. His books include Genome and The Rational Optimist.



No. 10 is learning how to deal with the Donald

Imagine if Donald Trump declared that Islam had 'no place' in his country, or proposed banning the burqa 'wherever legally possible'. There wouldn't be enough space in Trafalgar Square for all the protestors. British ministers would be forced to the Commons to make clear their disagreement with the President of the United States. And there would be millions more signatures on the petition demanding that his state visit invitation be rescinded.

The Trump White House, of course, hasn't said either of these things. They are the on-the-record positions of two heads of governments in the EU. Robert Fico, prime minister of Slovakia, has declared that Islam has no place in his country, while Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, wants the burqa banned wherever possible. It is a striking feature of British politics that we care more about statements by the US President than those of the leaders of the countries with whom we have been in 'ever closer union' for 40-odd years.

For reasons of culture, history and language, Britain follows the politics of the US more closely than that of any other country. American politics quickly becomes Westminster politics. That, in combination with America's security role, often makes this alliance a particularly problematic one in political terms for British prime ministers.

For the past eight years, the UK government has been shielded from protest by Barack Obama's aura. Shortly before the 2012 presidential election, a senior figure in the British intelligence community was asked who he wanted to win. He said he was praying for Obama: if Mitt Romney won and simply continued Obama's drone strikes, there would be tens of thousands demonstrating in London and questions asked in Parliament about how exactly the UK was assisting.

But now Theresa May has to contend with the most difficult American president since the establishment of the US-UK security alliance. Republican presidents haven't tended to go down well in Britain in recent decades. But Trump is in a different league: he actively wants to pick fights and offend liberal sensitivities. The shock with which his domestic opponents and foreign leaders have reacted to his refugee ban was part of the plan. You can take Trump out of *The Apprentice*, but you can't take *The Apprentice* out of Trump.

And yet Trump offers opportunities for Britain. He is a Brexit man who wants to see us succeed outside the EU as part of a

return to a nation-state-based international order. He has, as European Council president Donald Tusk laments, junked 70 years of US support for European integration. Despite his protectionist rhetoric, he is keen on a US-UK free trade deal. What squares the circle between his rhetoric and such a deal is that trade with the UK would not, like trade with China or Mexico, be seen as a threat to employment in the old manufacturing states that won him the election. As an influential figure in the British government told me, with the Trump team, 'Everything should be seen through the prism of jobs, jobs, jobs.'

Brexit has undoubtedly made the relationship with Washington more important for Britain. It was the Trump team's anger that

A phone call from Boris Johnson to Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, quickly resolved the visa issue

led to Theresa May attacking Obama's secretary of state, John Kerry, for his criticisms of the Israeli government in December, just days after Britain had voted for a UN resolution highly critical of Israel (and the US had abstained).

But even without Brexit, Downing Street would have had to get close to President Trump. Any European government would feel the same obligation. According to *Der Spiegel*, Merkel's aides told the Trump team that she was ready to come to Washington as soon as they wanted, only to receive no reply.

The reason why Berlin, as well as London, wants to face-to-face meetings with Trump is that Europe still relies on the American secu-

rity guarantee represented by Nato. When Trump talks about Nato being 'obsolete', he encourages Vladimir Putin to test western resolve. No UK prime minister could afford not to try to correct the course of an American president who was undermining Nato. And May does appear to have had some early success on this front: in their press conference, he did not dissent when she said that he backed the alliance 100 per cent.

So, how do you deal with an ally like Donald? The key is hard-headed realism about who he is, how he works and where he is open to influence. As Boris Johnson briefed Tory MPs last week, it is crucial to remember that the Trump team see themselves as ripping up a failed old order. They want to know how things have always been done, and then do something else. Appeals to precedent or the liberal post-war order will only persuade them to be more radical; arguments must be framed in terms of US national interest.

The Trump administration is run from the centre, and by a small group of people. If you want to influence it, you have to go through them. I understand that Kim Darroch, the British ambassador, has told ministers that they must involve themselves if they want something done; relying on bureaucratic channels doesn't really work. The embassy had notably little success at the weekend in trying to establish what the Trump visa ban meant for UK dual citizens; a phone call from Boris Johnson to Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, quickly resolved that issue.

Then there is Trump himself. All presidents are vain to some degree, but he does seem particularly status-conscious: much of his anger at the US media comes from his sense that he is not been given sufficient credit for his achievements. That's why the government thought the pomp of a state visit, with a royal audience, was the quickest way to appeal to him. But the tightrope the government must walk is flattering his vanity, without looking like it is blind to his faults.

If Theresa May can help broker an arrangement where Nato's European members all spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence and Trump recommit the US to the alliance, she will have both bolstered the security of the West and made a constructive Brexit deal more likely. If she can follow through with real progress on a broad US-UK trade deal, then she will have shown herself to be much more than an apprentice statesman.



'Nearest bank? Turn left, straight on, through the airport, plane to Frankfurt and you can't miss 'em.'

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

As he left the editorship of *The Spectator* in March 1984, Alexander Chancellor wrote in this space: 'When I joined the paper as editor in 1975, people were in the habit of asking me what my "policy" was going to be... How desperately uneasy this question made me. If there was a lavatory in the vicinity, I would lock myself inside it. I was sure I ought to have a "policy"... but I most certainly hadn't got one.' As his assistant editor, I witnessed the dismay on the faces of proprietors, advertisers and various big shots at Alexander's answers to this sort of question. He would say, 'Well, we should publish some good articles, I suppose,' and then give his distinctive laugh, which sounded like a schoolboy imitating a machine-gun.

Alexander felt genuinely insecure at not being able to come up with a 'policy': it was to do with his lack of intellectual self-confidence. But I gradually realised that this failure to satisfy the boss class was also something that he was proud of. He was sacked from editing *The Spectator*, *Time and Tide* and the *Sunday Telegraph* magazine, and from his columns in the *New Yorker*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. (He strongly believed he was about to be sacked from his last post, the editorship of the *Oldie*, although there was no evidence for this.) Given his talent, this record is remarkable. It was a reflection of his resistance to control. He was often lazy and chaotic. Sometimes he was simply absent and sometimes — because he was never full of his own opinions — he simply couldn't think of anything to write about. His copy was horrendously late, worse than anyone except Boris Johnson. Alexander was rarely downright rude to his bosses, and he was a man of immense charm, but I think they sensed — and resented — that he would never implement their ideas. For all his humility, he thought he knew better. He was right: he did.

As his assistant, I shared his Doughty Street office. He was then in his mid-forties and very dashing — the more so for his unkempt, bohemian air (he mistrusted neatness, complaining in print



about Jonathan Aitken's 'horribly well-tailored suit'), the smoking and drinking, and his physical restlessness which meant that he walked up and down the same patch of the valuable rug — stolen from Ian Gilmour, a previous proprietor — for hours each day, talking on the telephone. He had large, dark, expressive eyes, which would flash humour and desperation (often both at once). He never held a regular editorial meeting. He hardly ever closed his office door. He loved mischief. He was touched when, after his sacking, Richard Ingrams resigned as television critic in solidarity; but he also accepted with glee when I offered the vacancy to him.

The Alexander technique of editing exemplified this unusual combination of pride and humility: he hated being told what to do, so he didn't tell others. He nurtured talent gently. He invented the contrasting columns of Taki and the late Jeffrey Bernard, but he did not contrive the High Life/Low Life idea and then find people to fill it. He originally hired Taki to write occasional pieces but found his stuff on Greek politics tedious and suggested he write about his playboy life instead. He originally retained Bernard as racing correspondent, but then realised that the romance of the barfly was more interesting. Thus the double act emerged. In foreign coverage, Alexander found the right person in the right place at the right time — Timothy Garton Ash in early 1980s Poland, Murray Sayle in Japan, Xan Smiley in southern Africa, Charles Glass in Beirut. His reading of any article was honest and unprejudiced. He rarely rewrote anyone's copy, but when he did he always improved it, because he had purity of style and clarity of mind. He taught me more about editing than anyone else, by seeming not to teach.

In the farewell piece I mention above, Alexander came nearest to explaining his non-'policy': 'The good thing about *The Spectator*, as I think I have discovered, is that unlike most papers it actually benefits from a lack of editorial direction of the sort implied by the word "policy".' The paper couldn't pay its writers much, so they could be drawn to it only 'as a haven in which freedom of expression suffers from the minimum of restrictions and taboos'. That's what we all loved, and the readers loved it too. He restored *The Spectator's* greatness.

We also loved Alexander himself — his light hidden under a bushel (his great musical accomplishment, for example), his kindness, his absurdist anecdotes about the complications of human relationships, his gift for happiness and unhappiness. At the dinner when we sent Taki off to prison, I remember Alexander sliding down the wall at the end of the evening, saying, 'I'm 45 and I've had enough.' We knew that his marriage to Susie was what newspapers call 'tempestuous', but they seemed devoted as well as, sometimes, estranged. Once, in the 1980s, we had them to dinner at home. After everyone had left, I went out to put rubbish in the dustbins. There were Susie and Alexander kissing and cuddling in the street like 18-year-olds.

Alexander's last journalistic achievement was his Long Life column for this paper, about growing old. It showed his light touch and humanity to best advantage. Two weeks ago (21 January), he described how the nightmares of his boyhood had moved through the adult ones of public embarrassment or thwarted ambition to the unsettling, anxious ones of age. 'To dream of dying is one of the more disconcerting experiences, for you can't be sure that you haven't really died until you have pinched yourself a number of times after waking up.' I sent him an email praising the column as 'really a poem'. 'Thank you,' replied Alexander. 'Much more praise than I deserve, but all the more welcome for that.' He died five days later.

Surviving Trumpworld

How to keep your head amid the craziness

HARRY MOUNT

While he was on the campaign trail, Donald Trump was asked an intriguing question by Bob Lonsberry of WHAM 1180 AM, a local radio station in Rochester, New York.

'Is there a favourite Bible verse or Bible story that has informed your thinking or your character through life, sir?' Lonsberry said.

Trump's answer? 'An eye for an eye.'

If you wanted a quick glimpse inside Trump's brain, that quote's as good as any. It captures his narcissism, his thin skin, his exponentially cranked-up aggression.

It still isn't clear whether the Trump administration is genuinely deluded, in its creation of pretend crowds, its all-out assault on the media, its anger at supposed illegal voters in an election it won; or whether the administration is just pretending to be deluded to send the left apoplectic.

Because Trump isn't the only one pumping out the rage and the confected 'facts'. The world has gone bananas in its response to his tactics, and his enemies have responded in kind, moulding the truth to suit their aims, belting out the same foam-flecked rhetoric. To misquote Trump's favourite passage of scripture, it's a lie for a lie.

In his 1837 history of the French Revolution, Thomas Carlyle wrote, 'It is unfortunate, though very natural, that the history of this period has so generally been written in hysterics. Exaggeration abounds, execration, wailing; and on the whole, darkness.'

We're in danger of doing the same with Trump's American Revolution. We used to laugh at the comments below online articles — see how nuts how they are! — but now public discourse at the highest levels has become little more than an internet slanging match. It isn't so much the loner's isolated echo chamber as two separate, enormous, hermetically sealed silos, each crammed with opposed supporters screaming, unheard, at the other side.

So with all this rage whirling around on both sides of the Atlantic, how do you stay sane and composed in Trumpworld?

Don't let Trump — or his usefully hysterical enemies — drive you crazy. Ignore the trolls and the virtue-Trumpeters; discard Trump's anti-media hysteria as the cynically concocted ruse it is. Most people — including you — aren't shouting, so why should the



shouters have a monopoly on your attention? Neither the Trump-lovers nor the Trump-haters have a monopoly on the truth.

You can be sceptical about the media without denouncing it all as post-truth evil — particularly if you read both sides of the argument. Take the edge off partisanship, and you feel your way to a closer approxi-

The newly popular hashtag #NotMyPresident loses some power in the UK, where it is factually true

mation of the truth. For a brief moment, the two silos open up and their occupants listen to the other side.

When Trump lies, don't lie back; don't get angry. Come back with something true and composed that might conceivably register in the minds of the only people who can control Trump's future in four years' time — the American people.

There was little sign of that composed, effective response in the Trump protestors outside Downing Street on Monday night.

As individuals, they were a restrained bunch — largely white, middle-class, mostly in their twenties. The odd wisp of dope smoke drifted down Whitehall, and there were a few starry-eyed activists on the fringes. One handed me a flyer headlined 'Brexit is Racist'. But this was Middle England — or Middle London — on the march. As I wheeled my bike through the crowds, apologising for bumping into people, they displayed the chief distinguishing mark of English civilisation — they said 'Sorry' every time I said 'Sorry', even though it wasn't their fault.

Their collective message, though, was a kind of group rage. 'Theresa the Appeaser' was a regular theme on the placards, which is at least catchy, unlike the one that read 'No one asked for you, Theresa, you hatchet-faced old bitch.' Trump as Hitler was another repeated image, one pictured above the single word 'Twitler'.

A particularly popular slogan was to take the subtle, telling Martin Niemöller line — 'First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Social-

ist...' — and inject it with rage: 'First they came for the Muslims but the UK told Donny to fuck off'; 'First they came for the Muslims, and we said, not today or ever, motherfucker.'

Trump's travel ban is badly thought-out, ineffective and cruel, but it was hard to see how the abuse and rage would stop it — or stop the President's state visit to Britain.

It was even harder to see how any of this could shift the electoral maths that brought Trump to power. Trump got fewer votes last year than Mitt Romney did in the 2012 election, but he retained the Republican core vote. Hillary Clinton lost millions of black and Hispanic voters who had backed Obama in 2008 and 2012.

The placards on Monday night's march saying things like 'Trump's AmeriKKKa' won't have any power to turn that Republican base against Trump. If the London march was reported at all, they'll only firm up his support.

Getting angry with Trump won't do him any harm, either. He is the king of anger in an age of anger. Trump's campaign was built on manufactured rage — on anger mismanagement, you might call it: being rude about immigrants, threatening to lock up Hillary, demonising the press and mocking individual journalists.

It's a brutally effective technique: hate my enemies — love me. And it worked during the campaign. So they're doing it again now, with continued attacks on the press, and with the divisive executive order banning visitors from seven Muslim countries. Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, allegedly intervened to intensify the ban. Initially, it's reported, the Department of Homeland Security decided to give green-card holders an exemption. Bannon apparently overruled the decision to ramp up the outrage.

The protestors on Monday night are playing right into Bannon's hands. He'll be delighted with their placards; he must long for that 'Trump's AmeriKKKa' poster to be broadcast across the Republican heartlands. He won't be concerned, either, by the more than 1.7 million British signatures on a petition to ban Trump's visit here. Realpolitik dictates that Theresa May had to jump at the chance to be the first leader to meet a new American president. Manners dictate that the Queen will stick by her invitation.

It would hardly be much skin off Trump's nose even if the state visit were cancelled. Yes, he'd love to walk the Balmoral golf course with the Queen in the land of his dear old Scottish mum, Mary Anne MacLeod Trump. But Britain looms much smaller in America's world view than America does in ours.

Monday's protests won't figure in Trump's political reckoning, or Ohio's voting intentions in 2020. Nor will a 1.7 million-signature petition. Nor will the newly popular hashtag

The Smaller Type

Everything we have heard and read
pushes us out to get the big contract:
'with my body I thee worship'. There already
we see conditions to the important act:
'in sickness and in health' 'till death' and so on.
At this point our eyes cross. We smile and sign,
having, we think, enough to go on.
Good will has mixed and melted *yours* and *mine*.

It may take years to reach the smallest print,
where happiness hides: 'no call for certain words'
'days to remember' 'power must be concealed'
'flattery, to be offered without stint' —

clauses not noticed when the astonished birds
watched us undressing in that summer field.

— Alistair Elliot

#NotMyPresident, which loses some power in the UK, where it is factually true.

Still, for all its impotence, the mass protest is a sign of the increasing anger and deepening political divisions in Britain. American politics always used to be more divided than British politics. When I lived in New York a decade ago, I was astonished to meet the proprietor of a conservative newspaper at the entrance to his party in Midtown Manhattan. 'So, Harry, are you a conservative?' he asked.

'Erm — I suppose so,' I said.

'Well, come on in, then! Get yourself a glass of wine.'

That Manichean approach to party invitations doesn't apply, thank God, to *The Spectator*. But an angry 'Whose team are you on?' approach is increasingly spreading across the rest of Britain.

It applied in spades during the referendum campaign, when difference in voting intentions was interpreted by many as outright opposition.

The hatred wasn't just between Remainers and Brexiteers. It was, if anything, more virulent between the different factions of

Brexiteers, particularly between Nigel Farage and the leaders of Vote Leave. As I interviewed the various factions for a new book, I was constantly reminded of that inspired political scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian*:

REG: The only people we hate more than the Romans are the fucking Judean People's Front.

PEOPLE'S FRONT OF JUDEA: Yeah... Splitters!
FRANCIS: And the Judean Popular People's Front.

In these fevered times, it might be wise to channel the spirit of Alexander Chancellor, the late, much lamented former editor of this magazine, who died on Saturday. One of the many enchanting mysteries about Alexander is that a man who revolutionised Britain's leading political magazine wasn't all that interested in politics.

I can't remember him expressing any strong political opinions — although Nick Garland, a *Spectator* cartoonist for many years, does recall a sudden burst of outrage when it was suggested in 1979 that British naval vessels shouldn't pick up Vietnamese boat people from the sea, for fear they would become Britain's responsibility.

In his final *Spectator* column, published last week, Alexander predicted, in his measured way, that Trump wouldn't last long in Washington.

And, if he does lose the next election, it won't be because of angry Whitehall protests attacking AmeriKKKa; it will be despite them.

Harry Mount's Summer Madness: How Brexit Split the Tories, Destroyed Labour and Divided the Country is out next week.



'Are you English?'

Protest all you like. I won't listen until you burn



I think on balance I would prefer people to demonstrate their opposition to political developments — Brexit, the forthcoming state visit of Donald Trump and so on — by setting fire to themselves in the manner of outraged Buddhist monks, rather than simply by clicking 'sign' on some internet petition. I think the self-immolation thing carries more force.

It is true that a mass conflagration of a million and a half people in Trafalgar Square would, in the short term, greatly exacerbate the appalling smog afflicting London as a consequence of wood-burning stoves. But as most of the signatories of the petition against Trump coming probably own all of those stoves, we would be killing two birds with one stone. A forceful protest, which would make us sit up and take notice, and within a few days an end to the polluting effects of the liberal middle classes.

We have still not got to grips with click democracy, how we should weigh its import and who is it who is doing all of the relentless and asinine clicking. Seventeen million people vote for Brexit, but we are somehow expected to review that democratic decision when a million or so sign a petition saying it's a bad idea, not in my name etc. Why? So it is with President Trump's visit. The protests in the USA and the petition and demonstrations over here should count for nothing when placed against the fact that Mr Trump won his election fair and square. And I say that even though Gary Lineker was present at the anti-Trump demo in London. Normally, of course, when this intellectual colossus delivers himself of an opinion, we should ponder his words and take heed. But not on this occasion, I think.

My guess, supported by the geographical breakdown of where the petitioners live, is that the same people who decided that the democratic decision taken to leave the European Union was mistaken and must be overturned are precisely the same people who don't want the Donald to meet the Queen. And in both cases probably signed multiple times. They almost certainly include all of the people who clicked on a link to join the Labour party and elect Jeremy Corbyn as leader. I would put their number at somewhere between 600,000 and a million — at

most, 1.5 per cent of the population. They are at it every day on Change.org and 38 Degrees, demanding stuff, eternally 'involved'. They would call themselves activists, as if pressing your mouse every day could be considered activity. A minority among them actually take to the streets every so often to shout 'Tory scum!' and hold up placards, narcissistically signalling their virtue to the world.

I saw a conversation between some of them on a social media site, talking about what a brilliant day they'd had, and what sandwiches they'd eaten on the anti-Trump march. A few moans about the weather, which had been changeable. This isn't really activism, it's virtue-signalling as a social occasion, a kind of Glyndebourne except you get

The petition against Trump's visit is an explosion of fury from people who have had their way for far too long

to shout at the filth more and don't have to listen to classical music. Yes, some of those people took hampers.

It's also dumb, and hypocritical. The petition to stop Trump's state visit was predicated upon his temporary ban upon entry to the USA for residents of seven countries identified as being breeding grounds for terrorists. But represented by the petitioners, and the unblushingly parti-pris BBC, as being directed at Muslims.

Well, there are 57 Islamic states, so that charge makes no real sense: it is a non sequitur. And Trump's decree was not much more punitive than the one introduced by the

Nobel peace prize winner Barack Obama six years ago. Further, Trump said during his campaign that this is what he intended to do. And the American people voted for it. The liberal left is now in the interesting position of attacking a politician for keeping his promise.

Then there's the hypocrisy, as I say. The argument is that the Queen would be 'embarrassed' by Trump's visit, and I suppose we should be grateful for their sudden concern for our monarch. But in the last decade Brenda has been forced to entertain India's Narendra Modi, whose attitude towards Muslims is, I would argue, slightly to the right of Donald's. Oh, and also leaders from Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, China, Turkey and Russia, those bastions of democracy and human rights. Do you remember petitions on those occasions? Why didn't the autocrats from those homophobic, oppressive, sectarian Arab slave states face the righteous wrath of the wood-burning stove people? Do you remember huge demonstrations and the BBC working itself up into a liberal lather? Nope, me neither. Indeed, I don't remember very much of a fuss when Big Bob Mugabe, bless him, arrived here for a state visit in 1994. The petition against Trump's visit is simply an explosion of pique, or annoyance, or fury even, from people who have had their way for far too long and cannot believe that they are now being gainsaid.

The answer to my original question — what weight should be given to these sorts of petitions? — is very simple. None whatsoever. It is the same people signing every one of them. People with too much time on their hands, people who think they know everything and that the rest of us are both vile and wrong. (Except for my friend James Delingpole's petition to have Islington renamed 'Trumpville', which has not yet got a million signatories, although we are hopeful.)

Just wait until Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen are elected. They'll be back on those little buttons, tapping away so furiously they'll all get mouseburn. We thought the internet would broaden democracy — but it hasn't; it's narrowed it down to an affluent clique who cannot leave it alone. Virtue porn.

So ignore petitions. Let the protestors set themselves on fire instead. Then we will listen, albeit with many caveats.



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'Above all else, fun'

Remembering Alexander Chancellor,
the man who revitalised *The Spectator*

SIMON COURTAULD

Alexander Chancellor's 'Long Life' is over; but it was not nearly long enough. I was feeling rather gloomy last Friday, having just had our old terrier put down, when I opened *The Spectator* and was immediately cheered up by the first paragraph of Alexander's column.

It was so typical of the way that he often looked at the world, and of his delightfully quirky sense of humour, that he should relate a children's song to the new President of the United States. Recalling Nellie the elephant and her trumpety-trump, he wrote: 'I'm hoping against hope that Donald Trumpety-Trump will also say goodbye to the circus in Washington and return to the jungle whence he came.' (A few weeks earlier, he had perceptively ridiculed Trump by comparing him to Liberace.)

One of the remarkable things about the last months of Alexander's life was that, having had a brain haemorrhage, when he resumed his *Spectator* column it was as sparkling and readable as ever, and he never missed another week. At the same time he continued as the highly successful editor of the *Oldie*, but did not enjoy having to give up driving and drinking — though I was glad to hear from the magazine's publisher, James Pembroke, that he had recently been enjoying an occasional glass of red wine.

It was thanks to Alexander's endearing personality, his diffidence and his mastery of the art of gentle persuasion that he was able to attract so many outstanding writers to a magazine which, when he became editor in 1975, had a circulation of little more than 12,000. Several of them — Auberon Waugh, Murray Sayle, Christopher Hitchens, Richard West, Jeffrey Bernard — were seduced from the *New Statesman*, which then had a weekly sale of more than 40,000. They did not come for the money, of which there was little available, but because Alexander was establishing a congenial atmosphere at *The Spectator*: it was intellectually stimulating, civilised yet slightly anarchic and, as Stephen Glover once wrote, 'above all else, fun'.

Within three years the editor of the *Times*, William Rees-Mogg, was writing in a leading article that *The Spectator* was playing an important part in the movement away from collectivism. It had an intellectual vitality which was lacking in the *New Statesman*, and its writers were 'libertarian rather than hierarchical... from the tradition of Locke and Liberty rather than that of Burke and Community'.

When he became editor, having never voted Conservative, Alexander dreaded



being asked about his 'policy'. He insisted that *The Spectator* would not have a political line, and indeed he abolished the weekly leader for a while, because he did not think it should assume an authority and a certainty of opinion which he did not always possess. The magazine, he wrote, tends 'to edit itself. It is the writers who collectively give *The Spectator* its identity without much assistance from the editor.'

This was modesty to the point of self-deprecation. And of course it wasn't true: it was Alexander who, with his great edito-

rial gifts, gave *The Spectator* its identity and set it on the path to commercial success. But the eclecticism which he encouraged in *The Spectator*'s pages was not always appreciated by some of its readers. An article by the Labour MP Eric Heffer, a week before the 1979 general election, was one example. A piece from the poet James Fenton in 1982, as the British task force was on its way to the Falklands, calling the government's policy on the eve of battle 'frivolous, murderous, wicked', caused a bit of a stir. But the readers stayed and new ones arrived.

Alexander may have affected a hands-off attitude to editorship — he was the opposite of a headmaster editor — but he knew what he wanted from an article and he was very good at getting the best out of contributors. As deputy editor, I asked Rab Butler, not long before he died, to write a piece, the subject of which I no longer remember. When it came in, Alexander thought it needed some rewriting. I was somewhat embarrassed, as Rab was my godfather and had married twice into my family, but Alexander said he would deal with it. He persuaded Rab to make a number of amendments to his article which, because time was short, had to be written with his withered hand which he normally used only for signing his name.

On another occasion, when Mountbatten was murdered in 1979, Alexander prevailed upon a very reluctant General Sir John Hackett, the day before the magazine went to press, to write an appreciation. 'Why should I put myself out for you and ruin my evening?' the general asked. Employing all his famous charm, Alexander replied: 'In order to save *The Spectator*.' Long pause. 'All right, fuck you, I'll do it.' It was a very good article, delivered on time for publication.

During his nine years as *Spectator* editor, Alexander wrote the weekly Notebook and became a master of this journalistic form, penning four or five sharply observed comments on matters of the day. But he never wrote the Notebook before Wednesday morning (press day) and would often bring it himself to the typesetters in Clerkenwell Green where Peter Ackroyd and I were passing the pages for the week's issue. He would arrive clutching an armful of newspapers and a cigarette, and the layout of the page might show that he still had two or three hundred words to write. But there had to be time for a good lunch first at the Italian restaurant across the road. He always apologised profusely for his copy being late, usually with the comment, 'I hope it's not too boring.' Which it never was.

Alexander leaves a great journalistic legacy. However, after 40 years of friendship I shall remember him above all as so very lovable. And he had an unforgettable laugh.

Abandoned to their fate

Every week, there are more massacres of Nigeria's Christians – so why is nobody interested?

DOUGLAS MURRAY

Another day in northern Nigeria, another Christian village reeling from an attack by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen who used to be their neighbours – and who are now cleansing them from the area. The locals daren't collect the freshest bodies. Some who tried earlier have already been killed, spotted by the waiting militia and hacked down or shot. The Fulani are watching everything closely from the surrounding mountains. Every week, their progress across the northern states of Plateau and Kaduna continues. Every week, more massacres – another village burned, its church razed, its inhabitants slaughtered, raped or chased away. A young woman, whose husband and two children have just been killed in front of her, tells me blankly, 'Our parents told us about these people. But we lived in relative peace and we forgot what they said.'

For the outside world, what is happening to the Christians of northern Nigeria is both beyond our imagination and beneath our interest. These tribal-led villages, each with their own 'paramount ruler', were converted by missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. But now these Christians – from the bishop down – sense that they have become unsympathetic figures, perhaps even an embarrassment, to the West. The international community pretends that this situation is a tit-for-tat problem, rather than a one-sided slaughter. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the press fails to report or actively obscures the situation. Christians in the south of the country feel little solidarity with their co-religionists suffering from this Islamic revivalism and territorial conquest in the north. And worst of all, the plight of these people is of no interest to their own government. In fact, this ethnic and religious cleansing appears to be taking place with that government's complicity or connivance.

Every village has a similar story. A few days before any attack, a military helicopter is spotted dropping arms and other supplies into the areas inhabited by the Fulani tribes. Then the attack comes. For reasons of Islamic doctrine, the militia often deliver a letter of warning. Then they come, at any time of night or day, not down the dirt tracks, but silently through the foliage. The Christian villagers, who are forbidden to carry arms (everyone is, in theory), have no way

to defend themselves. With some exceptions, they also tend to believe what they were taught about turning the other cheek.

The village of Goska was attacked on Christmas Eve. In a temporary shelter nearby, a young man describes how he ran towards his home when he heard the attack start. There he found his mother lying dead

This ethnic and religious cleansing appears to be taking place with the government's connivance

on the floor. Uniformed Fulani militia were everywhere. He fled across the fields: 'I ran and ran until I realised my feet could not carry me any longer.' The first bullet that hit him passed through the sole of one foot; the second through the back of the other leg with that clean felt-tip mark Kalashnikov bullets make on entry. The exit wounds are less neat – the second exploded out through his right kneecap. On the ground, he realised why he could no longer run, but also that he

was still alive. 'My day was not over,' he says, brushing his hand across his better leg.

Across the surviving Christian villages of the north, thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. In those villages and the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps to which many have fled, you can see the same wounds from the same bullets. In the remote village of Sho, where the attacks have been going on since 2001, a girl of 12 – in her Sunday best – embarrassedly shows me the scars of the bullet which entered and exited her elbow recently while she played behind her house.

An eight-year-old girl balances on one foot to point out the bullet wound on the other, a hallmark of the snipers sitting in the hills around us. Villages have been persuaded to keep records of the attacks to show anyone who cares. One of the very few from outside who does – Britain's own Baroness Cox – came here recently. Her vehicle was spotted by the Fulani, who came out hunting for her and only just missed their target. Because of attacks like this, almost nobody comes. Just one more reason why these atrocities do not attract the West's attentions.

The task of chronicling the outrages continues nonetheless. Village leaders keep ring-binders of their dead. Some have photograph albums of what their villages have been through: old women set alight; young women raped and shot; babies hacked to death.

The Nigerian government, led by a Fulani president – Muhammadu Buhari – clearly does not wish to protect these people. Even more than under Buhari's incompetent Christian predecessor, the army fails to perform its most basic duties. As you get into the more dangerous and remote areas, sullen young soldiers at army road blocks hustle you for cash at gunpoint.

A villager takes me to the bridge where the village leader and 13 others were recently gunned down in a Fulani ambush. Nigerian army troops watched the whole thing from their base a couple of hundred yards away – just as they did the destruction of another Christian village, the remains of which sit, burned out and silent, right opposite them. The army seems to have no interest in protecting the Christians, while the government in Abuja appears to care more about passing new laws on cattle-rustling than on protecting human lives. When chal-

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Tax demand

From 'Lenders and taxpayers', The Spectator, 3 February 1917: As to the general financial soundness of the country there can be no question... Indeed, one of our worst economic troubles at the present moment is that many classes of people are in possession of more money than they have ever handled before, and cannot resist the temptation of spending it lavishly. Somehow or other their expenditure on their personal gratification has to be controlled in the interests of the state. A considerable amount of control is being exercised through the power which the government possess of regulating our imports. That power, as we shall presently urge, must be more extensively used as regards certain commodities. But apart altogether from this direct control over the importation of specified commodities, it is of the utmost importance to secure a general limitation of consumption, and that end can best be attained by the old-fashioned, but always efficient, device of taxation. This is a remedy which The Spectator has persistently urged since the war began.

lenged after a massacre, soldiers often claim that they didn't receive any orders — or had been commanded not to intervene.

In a line that's parroted by some NGOs, the government says that this is a land or agricultural dispute. Yet it is the Christian communities who are being systematically forced off it. If anybody wanted to find the culprits, they could find them living and farming on the land they have stolen. But such arrests never happen. The complicity between the army and the Fulani is obvious. Between Barakin-Ladi and Riyom — in sight of another army post — is a sacked Christian village which locals say now acts as a Fulani arms dump. The world's indifference gives the Nigerian government the advantage in what looks like a quiet effort to rid northern Nigeria of its Christians.

The moment three years ago when Boko Haram abducted 300 Christian schoolgirls from the north-east and 'Bring Back Our Girls' briefly trended on Twitter was the closest this situation has come to catching the world's attention. But the moment passed. Those girls are still missing and the story of Boko Haram has receded from the headlines. But similar atrocities go on all the time. At an IDP camp Deborah, 31, describes the 18 months she spent held captive by the group. When they burst into her village, the Islam-



'I want a red, white and blue paper.'

ists killed her husband and the rest of her family, forcibly converted her and 'married' her off to one of their 20-year-old fighters. He complained about her bad temper and argumentativeness, but he still raped her, producing the nine-month-old boy now suckling at her breast. A Christian pastor has urged her to love and cherish the boy as though he was her murdered husband.

The first time she escaped from Boko Haram, she was recaptured and lashed 80 times as punishment. At least she is now unafraid of death. 'What sort of death would I be running from?' she asks. 'I have already died once.' At night, she says, a military plane would sometimes appear over Boko Haram's camp and drop off supplies. 'Look

what powerful friends we have,' her husband would boast as he pointed to the lights in the sky above. Even if the Nigerian army does not support Boko Haram, elements of it certainly do. Whenever an actual operation against the group is planned, they are always tipped off by forces within the country's security apparatus.

Nigerians have their own view as to what is really going on: a suspicion fuelled again as I leave one IDP camp at sunset and news comes in that another camp to the east has just been bombed by the Nigerian military, killing and maiming scores of people.

The army later apologises for this 'error'. But the bigger picture is not about error. If the international community meant anything by its promises such as the UN's 'responsibility to protect' doctrine, then what is happening could not go on. But the international community is uninterested. Governments like ours are uninterested. The world's media is uninterested.

At morning service in the city of Jos, the congregation sing and pray using the 19th-century hymnals and prayer books by which their faith was delivered. When we reach the plea to 'Deliver us from the hands of our enemies', the closely packed room hums with the literalness of the words. The Christians of Nigeria are alone. Even if we do not care about this, we ought to know.

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JAIPUR NOTEBOOK

Andrew Roberts

Did Winston Churchill, like Donald Trump, also like to 'grab them by the pussy'? Last week at the Jaipur Literary Festival, I was on a panel discussion entitled 'Churchill: Hero or Villain?', where the Indian biographer Shrabani Basu told a large crowd that at a suffragettes' demonstration outside Parliament in November 1910, Churchill, then home secretary, had 'given instructions for police that they can batter the women and assault the women and sexually assault them as well'. He allegedly told policemen to 'put their hands up their thighs, they can grope them and press their breasts'. 'Can I just point out that that is completely untrue?' I intervened. 'He at no stage ever OK'd the sexual assault of any woman ever. It would be monstrous were it to be true, but there's no evidence for it.' To which Ms Basu replied: 'It's your word against mine.' Welcome to post-truth history.

I'd been invited to the city of pink palaces by my friend and Cambridge contemporary Willie Dalrymple, who had also invited me to defend Brexit, speak on the art of biography, and plug my biography of Napoleon. The title of Willie's best-known book, *White Mughals*, might well have been autobiographical, so much does his presence dominate the festival that was his brainchild and which is now celebrating its tenth year. He is the pasha of all he surveys.

It's the world's largest paid-ticket literary festival, so I was expecting large crowds, but nothing like the 3,000 people who turned up for the Brexit debate, covering the whole front lawn of the Diggi Palace. I was the sole Brexiteer on a stage of six people, but it went off all right, especially when I asked the crowd if, at their 'midnight hour' of independence in 1947, they had been told they would have better trade deals and market access by staying in the British empire, they would have foresworn their chance for sovereign independence.

The other panellists seemed to think that the British had voted for Brexit



in an act of post-imperial nostalgia, an idea that went down well with an audience who seemed fanatically angry with the British empire even three-quarters of a century after it lost its jewel in the crown. Really? It would be nice to think that the 17.4 million people who voted Leave still thought, or indeed knew very much, about the British empire, but surely other more immediate things were on our minds. I'm about the last public supporter of the empire left in Britain today, yet imperialism didn't cross my mind throughout the Brexit debate, except perhaps Brussels'. If the people of Sunderland had voted Leave because of what happened on the Indian subcontinent between 1875 and 1947, wouldn't someone there have said so? At Jaipur, the empire was regularly presented as having no redeeming features whatever — but here's a sentence from the coffee-table book in my hotel lobby, *Rajasthan: the Living Traditions* (1999). Writing of the practice of suttee (abolished by the British), it states: 'The ladies went to their deaths with dignity, in the manner of a celebration.'

Anita Anand chaired the biography panel, which also featured A.N. Wilson, Roy Foster, Suzannah Lipscomb, David Cannadine and Lucinda Hawksley. She asked us whether biographers had anything in common with serial killers, 'who also like to cover themselves with the skin of dead people?' She later equated us with stalkers, for the way we intrusively try to find out everything about our subjects' lives. Another good line came from Andrew Wilson, describing an archivist who shall be nameless but with whom several of the panellists had had run-ins in the past, who he said had 'now taken off on her broomstick and flown away over Slough'.

During the Napoleon interview, expertly conducted by Dr Swapan Dasgupta MP, I became aware of a gigantic monkey sitting on a wall behind the thousand-strong crowd, which seemed to be listening intently to what was being said. I found myself trying to retain the interest of this magnificent primate and started to gesticulate far more than I normally do. I'm pleased to say it stayed to the end, even through the Q&As. Living cheek by jowl with dozens of different animals is a knack most urban Britons have lost, but in Jaipur I was reminded of how natural it is in India. There were cows meandering nonchalantly down the middle of motorways with storks standing on their backs, feral pigs the size of small ponies, donkeys and camels, cockerels on the rubbish tips, a goat sitting on a car roof, an ostentation — great collective noun — of peacocks at our hotel, flocks of bright green parrots, and everywhere mongrel dogs that for some reason all looked identical.

After a day hearing all about the evils of the British empire, it was refreshing to attend the party Meru Gokhale threw to celebrate Penguin's 30th anniversary in India, which was as grand a durbar as any viceroy ever attended. Horse-drawn carriages and vintage cars brought the guests to the front steps of a palace which were flanked by two military bands and beyond which were 2,000 candles flickering in the trees. India is about to attain economic superpower status and it's unbecoming for the country still to try to cling to victimhood status. The *Times of India* has had to run headlines such as: 'Don't Blame West for Molestations, Rapes Here'. (The paper also has adverts for 'upper-caste brides' in its lonely hearts column.) With regard to Churchill, it's the sign of a self-confident people that they can ascribe greatness to people who actively disliked them, as we do for the anglophobic Thomas Jefferson, Napoleon Bonaparte and Charles de Gaulle. But after such splendid hospitality, I wasn't about to tell 3,000 Indians that it was time to grow up.

Rules for loneliness

Hospitals are putting NHS data-protection policies above simple humanity

JANE KELLY

An old acquaintance died recently. A friend of mine, who was closer to him than I was, rang to tell me. She'd known him for 40 years and looked after him at various times when he fell ill. He was diagnosed with cancer three weeks ago and died suddenly in hospital last week. She tried to find out what happened, but as she is not next of kin (he had no relations) she will probably never know. Within the monolith of the NHS, patients, particularly the elderly, are able to disappear from view as effectively as prisoners in the Soviet gulag. If they don't re-emerge alive, no except a close relation can discover why.

I first realised this two years ago when I moved from London to Oxford, and tried to carry on volunteering as a hospital visitor. A neighbour broke her leg. When I arrived at the hospital, it proved impossible to see her. 'If you don't know which ward she's on we are not allowed to tell you,' said a woman on the front desk. Of course I got in by going through a side door. On the ward there wasn't a nurse in sight to stop me.

This silly secrecy about patient identity or 'safeguarding' is a recent NHS obsession. In Oxford more than London, I found everything done by the book; a patient told me he was going to kill himself when he was discharged, with details of how he was going to do it. When I reported it, a nurse told me it was not my business.

I gave a man with two broken arms a drink, which was on the tray over his bed. This was noticed by a nurse and reported. Shortly afterwards, I was told by phone not to come to the hospital any more because I had 'endangered' a patient and there had to be an inquiry. I was cleared, but warned not to do it again.

I also saw other damaging effects of this ideology. A man of 95 was being discharged. There was no one at home waiting for him, he said, and he'd like a visitor. He told me he belonged to a local church and so, at his request, I contacted them and asked someone from their pastoral team to visit him. That was strictly against the rules as well, I was told. I gave up the hospital job.

In London, I had been told that as a visitor, I was 'befriending'. In Oxford that

proved almost impossible. Last week I discovered through a chance conversation with an NHS press officer in a pub that, as well as the Data Protection Act, introduced in 1998, Oxford is dominated by the Caldicott rules.

These are the work of the redoubtable Dame Fiona Caldicott, 76, an architect of the NHS culture of secrecy and 'safeguarding'. A former psychiatrist, she is chair

I gave a man with two broken arms a drink, which was on the tray over his bed. There had to be an inquiry

of the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. You may have seen her on *University Challenge* at Christmas, failing to answer a science question. In 1996, while she was principal of Somerville College, Oxford, she headed the Caldicott committee on patient-identifiable data in the NHS. This resulted in the 'Caldicott principles', which led to the creation of 'Caldicott guardians', who now oversee data protection in every hospital in the land.

Anyone who enters a British hospital, to



'Sorry, this is the anger management course.'

see a friend, visit someone lonely or say a prayer by a dying person they may not know, will be judged by these principles, which insist that everyone must justify their reason for seeing a patient, the assumption being that you probably do not need to be there at all. If you are not related to the patient, you fall under particular suspicion. Bad news for people like me who have no relatives, only friends.

These principles were followed by 16 other protocols for secrecy, including the injunction: 'A programme of work should be established to reinforce awareness of confidentiality and information security requirements among all staff within the NHS.' And more chillingly: 'The NHS number should replace the patient's name on Items of Service Claims made by GPs as soon as practically possible.'

In all the meetings held by the Caldicott committee, no one seems to have looked at the consequences of the principles. It's not just a patient's visitors who find it trickier to help, but their doctors too. It's no longer possible for a doctor to discuss anything about a patient with the person's relatives, let alone friends. Doctors may not use their discretion; they need permission — but the most vulnerable, neediest patients are often incapable of giving permission.

Dame Fiona's rules have also created a culture in which hospital managers, a very secretive group, can conceal their agendas from medical staff. Last year came another review, which argued that 'the public should be engaged about how their information is used and the benefits of data-sharing, with a wide-ranging consultation on proposals as a first step'.

It made clear that when it comes to sharing information, the balance is still not right, suggesting that confidentiality is coming before care, and that it should be the duty of agencies to share information where it is in the interest of the patient. A poor handover of information between care teams risks patient health. The report found that some NHS managers are still 'unduly restrictive' with information, for fear that their organisation will be fined for breaching data protection laws. It also highlighted that the public's lack of access to their own records causes 'great frustration'.

Well, exactly. Confidentiality is coming before care. I could not do my voluntary job in that atmosphere of regulations and secrecy. The truth is that, despite the paranoia of bureaucrats, the dangers which the Caldicott principles seek to protect us from are really not that great. Hospitals aren't surrounded by criminals waiting to prey on vulnerable patients, and most patients long to be visited by friendly, neighbourly people. It seems particularly sad that an eminent psychiatrist such as Fiona Caldicott should have introduced measures which have only perpetuated loneliness and distress.

Trump's rivals

More than **1.7m** people signed a petition on Parliament's website demanding that Donald Trump's state visit be cancelled, and more than **200,000** one calling for it to go ahead. What are the most and least signed of the 2,500 or so other live petitions?

MOST SIGNED

Repeal new surveillance laws **209,000**
 Ban firework sales to public **150,000**
 Set £1,200 maximum price on car insurance for 18- to 25-year-olds **148,000**

LEAST SIGNED

Offer discounted counselling to housing professionals **6**
 Plain bottles for alcoholic drinks **6**
 Scrap juries **6**

Visiting rites

Which countries have been awarded the most state visits to Britain? **64** countries have had a state visit during the Queen's reign, of which **25** had more than one:
 France **6**
 US, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Italy, Germany/West Germany **4**
 China, Turkey, South Africa, India, Brazil, Portugal, Nigeria **3**
 South Korea, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Poland, Jordan, Denmark, Japan, Finland, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nepal **2**
 Every US President since Reagan has had a state visit, but none before. Since de Gaulle in 1960, every French President has had one except Pompidou and Hollande.

Particular problem

A warning of 'very high' air pollution was issued in London, with especially high levels of the small soot particles known as PM2.5s. Main sources of the **59,000** tonnes of these particles emitted in the UK in 2009, in tonnes:

Road vehicle exhausts **12,000**
 Combustion in homes **10,000**
 Aircraft **8,000**
 Road abrasion/brake or tyre wear **7,000**
 Waste treatment/disposal **6,000**
 Combustion in industry **3,000**
 Natural **2,000**

Source: Defra

Many happy returns

The deadline for filing self-assessment tax returns passed on Tuesday 31 January. How many were filed on time last year?
 — **11.3m** tax returns were due.
 — **10.4m (92%)** were received on time.
 — **870,000** people were late, making them liable for a £100 fine.
 — **43%** of returns reached HMRC in January, and **18%** arrived on deadline day or the day before.

Source: HMRC

The man from nowhere

Emmanuel Macron is suddenly a real contender to be the next French president

PATRICK MARNHAM

Before the horrified gaze of its militants, the French Socialist party — which has been a major force in French politics since 1981, and forms the present government — is falling to pieces.

There are many reasons behind this catastrophe. They go back to 2005 and the dithering leadership of the then secretary-general, François Hollande, at a time when the party was dangerously divided after the referendum on a European constitution. And they continue up to 1 December last year, when President Hollande, after again dithering for months, announced on national television, in tears, that he had bowed to the inevitable — his own failure and unpopularity — and would not run for re-election. But the most significant reason for the Socialist implosion is the sudden arrival of a man from nowhere called Emmanuel Macron.

Macron, at 39, would normally be considered at least 15 years too young to mount a serious presidential challenge in France, but the most recent polls show him in third place, just behind the front-runner, the far-right Front National's leader, Marine Le Pen, and François Fillon, the candidate of the conservative party, Les Républicains.

His rapid rise makes Macron a genuine original in French politics and his opponents do not know what to make of him. Unlike all other serious contenders, he has no visible record of political commitment. In 2004 he graduated from the National School of Administration (ENA) and joined the upper civil service. Then, in 2008, he paid €50,000 to buy himself out of his government contract and became an investment banker with Rothschild, where he was highly regarded and quickly made a small fortune. Then, in 2012, with the election of President Hollande, his career took another unexpected change of direction: he left Rothschild to become deputy secretary-general at the Elysée. When Manuel Valls became Hollande's second prime minister in 2014, with instructions to deregulate the French economy, Macron was catapulted into the economics ministry.

Hollande and Valls congratulated themselves on an imaginative choice, and Macron set out to please Brussels by cutting France's deficit while encouraging business activity. In 2015 he introduced *la loi Macron*, a measure designed to stimulate growth by abolishing

public service monopolies and union restrictions on hours. This had to be forced through the National Assembly by decree, against the opposition of Socialist deputies, an unpopular move that consecrated Macron as the *bête noire* of the left.

As the months in office passed, Macron openly developed a separate political agenda, often disagreeing in public with Valls. Soon after his appointment, a mysterious movement appeared called 'Les Jeunes avec Macron' ('Young people for Macron'). This was launched as a 'spontaneous' internet site, but quickly grew into a well-organised group numbering several thousand activists whose average age was said to be 33.

Macron then began to dominate the debate on European and welfare policy — but Hollande and Valls did nothing to rein

Macron's rise bears all the hallmarks of a classic ENA undercover operation

him in. In 2015, a few days after Hollande insisted that Macron was 'respecting his authority', the maverick minister attacked the wealth tax — a central plank of Socialist fiscal policy since it was introduced in 1989. Meanwhile, party leaders mocked his inexperience and lack of support on the left, and estimated his electoral appeal at 6 per cent.

Undaunted, the economics minister announced that he was forming his own political 'movement', 'En Marche!' ('Let's Go!'), 'open to everyone of progressive views' and 'aimed at younger voters'. Last August he started touring French holiday resorts appealing for a vision that would 're-forge the country's politics, culture and ideology'. At the end of the month he announced his resignation, and in November he launched the presidential campaign that he must have been secretly preparing ever since he joined the government.

While the seven hapless candidates for the Socialist party's nomination were struggling throughout December to achieve three-figure attendance at their meetings, Macron — with no party machine behind him — was attracting thousands. In Clermont-Ferrand it was 2,500, in Lille 4,000, and in Paris last month 12,000 people packed into the hall to hear him speak.

As a presidential candidate, Macron is seen as an outsider, someone who will 'break the system' and challenge the stifling consensus of unions, over-entitled functionaries and remarkably youthful pensioners that prevents France from responding to the challenges of globalisation. He usually describes himself as 'centrist' but he also objects to being called 'anti-socialist'.

If Macron's unique selling point is unclear, his unique talking point is that he married his former school teacher, a lady 24 years older than him. This startling fact, when first encountered, tends to bring political discussion to a halt, while all pause for a few moments of profound reflection. His latest fan is Ségolène Royal. Ségolène is the current minister of the environment, and, by chance, she too is 24 years older than the dynamic new arrival. She has repeatedly spoken of her affection and admiration for Macron. Ségolène was the defeated Socialist presidential candidate of 2007, but last week she urged the party's voters to ignore their own candidate, Benoît Hamon — a hardline leftist sacked as education minister by Valls in 2014 — and back Macron instead.

Macron has not just divided the Socialists, he has replaced them. So how has this apparently isolated and underfunded individual managed all this in such a short time? It is



'THE Donald?!'

clear that Macron has powerful supporters behind the scenes, and a clue may lie in the little-discussed fact that some years ago he was identified as a member of 'les Gracques' — a discreet centre-left pressure group loosely staffed by influential chief executives and civil service mandarins. They are pro-market socialists who long ago gave up on the Socialist party. Many are fellow 'énarques' (graduates of ENA) and every step of Macron's career could have been directed by them. Spotted as a brilliant and charming student, Macron could first have been launched into the prestigious state Finance Inspectorate, then switched into Rothschild to gain business experience (and wealthy support) and then placed like a time bomb in Hollande's

outer office, where he ticked away until he could be moved into the heart of the Valls government. Last August he finally exploded into action at the perfect moment to cause maximum damage to Hollande, Valls and the entire Socialist presidential election campaign. Macron's rise bears all the hallmarks of a classic ENA undercover operation, a fundamental part of the 'énarques' stock-in-trade and one in which the country's leading bureaucrats are cynically trained.

Now that the Socialists have lumbered themselves with a dinosaur — Hamon — as their candidate, Macron is in an even stronger position. He will be able to tune his campaign to attract moderate Socialist voters as well as the centrists and centre-rightists who flock to his meetings and are having second thoughts about François Fillon.

Mr Fillon and his British wife Penelope are currently under investigation for misuse of public funds. Both deny the accusations. Interestingly, the information that has placed him under suspicion seems to have come from dissident members of Les Républicains, his own party — angry that neither ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy nor Alain Juppé, mayor of Bordeaux, won the nomination. If Mr Fillon is formally charged, he has said that he will not run. In which case the most likely solution for his party, at this short notice, would be to select Mr Juppé in his place.



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The ghastly truth

Tatler is turning its back on an irreplaceable word

MICHAEL HENDERSON

Paul Johnson once wrote that the ability to say 'really' in 12 different ways was the birthright of every true Englishman, or woman. Really rather awkward. Really dreadful. Really good effort. Really went to town. I know him really well. Did she really mean that? I mean, really! One word, many meanings.

'Ghastly' is another thoroughly English word, in tone and application. Its meaning is implicit, rather than explicit. It's a word shared by people of similar (that is to say, well-brought-up) backgrounds, which makes it all the more surprising that *Tatler* magazine, which likes to present itself as a guide for metropolitan smarties, has declared ghastly to be 'unfashionable'.

As many of *Tatler's* readers might say in

*Ghastly does not mean
frightful, or vulgar. Some people
are manifestly ghastly*

response: how ghastly. Some words do pop into fashion and then pop out again, but ghastly is not one of them. It is here to stay because — with the emphasis firmly on that long *a* — it does a job no other word can do.

Ghastly does not mean frightful, or vulgar. When Lord Charteris called Sarah Ferguson 'vulgar', three times, he chose his words carefully. Some people are manifestly ghastly: Jonathan Ross, Salman 'speaking as an artist' Rushdie, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Victoria Beckham. If you saw any of them walking up your drive, the shutters would come down fairly quickly.

Polly Toynbee of Gospel Oak and Tuscany, who tripped over a joke four decades ago and has taken pains not to suffer the indignity again, is ghastly. Nigel Kennedy, a potty-mouthed Peter Pan, is ghastly. 'Nigel was never meant to grow up,' says somebody who knew him when he was a well-spoken schoolboy. José Mourinho, the manager of Manchester United, is ghastly even by the standards of football, which are comfortably the worst of any professional sport.

You can throw in Robert Peston and Alan Yentob, who can argue about top billing until the cows come home. Vivienne Westwood belongs to the club, as does

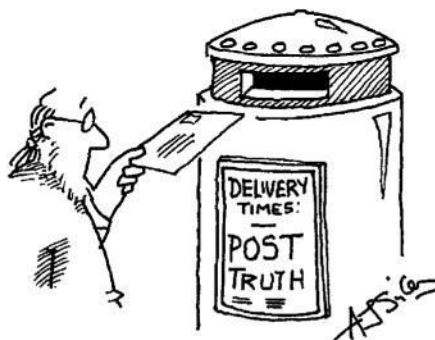
Nicola Sturgeon, whose Arctic smile could curdle a jug of milk.

For all-round ghastliness of exceptional tenacity it is impossible to best Madonna, who is dropping her drawers to great applause in her sixth decade. In that business there will never be a shortage of successors. Right now the race is led by Lily Allen, who has a pork pie where her brain should be, though some judges have paid out good money on Charlotte Church to overtake her in the final furlong.

One or two don't quite fit in. Owen Jones, the stropky teenage scribbler, may be a bore but he is not ghastly. Paul Mason, the Lenin of Leigh, who talks like the love child of Fred Dibnah and Maxine Peake, is absurd not ghastly. With that woe-is-me appearance, and ringing catchphrase, 'It's all going on out thurrrr,' he really ought to be playing the summer season on Blackpool's south pier.

Of those who kick with the right foot, the Hamiltons come as two for the price of one. No doubt some would throw in Nigel Farage and Piers Morgan but Farage, as even his detractors may acknowledge, is often funny, and Morgan's me-me-me act allows for some self-mockery. He's playing a role. It's not Hamlet but it helps to fill a scene or two.

The lefties are ghastly, so many of them, because, like Rousseau, they believe in the perfectibility of man, and are peeved when life, with its muck and nettles, disappoints them. Possessed by a sense of virtue they deny to others, it is no surprise that so many become humourless prigs. So keep that word close to hand, *Tatler*. There's never been a better time to use it.



ANCIENT AND MODERN

Nero's tips for Trump



A *Washington Post* interview with 'senior officials' in the Trump White House reveals that 'Trump... feels demoralised that the public's perception of his presidency so far does not necessarily align with his own sense of accomplishment.' Diddums! Nero could have taught him a trick or two.

Unlike Nero, Trump will not kill his mother, murder political rivals, indulge in drunken orgies or marry a boy, though he entertains the same sort of feelings about Muslims as Nero did about Christians; and he would doubtless love to turn central Washington into a vast, private, ruinously expensive 300-room Golden House, complete with fields, vineyards, pastures, woods and wildlife, fronted by a 120ft pillar with a bronze statue of himself as the sun-god on top (a *Colossus Trumpi*), like Nero built in the centre of Rome after the fire of AD 64.

The point about the Golden House is that it had no bedrooms. It was purely a place of entertainment. And that is the point about Nero. He was first and foremost a showman. Eventually tiring of politics, he turned his back on the senatorial elite and devoted himself entirely to the theatre and games. He entered competitions in oratory, poetry, acting, lyre-playing, singing and charioteering. Naturally, he won all the prizes — many handed over before the event — even when he fell out of a chariot and had to be helped back on. In all he recorded 1,808 'victories'. Winner! And adored by the plebs, who loved it all.

This is pure Trump, who made a huge splash with his TV shows, beauty pageants, modelling companies and interests in American football, baseball, cycling, wrestling, golf and boxing. Come on, the Donald (*Domhnall*, 'world-ruler')! Like a good ancient Greek, know yourself — what you can and cannot do. Leave the politics to your advisers and do what you are good at. The elite may hate you, as you them, but the people will love every minute of it, and on your deathbed you will be able say with Nero *Qualis artifex pereo* — 'What a showman dies in me!'

— Peter Jones

Brexiteers need ladders to climb down



I am worried about the mental state of many Brexiteers. The author of *The Spectator's* weekly Notes, Charles Moore, always a sharp observer of the passing scene, noticed my worry almost before I noticed it myself. He complained here a few weeks ago that I'm citing among my reasons for distrusting the Leave case the fact that so many of its adherents strike me as headbangers. He went on to suggest I've become psychologically incapable of even listening to their argument.

Personality traits displayed by Brexiteers do indeed worry me and help inform my response to their case. To help me weigh an argument, I'm in the habit of taking a long and careful look at the person making it. Little in life is provable, so our assessment of the judgment and balance of those who urge an opinion upon us can help us greatly in making up our own minds.

Which is why the insistent, splenetic, neurotic, angry, obsessive and sometimes almost crazed intensity of so many in the Leave crowd has become a source of concern to the rest of us. It isn't as if these people lost the referendum. It isn't as if their plans are being thwarted! They won, we concede it, and the government is executing their instructions with resolve — and all the signs are that the final outcome will be the 'hard' Brexit so many of them crave.

So what's bugging them? Why do they, the winners, keep lashing out whenever one of the losers doubts or questions their plans? You can almost see the veins standing out on their necks as they rail against the people who didn't win the referendum.

Charles is at the courteous end of this spectrum but (though he calls me a headbanger myself) I cannot forbear to observe that it has been hard to find a Notes of his since 23 June in which he has managed to resist the impulse to start banging on about Brexit again. To check my recollection I made a little survey of his weekly contribution since last November...

On 19 November (discussing a Deloitte's report on Brexit planning) he accuses the *Times* of 'false news'; on 26 November he's bothered that there are '17.4 million people whose views [on you-know-what] are unrepresented' among the 11 Supreme Court judges; on 3 December he's stunned by the judges'

failure to realise that the rudeness they're encountering is 'the inevitable result of their new activist stance as opponents of the executive'; on 10 December he muses on why as part of an educated elite he now supports the so-called oafs (who voted for you-know-what); on 7 January he laments an academic's failure to seek 'a creative way through this [you-know-what]'; on 28 January he praises Lord Reed, a Supreme Court judge who dissented on you-know-what...

And so it goes on. In recent months Charles is sometimes diverted from Brexit by his growing interest ('more interested than horrified') in Donald Trump. As it's hard to

These people are displaying the classic psychopathology of deep anxiety, seeing enemies everywhere

imagine any US politician better calculated to disgust Mr Moore, we can guess what leads him to indulge this one. You know what.

At least Charles observes the decencies. Here's a small sample of some of my *Times* readers responding online to a column I wrote last Saturday. This wasn't even about Brexit, but about Theresa May's remark last October that 'a citizen of the world is a citizen of nowhere'. I offered a mild toot on the trumpet for the value of being a world citizen as well as a British one, and remarked that I 'cling to the hope' that Mrs May accepts that. Critics among my readers, however, wanted to talk about me personally, and Brexit, and immigration, and Brexit, and the rage of our downtrodden native population, and Brexit.

'Sadly, Parris has become obsessed by Brexit.'

'Many ordinary people are "clinging to the

hope" that they won't be slagged off as racists for voting a new direction for their country.'

'And of course if you ever find you're in a crowd that is respectfully singing the National Anthem, you're waving the EU's flag and humming Ode to Joy?'

'Arty-farty nonsense ...'

'... boring, navel-fixated tosh.'

'God, you are sanctimonious old queen.'

'Theresa May at the Conference was addressing [native-born Britons] in the light of the Brexit vote.'

'Sadly Matthew, your obsession against Brexit is now colouring virtually everything you write.'

'Thank God we have had little Englanders to make you safe over the last decades whilst you hid under the stairs with matron.'

'Mushy, elitist claptrap.'

'You really are a pillock. Shouldn't you be writing the *Independent* or the *Red Star*?'

I find critics like these wonderfully affirming so don't think I'm complaining: I've got rather fond of them. No, I quote this sort of stuff (and anyone whom Brexiteers suspect of being 'liberal, metropolitan elite' faces a constant barrage of it) as evidence for my honest belief that there's a spirit abroad in the Leave camp that calls for psychiatric rather than political analysis.

Here's mine. I think most of these voters, MPs and journalists are public-spirited patriots who are secretly, usually unconsciously, terrified that they've done the wrong thing. They do of course care. They urged their country forward into a leap in the dark and now worry desperately lest it turn out badly. They're displaying the classic psychopathology of deep anxiety, seeing enemies and conspiracies everywhere, hitting out angrily at all dissent, and channelling their own fear into aggression against those who are in fact expressing it. Freudians call this projection.

So what's needed is not columns like this (which they will wrongly interpret as questioning their sanity) but therapy, in the form of ladders to climb down. Maybe I need it too, for in truth I'm not sure I'm right, and can imagine Brexit proving a (to me surprising) success. So let me make the first conciliatory move. I, a Remainer, accept that Brexit may not prove a mistake. Ball's in your court, Leavers: can you accept that it may?



This is not a strong government – so why isn't the opposition opposing it?



For heaven's sake, man, go!' A week after the Brexit referendum, and that was David Cameron at the despatch box, on Jeremy Corbyn. It might be in the Tories' interest for Corbyn to be leading the opposition, said Cameron, but it wasn't in Britain's, and he should push off sharpish.

At the time, it sounded a lot like deflection. As in, wind your neck in, Hamface. You're the one who just lost a referendum and your own career, so don't go blaming it on wild-eyed Grampa Simpson over there, just because he was too busy making jam to do enough press conferences. Latterly, though, I have begun to realise that Cameron was speaking not out of pique, but fear.

He knew that his defeat over the EU was a wound suffered not just by his particular government, but by government itself. Henceforth the Prime Minister, whoever that turned out to be, would be a hostage to populism, operating like a child who runs down a steep hill and cannot stop his little legs from pumping, even when the terror strikes. Moderation, prudence, caution, alternative views, or at the very least just enough friction to keep a steady speed – these were all going to have to come from the opposition. And there wasn't one.

The great mistake of Labour moderates, I suppose, was to have engineered a battle for the soul of the opposition when there was nothing coherent to oppose. They should have waited until now. In the last few weeks, really quite abruptly, Theresa May's government has coalesced into shape. We now know beyond any doubt which Brexit Brexit means, and it is a hard one of the most Brexit-y sort.

'We are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe,' Mrs May said in her Lancaster House speech, although her platitudes suddenly have subtext, and the subtext to this one was 'more's the pity'. Given the choice even between an emotional fraternity with the EU and one with Donald Trump's America, we are going all guns for the latter. We're those guys now. The Farage-ites have won.

Any idiot can sketch out an opposition to a government like that. Try it yourself on the back of a napkin. Personally, I'd start by abandoning the EU. Much as it pains me to say so, there's simply no path for staying in. For one thing, the mechanics of another referendum are simply exhausting, and nobody will vote to be exhausted. Although keep the single market. Yes, your opponents will expect you to dance on a million pinheads about whether a majority voted for this or not, but ignore them. You're an opposition, for God's sake, and thus disagreeing with

You could go mad trying to understand Labour's position on Brexit

the thing a majority just voted for is rather the point. Then, with that out of the way, what you start shouting about and don't stop shouting about is Donald Trump. What you want, you say, is for Britain to be Norway. Or if it helps, Switzerland. Whereas the Tories? They want Britain to be Mexico. And look what happened to Mexico.

That's not the sort of opposition we've got. You could go mad trying to understand Labour's position on Brexit. It heads off in one direction, then curls back on itself, upside down, like a work by Escher. I'm startled so many shadow ministers have resigned in protest against it, because that suggests they've managed to figure out what it is.



'Do they have to make such a song and dance about it?'

Inasmuch as I can make out, Corbyn hates the single market but is pretending to love it, with his only public caveat being that he can't stomach the freedom of movement aspect, whereas in reality that's the only part of it he actually likes. And all of this twisting is designed to make voters in Labour's provincial heartlands think he might agree with their views, which he doesn't, while also making voters in Labour's metropolitan seats think he might agree with their diametrically opposed views, which, almost magically, he doesn't either.

For the Lib Dems, meanwhile, a coherent alternative Brexit policy is tantalisingly close. Stretch, and their fingertips could almost touch it. Practicality, though, is not their forte. What they have not done, and perhaps cannot do, is accept that we really are leaving the EU. Probably they all know it, but you can feel the worried side-glances they must be casting each other in meetings, wondering who will be the first to say so. Their second referendum plan is confusing, sounds duplicitous and frankly just seems a lot of work. Then there's the SNP, whose whole stance on Brexit is really just a throat-clearing exercise before a different conversation altogether.

Look, I'm not blind. Brexit is happening, and it is happening hard. None of the above is going to make Labour or the Lib Dems win an election, because the problems of both are structural and generational and huge. But what it may do is give them all a point to being alive. Plus, damn it, this is simply what an opposition is supposed to do. This is not a strong government. Peek behind the bravado and you will see that it is secretly terrified, both of its own right-wing backbenchers and of others, unelected, further right still. That's something else. A proper opposition is one that faces you down, rather than chasing you to run further and faster. Both Corbyn and Farron need to get it together. Or for heaven's sake, go.

Hugo Rifkind is a writer for the Times.

Going Dutch

Sir: As a Dutch man who lives in Britain, I found it heartening to read two such different but well-considered articles on the state of my home country ('Orange alert' and 'Dutch courage', 28 January). Douglas Murray is right to attack the Dutch government for its attempts to criminalise opinions it doesn't like. I take issue, however, with his defence of Geert Wilders, who does indeed resemble Donald Trump in his eagerness to stoke outrage for political gain. His film *Fitna*, while pretending to be an honest statement about the nature of Islam, was really just an attempt to be so shocking as to provoke the liberal establishment into fierce condemnation, so that he could squawk about free speech. He is a hate-merchant. He should be allowed to make whatever movies he wants, but not be allowed anywhere near the levers of power.
Jan Van der Berg
London W14

Support the Albert Hall

Sir: We are grateful to Charles Moore (Notes, 28 January) for his argument in favour of the Royal Albert Hall's system of governance. We were disappointed by the recent intervention from the chairman of the Charity Commission, William Shawcross, who said: 'The scale of commercialisation in the private sale of seats raises questions about whether the charity is in fact operating for the public benefit as required by charity law. The trustees should consider whether such arrangements risk damaging public confidence in their charity.' He appears to hang that on nothing more than an alleged 'perception' of public concern; in other communications to us, the Charity Commission has confirmed that they have found no wrongdoing, that we are indeed a charity, and that we are acting lawfully.

One wonders why the Charity Commission is manoeuvring to impose upon the Hall a form of governance similar to the other major arts venues of London, which these days collectively need more than £60 million a year of Arts Council funding to keep going. The Hall, alone among them, has an annual operating surplus, all of which goes to the charity — above all to keep our beautiful but ruinously expensive Grade I building in tiptop shape. We urge the Charity Commission to consider the virtues of the Hall's system of governance which, set up by those great Victorians, could be a beacon for future funding of the arts.

Jon Moynihan
President, Royal Albert Hall, London SW1

Don't take our money

Sir: I read David Butterfield's article about a cashless society ('Keep the change', 28 January) with interest. Do people not stop to think about the elderly and disadvantaged who are unable to cope without cash? Or those living in an area without internet access? In my experience of using contactless cards, they are unsafe. I was standing waiting to pay for a few items in a store with my credit card, to be told by the cashier that I had already paid — with the contactless card in my wallet. I went into my bank and demanded a new debit card without the contactless facility. Telling this story in my village shop, another customer said that she had paid someone else's bill with her debit card. I hate to think how much those who use these cards constantly pay out unnecessarily, and I bet they don't check their bank statements.
Sally A. Williams
Pembrokeshire

The dairymaid's defence

Sir: There's an angle to the 'reputed sluttish behaviour of the dairymaid' which

Mark Bostridge overlooks in his review of Kathryn Hughes's *Victorians Undone* (Books, 21 January). Milkmaids were renowned for their looks. In an age when most people bore the scars of smallpox, they attracted attention for their clear skins, as they had acquired natural immunity through their contact with cowpox from their cows. Dr Jenner and the Dorset farmer Benjamin Jesty observed this fact. It proved magnetic for men. And because of their solitary work, milkmaids were easily accosted. Sluts or victims of assault — who exactly knows?

Bridget Mayes
Dorset

Sartorial symphony

Sir: Marcus Berkman (Notes on corduroy, 28 January) refers to corduroy as the 'only known multimedia fabric, in that you can usually hear it coming'. I cannot let this pass. Has he never heard the soft whoosh of silk against a leg? The rustling of denim in an adjacent lavatory? The distinctive sound of skin chaffing against PVC? There is a whole orchestra of sartorial sounds to be heard, if one listens carefully enough.

Nicholas Holton
London N1

A curse and a blessing

Sir: On behalf of call-centre workers everywhere, I'd like to thank Miriam Gross (Diary, 28 January) for her intemperate use of language. Most of us are obliged to continue pretending to listen to our customers however little we are able to help them, and however rude or repetitive they become. Only when they swear may we reclaim some small measure of autonomy by ending the call. Every F-word is a benediction. I'm sure the BT man who hung up on her feels the same.

Robin Peters
Nottingham

Final whistle

Sir: Miriam Gross (Diary, 28 January) is right to say that women do not always dislike being wolf-whistled. My wife, who is 63, usually took a whistle as a compliment, and only started to be anxious when men stopped wolf-whistling at her. (If they did so now, she says she wouldn't believe her ears.)

Paul Jacobs
Belgium

WRITE TO US

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Will Trump halt the hounding of UK and European banks? Don't bet on it



President Donald Trump is demolishing his predecessor's legacy as fast as he can sign executive orders, but one thing for which the Obama administration will be remembered is its zest for imposing fines on UK and European banks. In a flurry of Department of Justice activity ahead of the transfer of power, Deutsche Bank agreed to pay \$7.2 billion and Credit Suisse \$5.3 billion for misleading investors in mortgage-backed securities before 2008, while Deutsche also copped a \$630 million penalty (from UK as well as US regulators) for alleged money-laundering on behalf of Russian clients.

Meanwhile, Royal Bank of Scotland set aside another \$3.8 billion, making a total provision of \$8.3 billion towards an eventual settlement for mis-selling which many observers expect to exceed that figure by a distance and eat a big chunk of the crippled lender's shrunken net worth. And Barclays, having refused to settle on the DoJ's terms, awaits its day in court.

This was never entirely about scapegoating foreigners. There have been giant penalties on US banks too: \$17 billion for Bank of America, \$5 billion for Goldman Sachs. But this column reported in 2014 a conspiracy theory that 'the hounding of non-US banks by the DoJ... has a more sinister foreign-policy impetus behind it': namely, an attempt at that time to bring Europe into line on sanctions against Russia.

The case in point was a \$9 billion fine on BNP which — so Vladimir Putin claimed — might have been negotiable if France had agreed to cancel a contract to build two assault ships for the Russian navy. More recently, French presidential candidate François Fillon has urged Angela Merkel to join him in confronting Trump over the 'unilateralism' of US fines on European banks.

Where's this story going next? If Russia is really a factor, Trump will probably make a show of not caring whether Europe is onside when he does his own deal with Putin. On the domestic front, the Trump White House is staffed by ex-Goldman people, his cabinet

is packed with billionaire 'friends of Wall Street', deregulation is the executive order of the day, and Breitbart — alma mater of Trump sidekick Steve Bannon — reports that Obama used 'more than \$650 million' of bank fine proceeds to fund 'progressive liberal [and] left-wing organisations'. So an end to vengeance against US banks may be a natural move for the new regime.

On the other hand, foreign banks that stand accused of cheating America's citizens or aiding its enemies remain ideal targets for Trumpist jingoism. So I wouldn't bet on RBS getting off more lightly because Obama has gone. I liked the punchline offered on this topic by Jon Shazar on *Dealbreaker* — 'If the Mexicans won't pay for the Wall, maybe the Scots will' — but I fear that punishment may fall, bizarrely, on the English taxpayer.

Tesco's Booker prize

It's hard to remember the last time there was a good-news story about Tesco, whose shares stand at half of what they were worth four years ago. Some prominent hedge funds evidently expected them to fall further — and were caught short of the stock when the price jumped 20 pence last Friday on the announcement of a £3.7 billion takeover of the Booker food group.

If competition authorities don't block it, this looks a smart deal. It gives Tesco an extra slice of the UK grocery market without actually adding more Tesco stores, and takes the group into new areas such as restaurant supply; it puts Tesco buying power and logistical strength behind the Booker network; and it promises economies of scale. Like last year's Sainsbury-Argos merger, it demonstrates smart lateral thinking in the overpopulated supermarket sector.

Of course many *Spectator* readers will worry that more power to the Tesco monster means worse prospects for independent grocers, butchers and fishmongers — but those who have survived the retail revolution thus far are likely to go on surviving, supported by middle-class foodies, while

Booker's 5,000-plus franchised Londis, Budgens and Premier convenience stores (each one a small business in its own right) will have more to offer in the less prosperous towns and suburbs that they serve.

But — I hear you ask — does this also mean the Booker Prize is about to mutate into the Tesco Prize? The award had its origin in Booker's diversification away from its core sugar-refining business in British Guiana in the 1960s. A portfolio of authors' rights was acquired, including those of Ian Fleming, and their profits funded the competition for novelists — until sponsorship transferred in 2002 to Man Group, a hedge fund firm that also has a history in sugar. Hence the prize is now the Man Booker, and Tesco-phobic literati need not fret.

A man who always decided

Sir Christopher Bland, the former chairman of BT, London Weekend Television and the BBC, who died last week, was a man who took himself seriously — as I discovered when I listened to him complaining about the hours of queuing he had endured to get into the notorious Millennium Eve party at the Dome. The vision of all those VIPs shivering through Stratford station seemed comic to me, but not to him. 'What are you laughing at?' he barked, bringing our social encounter to an abrupt end.

But still I admired him both for the extraordinary range of his interests — which included wine-making and novel-writing, as well as a dozen chairmanships — and for the cut-the-crap clarity that made him a boardroom role model for many younger executives. One friend of mine who worked for Bland at the privatised haulage group National Freight before going on to higher things recalls: 'Christopher taught me always to make a decision: however difficult, never dither. Of course you might get it wrong sometimes. But if you're any good at your job, you'll far more often be right.' Remarkable how many people rise to the top without learning to apply that simple rule.

BOOKS & ARTS



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'Preferring the out to the indoor night', 2010, by Hernan Bas, on show at Victoria Miro
Martin Gayford — p45

Joanne Harris is charmed by the mean, lustful and downright stupid Norse gods
Martin Gayford considers Pope Julius II's tomb the worst case of project overrun in art history

Molly Guinness reckons that Elif Shafak could now qualify as a UN special envoy
James Walton is amazed by how much he enjoys himself in Hull

James Delingpole discovers that George III did much more than just lose America and go mad
Deborah Ross sees herself in an uglier up Matthew McConaughey

BOOKS

Sins of the flesh

The subject has been popularised from Homer to the Brothers Grimm, but, mercifully, human cannibalism has always been rare, says *Philip Hensher*

Eat Me: A Natural and Unnatural History of Cannibalism

by *Bill Schutt*

Profile, £14.99, pp. 256

Bill Schutt has an excellent subject, and he explores it from a promising angle. Cannibalism has long interested zoologists, anthropologists, historians, criminologists, literary theorists and students of theology and blasphemy — the absurd claim that Roman Catholics were commending it in their account of transubstantiation was a favourite with 18th-century English blasphemers. Few people have tried to bring all these together, and perhaps by the end we have to conclude that there is not much connecting the very different elements at the remote ends of the scale. Still, it was worth a try.

Schutt is an animal scientist, and he begins with the simpler organisms. At the bottom of the scale, cannibalism in invertebrates is actually quite common for particular purposes. There are mother spiders who present themselves to their young to be eaten once their purpose has been served. In snails it is a passing phase; under a certain age, snails will eat their own eggs and lettuce indiscriminately before eating only plants.

The freshwater fish *Cichlidae* breed their young in their mouths, and often eat a good proportion of them. They need to strike a balance. Fish can produce a huge number of eggs — up to 300 million in some species — which ought to make it possible to be generous in expenditure and to eat some of these high-protein emissions. If the fish eats too many, however — over 80 per cent, for instance — then it seems to make more sense to eat the rest rather than devote energy to bringing up the few remaining.

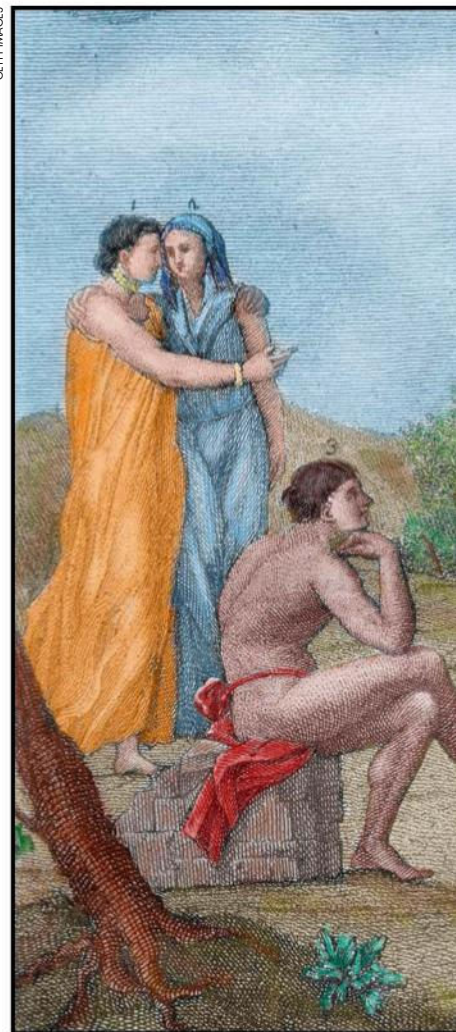
Different sorts of cannibalism are recorded among animals. The eating of young — filial cannibalism — goes alongside sibling cannibalism, or the eating of rivals. This is memorably described in Ted Hughes's poem about the pike, with its mysterious reduction of the number of pike in a

tank, until suddenly there is only one, 'with a sag belly and the grin it was born with'. There is heterocannibalism — eating others or others' young; whether polar bears have recently taken to doing this, whether an occasional practice has been made more common because of global warming, is a matter of fierce debate.

Even with animal cannibalism, however, myths and cultural projections have to be disentangled. Sexual cannibalism, in which the female eats the male in the act of copulation, is rare, and in some species to which it is ascribed, hardly documented. It does happen with redback spiders. Why does the male have anything to do with a practice that will end with his death? The Darwinian theory is that cannibalised redbacks copulate for longer and transfer more sperm, so the male will increase his chances of breeding by allowing himself to be eaten. Since the female spider who has recently eaten a male is less susceptible to the approaches of other males set on the same ambition, the eaten spider will also have beaten off his posthumous rivals. Why some male spiders chase and eat females in the act of copulation, however — a practice which has gained much less publicity — is still puzzling zoologists. Perhaps the more interesting subject is why we place so much emphasis on the real or supposed practices of female insects that devour the males in the act of mating.

When we turn to human cannibalism, a sharp difference is immediately apparent — between widespread cultural practice and psychopathic behaviour outside society's order. Neanderthals were said by H.G. Wells to eat each other (on flimsy evidence) and in *The Time Machine* he foresaw a revival of this in the remote future. Much about the celebrated cases of early human anthropophagy turns out to be debatable. Conclusive evidence that cannibalism was practised would need proof that the fossilised coprolites that have been found containing human remains were also produced by humans, or that the cut marks that have been discovered on human bones were those of butchery and not of battle. It seems likely but not conclusively proved. The early

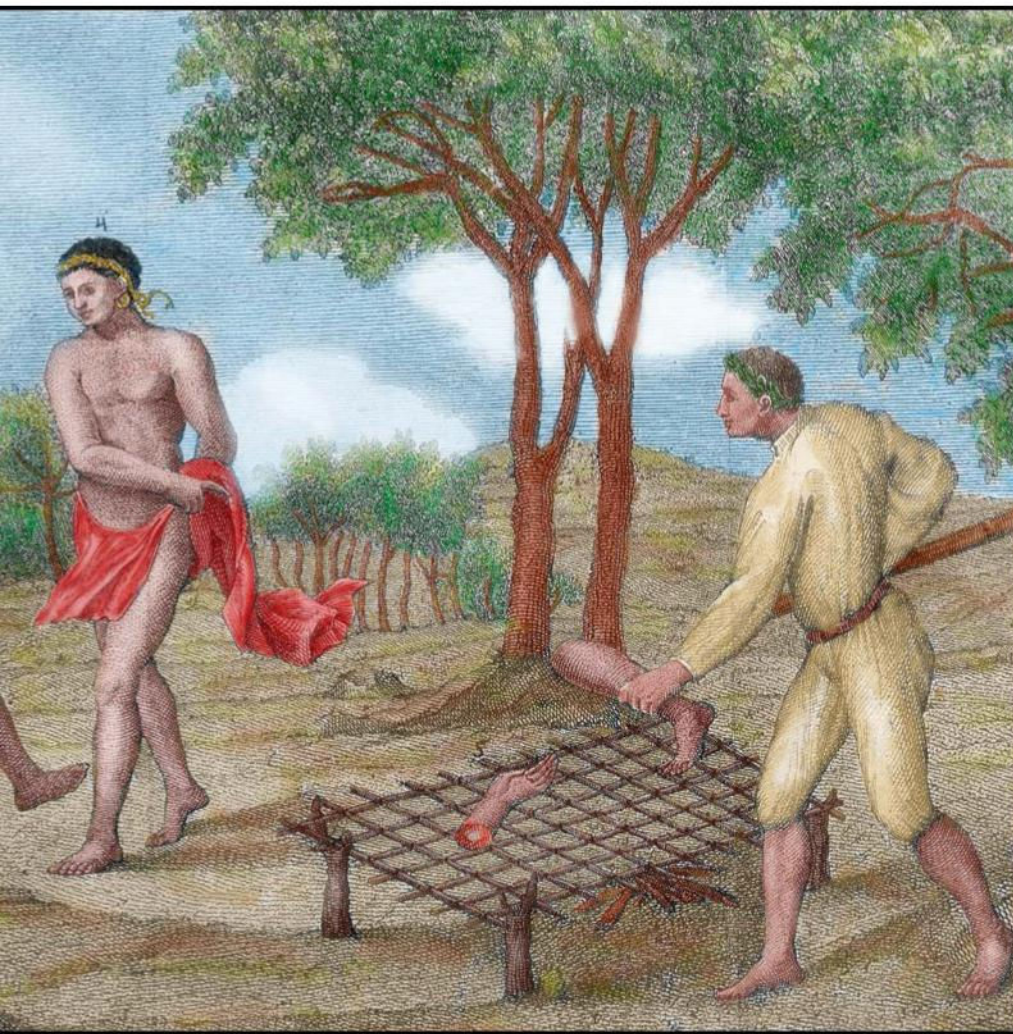
GETTY IMAGES



humans that preceded the Neanderthals, fading out about 150,000 BC — known as *Homo antecessor* — do seem to have been cannibals, given the evidence of bones that have been cracked open to extract marrow.

Since then, for the most part, the accusation of cannibalism has been directed at the Other. Anthropologists have often heard from tribal people that the practice of cannibalism is in full spate among the dreadful horde who live beyond the mountains: on crossing the mountains, they have heard the same about the people they just left. This has had its political uses. Early explorers in the New World — such as Columbus — were quick to ascribe cannibalism to the natives. In 1503 Queen Isabella decreed that natives who did not practise cannibalism should be freed from slavery — suggesting a belief in the custom being widespread. Usefully, the innocent indigenous Trinidadians were declared to be bestial cannibals so that they could be subjected by the Spaniards.

During the larger part of the history of anthropology, academics have nevertheless accepted that there are cultures in which



Maipure Indians, inhabitants of the Upper Orinoco, grill the limbs of a dead enemy (Italian engraving, 1781)

dead humans are eaten: either the bodies of defeated enemies or the honoured remains of elders in the community. The evidence for this was actually quite limited, and largely restricted to oral testimony. In 1979 the anthropologist William Arens argued that there was no evidence that anthropophagy had ever occurred as a regular practice beyond second- or third-hand accounts. ('No ceremonial devouring of human flesh?' a disappointed anthropologist inquires at a seminar in one of Barbara Pym's novels). He was attacked at the time, but it seems clear that many accounts of cannibalism, even in modern times, are questionable. The best evidence for it has been the outbreak of kuru among the Fore people of Papua New Guinea — a fatal disease which appears to have been spread by their ritual habit of eating their elders' brains.

Most of the indubitable cases of cannibalism have occurred in desperate and unique circumstances — among individual psychopaths, people in survival situations such as shipwrecked sailors and the air crash casualties in the Andes. There were many stories of cannibalism during the

siege of Leningrad in the second world war, and it has since emerged that 2,000 people were arrested for the crime. The most historically important case of cannibalism is one of the founding cases of English criminal law, Dudley and Stevens. Surprisingly, it's not mentioned by Schutt, despite its historic legal significance, and concerns a case of two sailors killing and eating a cabin boy.

Why does the male redback spider have anything to do with a practice that will end in his death?

Perhaps more controversially, the author suggests that the relative prevalence of incidents of cannibalism during Mao's famines comes from the lack of dietary taboos possessed by the Chinese; but it is quite clear that they do in reality see the difference between eating a snake and eating a child.

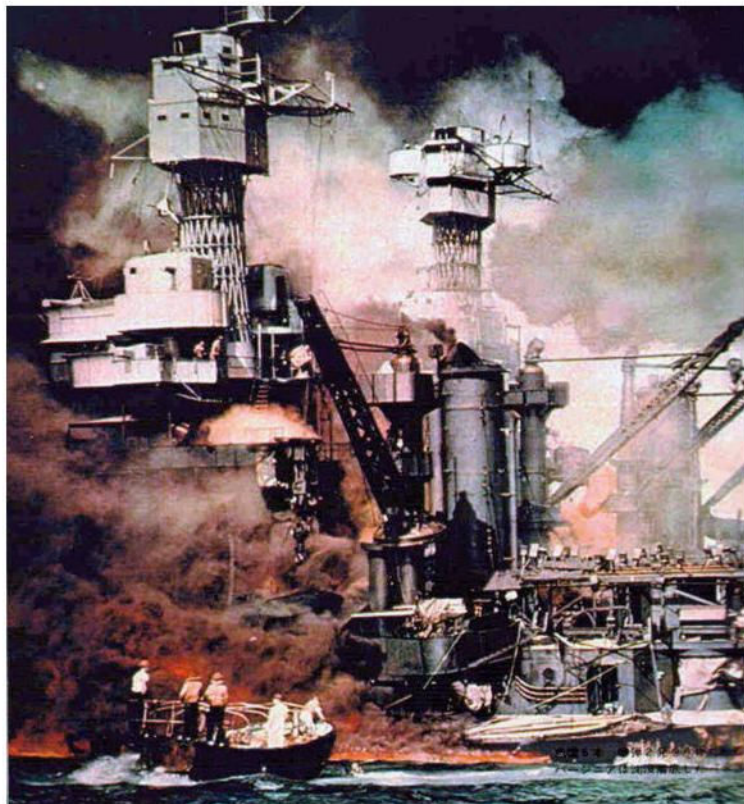
Schutt tries to draw his subject together by saying that 'Cannibalism occurs across the entire animal kingdom, albeit more frequently in some groups than others'. This neglects the fact that as animals become

more advanced, they are less likely to commit cannibalism. Snails routinely do so, orang-utans never.

The most conspicuous place of cannibalism in human culture is, of course, in the grotesque fantasies of literature. Cannibals can be found in Homer; through the folk tales recorded by Grimm; and onwards to contemporary villains such as Hannibal Lecter. In this context it does not matter that such acts hardly ever happen, and it's tempting to suggest that literary fantasies about cannibals created real-life psychopaths such as Jeffrey Dahmer.

The greatest work of literature about cannibalism is, of course, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* — not mentioned by Schutt. It's worth noting, however, that the irony of the great pamphlet only works if we accept that cannibalism will never become an accepted part of human society.

This is an interesting book, which inevitably contains a lot of fascinating stories, but its bold attempt to trace a line between the routine habits of simple organisms and the periodic surfacing of anthropophagy cannot, thank goodness, be sustained.



Attack on
Pearl Harbor,
7 December
1941

Day of infamy Allan Mallinson

Pearl Harbor: From Infamy to Greatness

by Craig Nelson
Weidenfeld, £25, pp. 544

On 7 December 1941, without declaration of war, 350 Japanese carrier-borne aircraft struck at the US Pacific Fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii — in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's ringing words, 'a date that will live in infamy'. For the 75th anniversary, Craig Nelson, a *New York Times* journalist, has, says his publisher, produced 'a definitive account'.

I disagree. Indeed, if this book were a motor car (or 'automobile', for it is a reprint of the US edition, with American usage and spelling), it would have to be recalled for extensive safety modifications and replacement parts. The errors, misunderstandings and omissions are markedly misleading, sowing doubt about the accuracy of the admittedly 'gripping' (publisher's words again) account of the actual attack, and undermining the credibility of the analysis of cause and effect.

Some of the technical errors are trivial enough, though indicative — warships 'cabling' each other, for example, in the age of wireless telegraphy. Others are more egregious. In the 1930s, writes Nelson, the Japanese developed a 'two-foot-long, oxygen-powered torpedo that could

travel 24 miles and was twice as effective in speed, in distance, in targeting and explosive power as anything American-made'. Just how does the author suppose that torpedo technology could have reached such a degree of miniaturisation, especially of explosive power, even now, let alone then?

What he is almost certainly referring to is the 'Long Lance', which had a diameter of two feet and a length of nine metres (pretty evident in the name) and weighed nearly three tons. But it could not be air-launched, for besides the payload, the oxygen propellant was too unstable. Its range of 24 miles, in the days of unguided torpedoes, gave it no advantage except in a game of fire and hope; there was no superiority in 'targeting'. All this might be passed over as mere detail, except that this is a 'definitive book about the boldest carrier air strike in history'.

Nelson is equally at sea when it comes to the genesis of the big ships at the heart of the story: the dreadnoughts. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 (when Moscow was the Russian capital, he believes), 'Togo [the Japanese naval C-in-C] was the world's only admiral with dreadnought experience in an actual engagement'. But the first dreadnought was not launched until 1906 — by Britain, and eponymously. Indeed, the battle of Tsushima, Togo's humiliation of the Russian Baltic fleet after it had steamed halfway round the world, was really the dreadnought's moment of conception — its lessons were behind the whole theory of naval warfare which led Britain

and Germany to Jutland in 1916 (not mentioned), and which persisted in the minds of the Japanese in the 1930s. Nelson ascribes the faith the Japanese put in the 'decisive battle' to the US naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, but fails even to mention Japan's own Mahan, Sato Tetsutaro.

An instinct for the realities of war should also have told him that a carrier-borne force of about 50 bi-planes bombing Shanghai in a punitive raid in 1932 could not have killed 'hundreds of thousands', when at Dresden in 1945 1,300 US and British medium and heavy bombers killed 'only' (as Unity Mitford might have said) 25,000.

Nelson even confuses his indexer into thinking that there was an earlier Russo-Japanese war, in 1853, yet omits to mention the fighting along the border of Manchuria in 1939, in which the Japanese admitted to losses of 20,000, but which were possibly three times that number — fighting which influenced their decision to turn south in 1940.

Nelson thinks the Germans continued to have colonial possessions in Asia after Versailles, contributing to Japan's sense of being surrounded, and describes Oahu (in effect Pearl Harbor) as 'America's most significant post-Great War foreign [sic] base'. A good copy editor should have picked that up, as well as, *inter alia*, that a howitzer is not an item of boy's clothing, nor that having spent decades in Washington, Cordell Hull, the secretary of state, had developed 'the hair of an *éminence grise*'.

What is not a careless misprint, however, for it is central to Nelson's narrative of 1940, is that on 23 September 1940, Japanese troops invaded Malaya, French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, so that 'Japan now controlled British Malaya's acres of rubber plantations, French Indochina's sinuous veins of tin and, most important, the Dutch East Indies' bounteous cache of oil'. If only the British army in Malaya had indeed had such delaying power: 17 months until the fall of Singapore, rather than, in reality, barely nine weeks. The Japanese attack on Malaya, for obvious reasons, was almost simultaneous with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and their attack on the Dutch East Indies came a month later. What does the author suppose was happening between London and Washington during the time that Britain's key colony was supposed to be in Japanese hands?

All this is a pity, to say the least, for if — if — Nelson is accurate in his account of the confusion, dereliction or misjudgment among politicians and senior officers before Pearl Harbor, or the ducking and diving afterwards, then the book has some title to the publisher's claims. But its defects illustrate the problem of anniversaries — seen closer to home in the recent plethora of books on Waterloo and the Somme: the 'visiting author'.

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Big skies and frozen wastes

Lee Langley

For a Little While

by Rick Bass
Pushkin, £20, pp. 466

We know our way around Raymond Carver's blue-collar cityscapes and Updike's urban angst and despair. Rick Bass opens a window onto a wilder America — the far reaches of Montana, Alabama, Texas, Missouri... But to say his stories are about rural life would be like saying *Moby-Dick* is about whaling.

Lauded by American critics and freighted with prizes, Bass is scarcely known in Britain. Praise to Pushkin Press for introducing us to an astonishing literary voice. Life in Bass's world is often challenging: his people live close to the land; they fish, shoot birds, hunt elk, moose and deer to stock the larder. But while forests, prairies, rivers and lakes form the settings, the vagaries of the human heart ignore boundaries. Beneath the big skies men and women endure loneliness and loss; there are unspoken loves; a simple man yearns for grace. With a poet's eye, Bass encompasses tender domestic felicity and moments of high farce.

In 'The Watch', a 77-year-old man escapes from his controlling son for a delirious last hurrah, a taste of freedom in the bayou, finding renewed virility and happiness, grappling with giant catfish and alligators, swinging Tarzan-like through the trees, geriatric king of a commune of women fleeing from abusive men. The son's vindictive

concern for his father's 'welfare' leads to a denouement of chilling horror that recalls Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*.

The stories gleam with images of haunting strangeness and beauty. A naked young man swims up a river harnessed to a canoe loaded with cast-iron statues; a mountain lion lurks, as a father guides his children through a dark, snow-bound forest to a living Christmas tree aglow with blue lights; three teenagers create a fairytale hideout from rusting junk on a polluted river, basking in a sweetly intoxicating summer of love before drifting apart with wry regret.

The volume covers 30 years of writing, and the half dozen later stories don't always achieve the textural richness and visceral intensity of the 18 earlier ones, but in 'Lease Hound', set in the murky world of land purchase and mineral rights, Bass draws on his experience as a petroleum geologist, subtly capturing the way guilt seeps into the soul of a decent man drawn into moral equivocation.

The masterpiece of the collection is 'The Hermit's Story'. A couple caught in a violent arctic storm are trapped at the edge of a frozen lake. Venturing out from the shore the man vanishes from sight when the ice cracks beneath him. What follows is so eerily bizarre that it seems at first to be fantasy. The frantic woman peers down and sees the man waving, not swimming: beneath the surface, the water has drained away, and the pair cross the dry lake bed beneath a roof of thick blue ice. Huddled under the frozen surface are birds, sheltering in pockets of air to survive. The story glitters like an ice sculpture, dazzling, unforgettable.

Agonised questions

Molly Guinness

Three Daughters of Eve

by Elif Shafak
Penguin, £12.99, pp. 365

It's terribly difficult to write a novel about soul-searching, and Elif Shafak has come up with a rather clever device to do so: Peri grows up in Istanbul listening to her parents fighting about religion. Solemn, naive and tortured, she gets a place at Oxford, where she makes friends with Mona, who wears a headscarf and feels persecuted, and Shirin, who enjoys drinking and sex and says things like 'We Muslims are going through an identity crisis. Especially the women... Eat your heart out Jean-Paul Sartre! Get a load of this! We have an existential crisis like you've never seen!' They all study under the handsome and wayward Professor Azur, who gives seminars about God. The scene is set for a romantic crisis. Fourteen years later, Peri has a violent encounter with a tramp that brings it all back.

Shafak is an international pin-up: *Three Daughters of Eve* is her tenth novel, but she's also a founding member of a foreign affairs thinktank, has an active role at the World Economic Forum, defends gay rights and has been prosecuted by the Turkish government. People on Twitter adore her. This is a very serious book and in it she deals with enough vexed themes to qualify as a UN special envoy.

Peri keeps a diary where she writes down her feelings about God. She's constantly having thoughts like this: 'Was religion an empowering force for women who otherwise had limited power in a society designed for and by men, or was it yet another tool for facilitating their submission?' That's how she lives, question after agonised question.

The young people she talks to are just as brooding. In Professor Azur's class she meets a staunch atheist who quotes Ernest Hemingway, an Irish Catholic who's there to broaden her perspective, a Jewish boy who wants to foster religious dialogue, a British Indian whose motto is 'Your idea of you creates your reality', and so on. Peri suspects the professor has chosen them specially to create arguments, but actually the same could be said of the author. Every character in the book slots neatly into one side or another of an argument. It's like an edition of the phone-in show *World Have Your Say*. They're ideally cast for a passionate debate on religion, identity and feminism, but all the intellectual sparring rather jostles out the other little details that might help us believe in the characters and worry about their welfare.

Red Sea Crossing

Whether to trust it. That wider breath
That opens the sea in two directions
At once. Dart in between those hissing walls
While you can, run down the chill, impossible lane
To sea's ancient ruin. Pelagic eyes,
Not unindifferent, loom, intent,
Follow your progress. While there's still time
Lean your whole length against the membrane,
For your body to feel the deep crackles,
Detonations and wails. To be held
By what doesn't know you. Others pull
You away to survive on the other shore.
Watch as the sea sets down its full weight
On others, who drown. Turn inland then
To where the patient column of fire
Waits, as ever. More miracles to endure.

— Gwyneth Lewis

It's odd because in her Ted talk (watched more than 1.6 million times), Shafak complains about the way critics expect her to be a representative of her own culture and only write about Muslim women. She talks a lot about the freedom that fiction gives her to get away from what she calls identity politics. Reading *Three Daughters of Eve*, it's hard to believe she started with the story, rather than the thematic baggage that rather weighs it down. But perhaps she just wanted to shut us all up.

Whited sepulchre

Martin Gayford

Michelangelo's Tomb for Pope Julius II: Genesis and Genius

edited by Christoph Luitpold Frommel,
translated by A. Lawrence Jenkins Jr
Yale, £50, pp. 368

'How often', wrote Sigmund Freud in 1914, 'have I mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza where the church stands, and have essayed to support the angry scorn of the heroic glance.' The gaze that the founder of psychoanalysis struggled to withstand belonged to Michelangelo's Moses, centrepiece of the tomb of Julius II in the basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli.

Michelangelo's Moses has indeed a look of formidable authority. The prophet possesses, in addition, the physique of a bodybuilder, a beard that cascades like Niagara Falls and a pair of knees for which the best adjective is also 'heroic'. Yet, despite its power, this statue was — for its creator — just one element in an agonising, slow-motion disaster. In the life of Michelangelo by Condivi — something close to a modern 'as-told-to' biography — this is described as 'the tragedy of the tomb'. It was just about the worst case of project overrun in art history.

When first planned in 1505, the sepulchre was intended to dominate the choir of the newly rebuilt St Peter's. It was to be free-standing — almost a building in its own right — arrayed with some 40 sculptures, including prophets, sibyls, Moses, St Paul and beautiful, naked young men: a glorious memorial not only to Julius II, but also to the genius who carved it.

In this superbly illustrated and meticulously documented volume, Christoph Luitpold Frommel analyses what followed. Within a year, to Michelangelo's fury, Julius had tired of slow progress and rising costs. The sculptor fled to Florence, was forced to return to papal service and eventually diverted — against his will — into painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

After Julius died in 1513 Michelangelo



GETTY IMAGES

Moses has a formidable authority, with the physique of a bodybuilder and a beard that cascades like Niagara Falls

carried on with the tomb, but then his attention shifted to another scheme — then another, and another. Decades went by. The Reformation split Christianity, Rome was sacked — and still the tomb remained unfinished.

Too many powerful people wanted Michelangelo to work on their own *grands projets*. On being told that the artist could not enter his service as he was under contract to execute the tomb, for example, Pope Paul III exclaimed: 'Where is this contract? I will tear it up!' On the other

It was intended to be a glorious memorial, not only to Julius II but to the genius who carved it

hand, Julius's heirs remained too forceful for the whole thing to be dropped. It was particularly hard to ignore his alarmingly irascible nephew — Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino — who once ran a cardinal through with a pike after a brisk exchange of views.

Consequently, the project went through a dizzyingly complicated series of revised contracts and modified designs — and

with each alteration, it dwindled. A number of masterpieces were intended for it — including the two Slaves in the Louvre — only to be discarded as Michelangelo's ideas changed. By the time the tomb was finally installed, 40 years after this marathon began, its site had been moved to a different, far less prominent, church and the number of sculptures included had fallen to seven. Even after it was finished, the sorry business continued to trouble Michelangelo.

No one — including the artist — has ever been sure what to make of the ultimate result. In Condivi's authorised biography it is described as 'botched' — but still the most impressive tomb in Rome (which may still be true, although Bernini later produced some strong competition).

The truth was that Michelangelo's style changed radically in the aeons during which he was at work on it. As a result the architecture of the upper part is in his late style, while the lower section reflects his 15th-century roots. Moses is completely out of scale with the two female figures — representing the active and contemplative life — that flank him on either side. The other ill-assorted sculptures are largely the

work of assistants (except — the authors claim — the recumbent effigy of Julius himself).

The essays by Frommel and the other contributors are full of fresh insights, many garnered from a restoration in the 1990s. But perhaps the most valuable aspect of this publication is the array of sumptuous photographs by Andrea Jemolo. These allow one to appreciate the tomb, detail by detail, for what it is: an assortment of fragments salvaged from one of the most ambitious sculptural projects ever conceived.

The great Norse soap opera

Joanne Harris

Norse Mythology

by Neil Gaiman

Bloomsbury, £20, pp. 277

Norse myths are having a moment. Or should I say another moment; one of a long chain of moments, in fact, beginning in the primordial soup of the oral tradition of storytelling in Iceland and Scandinavia. This mythology is old; old and very tenacious. First chronicled by scholars and historians some centuries after the Christianisation of Scandinavia, it tells of the creation of the world from the flesh of a slaughtered giant; of the rise of Asgard, the stronghold of the gods, and of their struggle against the forces of evil; and it predicts the eventual death of the gods in a final battle, Ragnarök, in which all of creation will be destroyed. It also tells of the exploits of some of the most complex, entertaining, funny, flawed and, yes, human characters ever to lift a hammer in battle against the enemy.

Norse gods do not have the remoteness of the Olympian gods, the grandeur of the Greek heroes (at least in bowdlerised modern versions) or the strangeness of the Egyptian pantheon. Norse gods are oddly familiar. Their powers may be god-like, but their motives are all too human. They make terrible life choices. They fall in love with the wrong people. They succumb to jealousy and lust. They can be fearful, careless, mean, resentful or downright stupid. Their myths are part soap opera, part fantasy, with a good deal of vaudeville thrown in.

Perhaps it is this familiarity that has made the Norse myths so enduring. Certainly, the amount of source material that has survived is relatively small, most of it taken from the anonymous group of early skaldic poems known as the *Poetic Edda*, and the *Prose Edda*, compiled by Snorri Sturluson in about 1220. But what these myths may lack in volume, they

make up for in impact. The Norse myths have influenced countless writers and artists across the centuries, from Tolkien to Wagner, Rackham to Alan Garner, propelling the gods of the Vikings as far as Japanese manga and the Marvel universe.

Many of these works have taken the gods far out of their natural sphere. Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel *American Gods* relocated them to modern-day America and pitted them against the new gods of wealth, change and the media. Aspects of their legends have appeared in several of Gaiman's other

These are some of the most flawed and entertaining characters ever to lift a hammer in battle against the enemy

works, including *Sandman* and *Odd and the Frost Giants*. And following the recent translation of *American Gods* to screen, the publication of Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* may not come as too much of a surprise. But to a younger readership more familiar with the gods of Marvel than with those of the *Eddas*, and with so many books in print in which the original myths have been changed and subverted, it comes as a welcome opportunity to

revisit the traditional stories and to understand their significance in the broader context of literature.

As such, Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* offers little by way of subversion. Like the *Norse Myths* of Kevin Crossley-Holland (1993), it is a fairly conventional account of the principal stories outlined in the *Prose Edda*, from the birth of the first being from out of the primeval ice to the chaos of Ragnarök, and the hope of a new world. There is no attempt to impose a more linear structure on the myths. That has been done many times elsewhere, and in this retelling, the inconsistencies and eccentricities that form part of the charm of the original source material are reproduced mostly without comment, in a clear and accessible prose. Gaiman's voice is engaging; often quirkily humorous, and the spaces between the myths (as essential, perhaps, as the myths themselves) are explored with a gentleness close to reverence.

Unlike Snorri's *Edda*, there is nothing pompous or grand here, nor any hint of preaching. Instead, it's easy to imagine oneself reading these stories to a child, or having them read to you by a friend. With the deftest of touches, the characters are once again brought to life: Odin the Allfather,

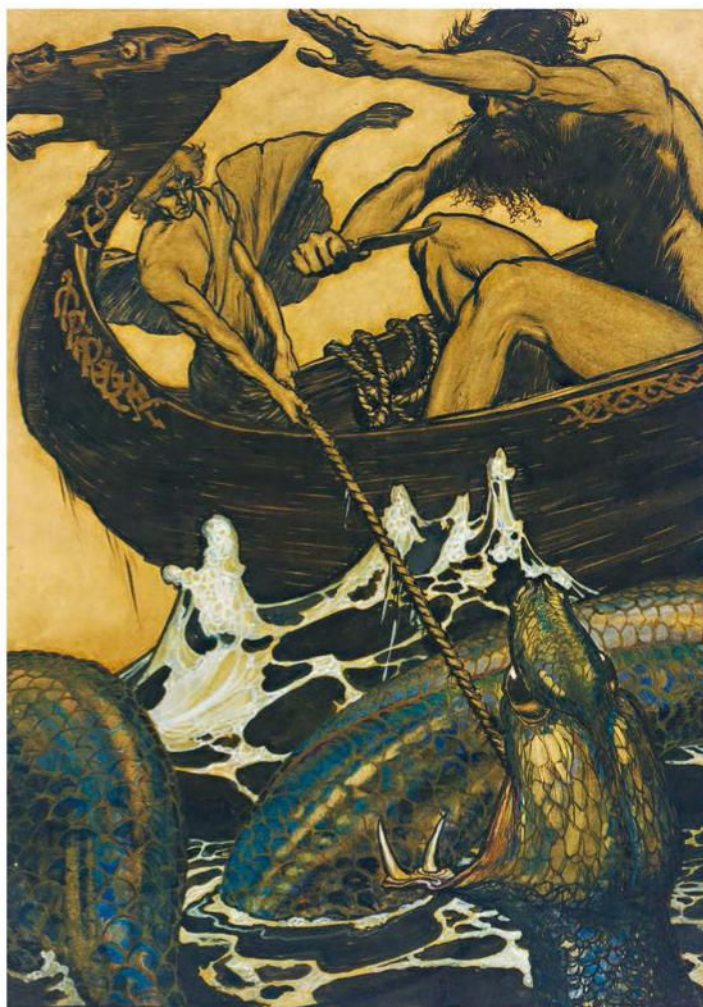


Illustration for the *Edda* by Arthur Rackham

grim and unfathomable; Thor the Thunderer, loyal, strong, but not particularly bright; Loki, the Trickster, rebellious, perverse and self-destructive; Freyja, the Goddess of Love and War; Skadi, the Snowshoe Huntress, vengeful, solitary and cold. The author's affection for the characters shines out from every page, and the narrative, always crisp and direct, combines an adult's insight with a childlike sense of wonder at the magic of it all; the heroes, the monsters, the giants, the runes. Best of all, the stories remain as fresh and appealing as they were when I first discovered them.

Thus, the myths I loved as a child can be passed to a new generation, to be reinvented anew. For stories that cannot be retold are destined to be forgotten; and every generation must rediscover these myths for themselves, and take from them whatever they need.

Riding the storm

Suzi Feay

The Wild Other: A Memoir

by Clover Stroud

Hodder, £20, pp. 276

Clover Stroud opens her memoir with the crippling bout of post-natal depression that hit after the birth of her fourth child. 'I felt like a fist. Dash was always naked, plastered bare to my breast, sucking from me as my body dripped milk and tears.' She even contemplates harming the baby then killing herself, guilelessly telling the health visitor: 'But isn't that normal?' We spiral back in time to the cataclysmic events that spurred Stroud's distress.

Stroud's life was idyllic up to the age of 16. Home was a rambling country house in the village of Minety, Wiltshire, filled with adorable siblings and presided over by her father Rick, a TV executive, and her exuberant earth mother Charlotte. Horse-mad from an early age, Stroud was not to know that her keenest passion was to turn into the family curse. At the age of 52, the vibrant Charlotte is thrown from her horse and suffers a catastrophic brain injury. Defying the medical prognosis, she regains consciousness, but is incontinent, barely able to speak and never again becomes the woman they all loved so much, and the mother that the teenage Stroud needed so desperately.

Curiously, this disaster doesn't put Stroud off horses; on the contrary, their danger, their wildness — the untameable 'wild other' of the title — becomes all the more alluring. Even her fourth child's name, Dash, shortened from Dashiell, was also the name of a much-loved pony. The accident seems to beckon Stroud on to flirt with danger and death, to ride as hard and fast as she can. The book charts a journey that takes

her from English racing stables to Texan ranches and on to the most perilous emotional and physical states she can access. At which point, even the intrepid Stroud realises she has reached her limit.

Memoir always seems an unstable genre, slippery and ambiguous. Who can really recall the details of conversations from long ago? Who can remember verbatim the precise escalation of a drunken argument? By the time we get to Texas, the impression of fictionality intensifies; everyone seems to talk like a character from *Dallas*, one of Charlotte's favourite shows. 'Hey, y'all, you ready for this?... Damn coyotes... they'd eat a calf right out of its momma as it's being born.'

This is not to disrespect or disbelieve Stroud's account (the acknowledgements refer to the notebooks and diaries she kept along the way), merely to note the narrative strategies used to convey the emotional truths of the past. Stroud's life is certainly eventful. A fascination with music, drugs, gypsies and travellers leads her across England and Ireland in search of outlaw communities and raves (it's the 1990s). Drawn to rootless men with horses, she tumbles into successive beds and bunks, breaks off for a stint at Oxford University during which she seems utterly bemused, and finally marries a charismatic Irish musician who turns out to be a heavy drinker and something of a fake Paddy.

All the while, Stroud's crazy is mirrored by her mother's immobility, almost as though she is living for two, or raging mutely: 'You see what happens when you desert your child?' For as she acknowledges, as well as feeling love, anguish and pity, Stroud nurses a fierce anger towards Charlotte. The accident means that Stroud remains 16, locked into a rebellious pose she should have long outgrown.

It's a little odd, moving chronologically, to reach the point where we started and find the post-natal depression passed by as though it was a blip. I'm sure it was perfectly real; Stroud's honesty as a writer is blistering. It's just that treating the depression this way relegates it to a literary device. Another jolting omission is the abrupt dismissal of Stroud's first marriage: 'we are friends now,

and neither Dan nor I have looked back.' You suspect Dan is not entirely on board with this project.

The spine of the book is formed by Stroud's beloved Ridgeway, the prehistoric hillside track running from Wiltshire to Bucks by which she lives. Its ancient monuments, the White Horse of Uffington and Wayland's Smithy, are Stroud's touchstones of a higher reality. Such glimpses of a particularly English spirituality, aligned with the power and otherness of non-human companionship, elevate her memoir. Some events can't be mitigated; they can only be endured with grace and style, something Stroud certainly achieves, to judge from this marvellous book.

The lure of the desert

John Hare

Great Desert Explorers

by Andrew Goudie

Silphium Press /Royal Geographical Society with IBG, £39.95, pp. 354

The great deserts of the world hold a compelling attraction for a rare breed of men who are 'unwise and curiously planned'. Once under the spell of that seemingly infinite arena of sand and stone, many are helplessly hooked. It is an arena where the sun burns down relentlessly during the day, to be replaced at night by a hauntingly beautiful backdrop of brilliant stars. Where the moon shines with a light which softens the austere outline of rocks and hills and casts a diffused greyness over the desert sands.

This well-organised and beautifully produced book lists many of the men and women who have been hopelessly seduced by the desert's spell; romantics, explorers, adventurers, solitaires and escapees — all victims of desert seduction — many who 'travel for lust of knowing what should not be known'.

Neatly divided into areas of the world where vast deserts are found, the concise biographies of great explorers who were the first to venture on to the 'desert's dusty face' are inserted into their respective areas. There are some wonderful quotations; from Wilfrid Blunt's description of the Great Nafud Desert in Saudi Arabia as the colour of 'rhubarb and magnesia', to Lady Blunt's assertion that 'a Persian riding a camel is the most ridiculous sight in the world'. Blunt was the great uncle of Anthony Blunt, whose co-traitors included Kim, the son of another great Arabian explorer, Harry St John Philby. Spying was also an occupation of the extraordinary Gertrude Bell, who combined 'high intelligence and political skill with archaeology and masculine vigour'.

There are 64 entries in all and many of





Robert O'Hara Burke, William John Wills and John A. King return to their depot at Cooper's Creek, Queensland, during their ill-fated exploration of the Australian interior, 1860–61

the excellent photographs, maps and line drawings have come from the archives of the Royal Geographical Society.

In the Gobi there is Przhevalsky, who rode unflinchingly and imperiously through the harshest desert, where he discovered the wild horse and the wild camel. There is Sven Hedin, who filled in numerous blank spaces on the map, and Sir Marc Aurel Stein, who to one reviewer 'had all the allure of an Edwardian chartered accountant' and is known to the Chinese to this day as 'the great robber', yet became an outstanding desert archaeologist.

My personal fascination is with the Australian entries, Sturt, Stuart, Eyre, Warburton and Wills, whose achievements were quite outstanding in the face of horrific conditions. 'We were attacked with swollen and ulcerated gums, violent headaches, pains in the limbs . . .' wrote Charles Sturt. And Peter Egerton Warburton experienced 'fly-blown camels whose sores had to be emptied in a pint pot . . .'

McDuell Stuart, the first man to trek from Darwin to Adelaide, lost not a man on his gruelling expeditions; and Edward John Eyre had an enlightened view of the Aborigines: 'It is most lamentable to think the progress and prosperity of one race should be the downfall of another.'

Sandstorms and camels are a common theme for most of these explorers. During one storm, Lady Blunt wrote, 'The camels all huddled for protection, with their long necks stretched out and heads low, tags and ropes flying . . . all seen through the yellow haze of sand.'

As for the Bactrian camel: 'It is a slow heavy beast, but with muscles like steel and amazing powers of endurance which carry it through extremes of heat, cold, hunger and thirst such as no other beast of burden could stand,' wrote Mildred Cable.

'The desert is the breathing space of the world, and therein one truly lives and breathes,' wrote the archaeologist Arthur Weigall.

This book is a fine tribute to those who ventured into and were seduced by the clean, breathing spaces of the world.

Another challenge for Trump

Michael Beloff

Supremely Partisan: How Raw Politics Tips the Scales in the United States Supreme Court

by James D. Zirin

Rowman and Littlefield, £18.95, pp.312

James D. Zirin is an experienced litigator as well as the host of a popular television talkshow. In this provocative polemic he uses skills developed both from behind the bar and in front of the camera to mount the charge that the US Supreme Court is a political court. How far does his evidence support his claim?

In 1803 Chief Justice Marshall invented the doctrine of judicial review, by which the Supreme Court had the right

to strike down Acts of Congress and executive action as inconsistent with the constitution. Inevitably, it then became involved in issues that were heavily political. In 1857 the court upheld the property rights of slave owners. In 1896 it created the separate but equal principle. In 1954 it outlawed segregation. Next it validated race-based affirmative action, but in 2003 signalled its eventual decline. There is no clearer illustration of Zirin's dictum: 'Changing judges decidedly changes the law.'

But this is not to say that the justices vote a party ticket. The expectations of presidents who seek out judges sympathetic to their own agendas are often disappointed: they can't always get what they want. Earl Warren, a conservative governor of California and Eisenhower's choice for chief justice, became leader of the court in its most liberal hour. John Roberts, George W. Bush's selection for the same office, ensured the narrow majority in support of Obamacare.

Of the current court, there were, until Antonin Scalia's premature death, six Catholics and three Jews on the bench — not a Wasp in sight, which may provide some insight into the recent electoral rebellion of white protestant males. Scalia voted against gay marriage; Anthony Kennedy wrote the majority judgment in its favour. Both were Catholics as well as Republican nominees. But Scalia was an originalist, seeking to interpret the constitution through the eyes of those who drafted it. Kennedy, by contrast,

sees the constitution as ‘always speaking’. It was not politics or even religion that put them on different sides of this hot-button issue.

Nor can pure politics explain the extreme fidelity of the court to the first amendment guarantee of freedom of expression — which has, after all, been used to exculpate hate speech of the kind criminalised in the United Kingdom, as well as to remove constraints on political funding. Only a Donald Trump can nowadays afford to campaign: an Abraham Lincoln could not. Some justices are also free in their expression about the opinions of those with whom they disagree. No British judge has ever characterised another’s judgments, in Scalia’s pungent vernacular, as ‘pure apple sauce’.

Zirin is on surer ground when he notes that judges — who must, and do, aspire to impartiality — cannot detach themselves entirely from either nature or nurture. Both forces shape their judgments (and no doubt their politics, too). But while there are indeed identifiable liberal and conservative blocs on the Supreme Court — he speculates that it will take a single substitution of a conservative for a liberal justice to unwind the *Roe v. Wade* decision on the right to abortion — the verdict on Zirin’s less nuanced charge must be ‘not proven’. The 5-4 decision which ensured that George W. Bush triumphed over Al Gore in the contested 2000 election, with the five republican appointees outvoting the four democratic ones, was exceptional — as indeed was the case itself.

Alexander Hamilton described the judiciary as ‘beyond comparison the weakest’ of the organs of government, lacking both sword and purse. But, as custodian and construer of the highest law of the republic, the US Supreme Court has become, in legal terms, the strongest — which is why there is so much interest in Trump’s potential capacity to reshape the court. Our own Supreme Court’s powers of judicial review are more limited but, partly through the infusion of European law, it is taking decisions of great political consequence — witness the Article 50 litigation.

Half of the 12 British justices are due to retire in the next three years. Leading Tory politicians, such as William Hague, have from time to time suggested, as a *quid pro quo*, the need for political involvement in the process of senior judicial appointments — anathema to those who value the independence of the judiciary. Zirin’s book is destined to be source material for those on both sides of this recurring debate.

In the United Kingdom judicial independence is protected by security of tenure and protection of salary. In the USA the latter applies as well but, unlike in the UK, there is no mandatory retiring age and vol-

untary retirements are exceptional. Lord Neuberger recently announced that half of the 12 justices will retire as time expires within the next 18 months. By then three of the US justices will be in their eighties, giving Trump, with a compliant Senate, an opportunity to reshape a court whose legacy will inevitably outlast his own. Zirin’s book explains just why the stakes are so high.

Satirising the artful Hoxha

Ian Thomson

The Traitor’s Niche

by Ismail Kadare,
translated by John Hodgson
Harvill Secker, £16.99, pp. 199

Blood, they say, is quick on the knife in Albania, where Balkan-style revenge killings, known as *giakmarrie* (‘blood-takings’), settle ancient scores and land disputes. The great engine of vengeance — the old idea of purification by blood — was explored by the Albanian novelist Ismail Kadare in his first novel, *General of the Dead Army*. Published in communist Albania in 1963, the novel told of an Italian army officer who returns to the Balkan outpost after the second world war in order to bury his fallen compatriots. It remains a magnificent allegory of life and death under totalitarian dictatorship.

Kadare, 80, wrote his best books under the communist regime of Enver Hoxha (pronounced ‘Hodger’), a Muslim-born bigwig in the megalomaniac lineage of Tamburlaine. During his 40-year dictatorship, Hoxha made a show of outlawing revenge killings and other ‘backward’ tribal customs. However, his politburo was motivated less by Marxism-Leninism than by the Albanian cult of *giak per giak* (blood for blood), which requires that a family avenge a death with a death. Retaliatory political murders and party purges were all too frequent under the artful Hoxha.

Though Kadare himself never became

a party member, he was friendly with the dictator’s foxy wife Nexhmije Hoxha, the ‘Lady Macbeth of the Balkans’. As minister for propaganda in the early 1960s, Nexhmije was behind Albania’s feared Sigurimi secret police. The Sigurimi were, of course, enemies of literary expression, but Kadare managed to write slyly subtle critiques of their repressions and trap-door disappearances. He was accommodated by the Hoxha regime until he incurred the displeasure of the Sigurimi in 1990, and defected to Paris, where he lives to this day.

The Traitor’s Niche, written in the Albanian capital of Tirana between 1974 and 1976, is part of Kadare’s trilogy of interlinked political novels set in the early 19th century. The year is 1822 and the Balkan pashadom of Albania is languishing unhappily at the far edge of the Ottoman empire. Ali Pasha Tepelena, Albania’s rebellious governor, objects to the cumbersome concentration of governance in faraway Constantinople. Freedom is his new watchword, and he welcomes freedom-fighters from abroad. Thirteen years earlier, in 1809, Ali Pasha had in fact provided Lord Byron with shelter — as well as supplies of sweetmeats and sugared sherbet. Byron, in gratitude, apostrophised Albania in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* as a beautiful, rugged place of moorland tarns and minarets.

When not roasting his enemies alive, Ali Pasha schemes to defy Sultan Mahmud II and free Albania. The country has been under the Ottoman yoke for 400 years. Enough is enough. For all his narcissistic Bonapartism, Ali Pasha clearly is intended to be a prototype for Enver Hoxha. ‘You’ve done nothing,’ a political prisoner yells at him, adding: ‘You’re still a pasha.’ Before long Ali Pasha’s head is brought to Constantinople for public display in the so-called traitor’s niche high up in a main square. Headless in Turkey, the renegade pasha is thus made to serve as an example. In John Hodgson’s lucid translation, *The Traitor’s Niche* is absorbing from start to finish. Kadare’s allegorical burlesque has rarely been so trenchant.



‘Sincerely yours, Geronimo.... P.S. Missing you already’

In hot water

Andrew Taylor

Spook Street

by Mick Herron

John Murray, £14.99, pp 341

It's good to be back in Spook Street, home of the nation's secret service. From a handful of locations across London, its dedicated employees struggle ceaselessly against the nation's enemies, when not otherwise engaged in scratching each other's backs or scratching each other's eyes out.

Spook Street is Mick Herron's fourth novel in the series, and like its predecessors its focus is the activities of the 'slow horses', the Service's rejects. Their records irredeemably blotted by past transgressions, these men and women have been despatched to Slough House, a small but hideous office block near the Barbican, where they are condemned to spend the rest of their careers engaged on the sort of tasks that Kafka might have invented for Sisypheus.

Presiding over this bureaucratic gulag is Jackson Lamb, one of the most reliably disgusting characters in modern fiction. At one point, in one of those bravura flourishes that make this series such a pleasure, Lamb is described as 'surveying his slow horses... the way a battery farmer might inspect his chickens'.

The story begins when a flash mob of innocent teenagers assembles at Westacres, an enormous retail dome in west London, just in time to form part of the bloodbath that follows a terrorist explosion. Meanwhile, one slow horse, River Cartwright, is wrestling with a personal problem in the shape of his grandfather, the Old Bastard, a former Service legend who is now flirting with dementia. What do you do with a retired spy when his brain begins to disintegrate? The O.B. has a memory full of lethal secrets and a body trained to kill.

The problem swiftly escalates when the O.B. vanishes, leaving a corpse in his bath — a corpse that Jackson Lamb cheerfully identifies as River. To make matters worse, it looks as if the O.B. may have had some connection with the Westacres bomb. There are secrets that the O.B. has confided to no one, even his grandson.

All the slow horse misfits, from Jackson Lamb downwards, have pockets of expertise and redeeming qualities. But Herron's characters aren't intended to be naturalistic. Nor are the almost cartoonish events (two car crashes! hurrah!) that gently mock the conventions of the cruder type of thriller. The battles are a particular pleasure. The previous novel, *Real Tigers*, featured a double-decker bus as a weapon. This one has, among other items in the armoury, a kettle full of boiling water.

Stylistically, you can draw comparisons with the work of Raymond Chandler, though Herron keeps a tighter grasp on his narrative than Chandler ever did. But the story takes second place to the prose. The dialogue crackles. Herron is a master of timing, word by word, sentence by sentence. His language creates its own world, with streaks of satire and loss that prevent it from becoming too comfortable.

Give yourself a treat and hurry on down to Spook Street.

And then there was one

Matt Thorne

4 3 2 1

by Paul Auster

Faber, £20, pp. 880

After a long struggle to receive mainstream publication, Paul Auster's first few novels were a genuinely significant contribution to American letters, his patented mix of post-modernism, deadpan comedy and meta-

Fisheye

Wind pulls out the gather
in the fish shop's nets of rain
on glass where bits of clingfilm
peel back to shrunk membrane
smeared with cabled lightbulbs
looped down the promenade,
B & Bs, guest houses,
white-stucco'd, crowned and starred,
shone bright enough to turn him
to a loser who, outcast,
stares back into his future
through the blurred lens of a past.

He lights out for his hostel
but hoodwinked by the blaze
as an arcade's incandescence
showers down on alleyways,
winds up inside this mirror
with its torsion of surprise
that twists, sucks in and swallows
lost shillings, chrome-rimmed eyes;
mercurial, time bulges
in his bright metallic grin
as the boy clean out of silver
slips through its tarnishing.

— John Levett

textual homage to Kafka, Hamsun, Melville and Hawthorne so singular it invited parody. Among these books, *The New York Trilogy* and *The Music of Chance* seem likely to last many years from now.

But the second half of his career has proved more problematic. Seemingly tiring of his own shtick, he spent a long time dismantling what made him great, sometimes to powerful effect (*Oracle Night*), but more usually in a way that seemed designed deliberately to test his biggest fans. His writer protagonists used to be detectives manqué, trapped in compelling noir narratives; in later novels they're more likely to fret about their membership of PEN. Now, however, he has produced a novel as likely to cement his reputation among the American greats as Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (Auster's friend and arguably the writer he most resembles).

The concept of *4 3 2 1* is not original. Auster is far from the first author to take inspiration from Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken' to explore the different directions a protagonist's life might take. In the past few years alone, this conceit has powered Lionel Shriver's *The Post-Birthday World*, Kate Atkinson's *Life after Life* and Laura Barnett's *The Versions of Us*. It is also commonly used in film, TV, science-fiction and comics, where the multiverse is a common get-out clause to reverse a protagonist's demise or reboot a flagging narrative.

But Auster ups the stakes in two ways: first, he gives his protagonist, Archibald Isaac Ferguson, four alternate lives; and second, he depicts these alternate existences with such creative energy that it's a delight rather than a chore to switch between narratives, experiencing childhood, first love and creative ambition over and over again.

Towards the end of the novel, Auster takes a swipe at Updike and Bellow, but his real enemy is middlebrow realist novelists who shy away from the eccentric. What elevates this novel is not the conceit of the road not taken, but the fact that all roads offered are so perilous. Although the four iterations of Ferguson have relatively straightforward ambitions — all they want is to write, and to find suitable sexual partners — they are forever surrounded by death and disaster.

Only one Ferguson will make it to the end of the novel, and there is a thrilling sense throughout that anything can happen at any time. The downside of this is that Auster finds it perfectly acceptable to devote over 13 pages to a dopey piece of juvenilia that one of his Fergusons writes about a sentient pair of shoes. The upside is that Auster gives us the epic novel that even his greatest fans might have assumed beyond him. Among American novelists only DeLillo and Roth have produced late work of this quality. To put it in terms Auster's protagonists would relish, *4 3 2 1* is an epic home-run.

Still giving peace a chance

Kapil Komireddi

The Division of Heaven and Earth: On Tibet's Peaceful Revolution

by Shokdung,

translated by Matthew Akester

Hurst, £14.99, pp. 176

Tibetans were once fabled warriors. Their empire, at the summit of its power in the eighth century, extended to northern India, western China and central Asia. The Arabs, making inroads into central Asia, were in awe of them. And China, according to an inscription commissioned to memorialise Tibet's conquest of the Tang Chinese capital of Changan in 763, 'shivered with fear' at their mention. But the Tibet annexed by Mao Zedong in the 20th century bore no trace of its imperial past.

When the People's Liberation Army struck in 1950, Tibet, having metamorphosed over a millennium into a reclusive hagiarchy, possessed neither the vocabulary to parley with the communists nor the strength to resist them. Its response to this worldly threat was to retreat into ritual. A 15-year-old boy called Tenzin Gyatso, identified some years before as the 14th Dalai Lama, was hastily confirmed as Tibet's supreme ruler. His delegation to Beijing the following year signed away Tibet's sovereignty without consulting him. What ensued was a protracted act of gratuitous savagery. Mao called it 'liberation'. Monasteries were razed, monks executed, thousands of nonviolent protesters massacred, and many thousands more detained, starved, tortured, uprooted and carted away to communes to toil in conditions so severe that some resorted to cannibalism in order to survive. In 1959, the Dalai Lama, facing imminent capture, escaped to India.

At no point in their history, the influential Tibetan author Tragya, who publishes under the pen name Shokdung ('wake-up call'), writes in *The Division of Heaven and Earth*, were Tibetans made to endure such sustained misery. Swiftly banned by the Chinese Communist party when it was first published in Tibet in 2008, the book is now available for the first time in English. It is a haunting indictment of China's colonial project in Tibet, and if the charges contained in it are so bruising for Beijing, it is because the person making them was not long ago regarded by the CCP as a fellow traveller. Shokdung attained notoriety in the 1990s for his attacks on Tibet's religious 'tumour of ignorance'. Beijing immediately sought to co-opt him.

The uprising of 2008, when thousands of Tibetans streamed into the streets demanding an end to Chinese occupation and the return of the Dalai Lama, upended Shokdung's world. China expelled journalists from Tibet and set its military loose on the

protesters. It was a bloodbath. Witnessing the crackdown with increasing self-revelation from his office in a state-run publishing house, Shokdung arrived at the conclusion that what Tibetans lacked was not the will but a political philosophy suited to their conditions. Here, he advances Gandhi as the model for Tibetan resistance.

Shokdung makes a powerful case. But can Gandhi really save Tibet? George Orwell once disappointed pacifists by saying that Gandhian tactics of nonviolent non-cooperation would not have worked against the Soviet Union. The same is true of China. As Shokdung himself concedes, 'The British rulers of India had some degree of moral conscience'. Gandhi had tea with George V. The Dalai Lama had to flee Mao in heavy disguise.

Tibet today enjoys virtually no meaningful external support. The liberal assumption that the West was more likely to influence China by making concessions to its rulers has proved to be a self-wounding fantasy. Far from moulding China's behaviour, it is the West that has incrementally surrendered to Beijing. Today, western authors self-censor for the tawdry privilege of being published in China; Hollywood modifies its films to placate the CCP, and governments that never

tire of puffing their chests at the Middle East's tinpot tyrannies abase themselves before Beijing.

China, emboldened by the display of deference, continues remorselessly to disfigure the hypnotically beautiful plateau. In official documents, Tibet, a source of prized minerals and hydrocarbons, is classified as 'Water Tower Number One'. More than 140 Tibetans have immolated their own bodies in protest at China's plunder of their natural resources. No government has the moral courage to mourn them.

Shokdung recognises the isolated position of Tibetans. His Gandhian prescription, whether it succeeds or not, has the merit of being self-reliant. Shokdung has been jailed for defying the CCP. His family continues to be harassed. Meanwhile, copies of his book circulate underground in Tibet. Tibet's overlords are evidently terrified. If Shokdung, an intellectual moulded by China's ideological schools, can turn so abruptly hostile, what hope does Beijing have of controlling others?

This remarkable book, written to fortify the Tibetan spirit against the assaults of colonialism, has already performed an important service by exposing the fragility of China's hold on the Tibetan mind.



A Tibetan woman prays at the Jokhang temple in Lhasa in September 2004 after one of many harsh crackdowns by the Chinese in Tibet

ARTS

Hull's a poppin'

James Walton finds a lot to love about this year's City of Culture – even on a bleak January weekend

In early January, lastminute.com recommended its top 15 destinations for 2017. In 12th spot, just above Montreal, Croatia and Japan, was Hull. And if you're tempted to opt for a snooty chuckle at this point, my advice would be to go to Hull – because, judging from my recent experience, even on a cold January weekend, the place is buzzing with a hugely infectious, if still slightly bashful, sense of rediscovered civic pride. 'I've lived here for 50 years,' one man told me, 'and this is the greatest thing that's happened to the city in my time.'

The 'this' he's referring to is, of course, Hull's status as the UK City of Culture for 2017. When the government announced the news four years ago, it was greeted with amusement by some people – not all of them living elsewhere. ('You're only here for the culture,' became a regular chant at Hull City home matches, especially when London teams were visiting.)

The reasons for this initial self-deprecating defensiveness aren't hard to find. For one thing, Hullensians – I was repeatedly told – have an inbuilt determination not to be impressed by anything too fancy. For another, the past 80-odd years have done plenty to make the city's feelings of being

either neglected or scorned by the rest of the country entirely understandable.

As the locals will soon tell you – but as hardly anybody else seems to know – Hull was second only to London as Britain's most bombed city during the Blitz. The 1970s Cod Wars wiped out the fishing industry on which it largely depended. In 2003, the best-selling book *Crap Towns* chortlingly named Hull the crappiest UK town of all – something the inhabitants still try to laugh off, but

The Sun marked the occasion with the headline 'Scrapital of Culture'

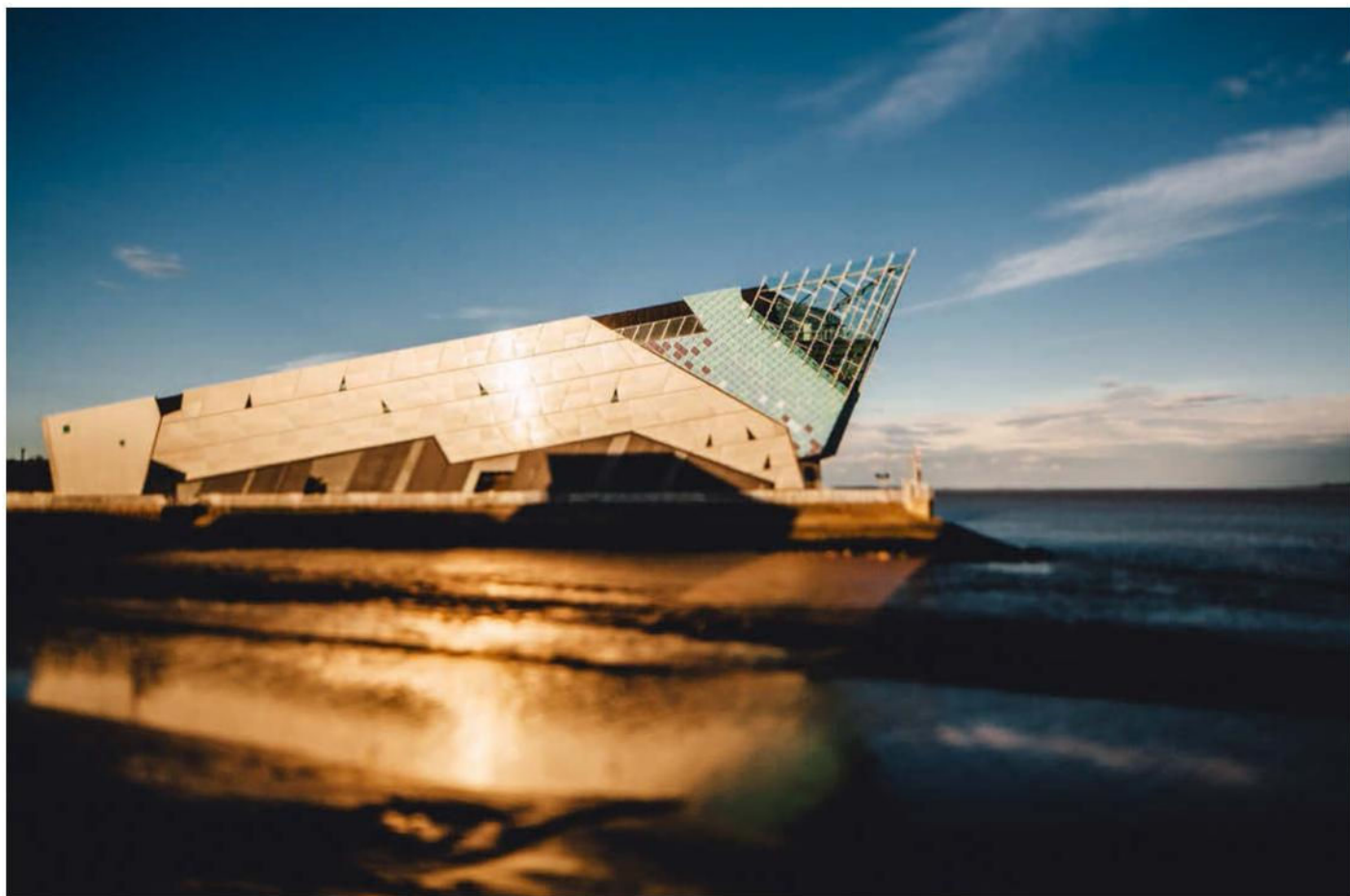
which clearly stung. Then, when the City of Culture year began, the *Sun* chose to mark the occasion with the headline 'Scrapital of Culture' and pictures of drunk young Hullensians on New Year's Eve. (Personally, I wouldn't want to live in a city that didn't have drunk people in it on New Year's Eve – but even if I did, I doubt I'd find one.)

And yet last Sunday morning, there were long queues outside the Ferens art gallery in the town centre, after a week in which it had already had 60,000 visitors – or more than a tenth of the total for an average year. Meanwhile, virtually everyone I met/randomly

accosted had found something in the City of Culture that captured their imagination.

For Leah, dressed as Catwoman and having a cigarette outside the Yates's pub, it was the indie bands that are coming. For Suzi, in Ye Olde White Harte – a favourite pub of Philip Larkin's – it was the effect on her six-year-old daughter of the models of tiger moths scattered across the city in memory of Hull's Amy Johnson. 'She's completely obsessed with them,' Suzi told me – adding that when she and her husband come into town these days, they're starting to look for what's going on culturally, rather than just having a drink.

So why the startling change in attitude? Well, the director of Hull City of Culture is Martin Green, the man behind the London Olympic ceremonies, and here he was wise enough to repeat the same tactic of getting the locals on side first. The centrepiece of a week-long launch called Made in Hull was a film montage of the city's achievements screened on all the grand buildings around Victoria Square – and aimed squarely at Hullensians. Just as the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony was happy to baffle non-Brits with say, footage of a weather forecaster pooh-poohing the idea of a hurricane, so Made in Hull threw



On the waterfront: The Deep, Hull

in such things as the goal that sent Hull City into the Premier League for the first time. As the film concluded with the words ‘We are Hull’, most of the audience were apparently in tears — and even beginning to think their city might be pretty good after all.

That week, *Made in Hull* had had more visitors than the British Museum, the National Gallery and the Natural History Museum combined. But what, people wondered, would happen next? The answer turned out to be a 75-metre wind-turbine blade, made at the recently opened Siemens factory, and secretly smuggled into Victoria Square overnight. Cunningly, this combines the optimism produced by the creation of new jobs, a handy conversation starter, and a distinctly beautiful object in its own right.

Not, needless to say, that Hull didn’t have anything cultural to offer before. There is, for example, its long tradition of poetry, from Marvell to Larkin. Less grandly, there’s also the New Adelphi club, a small independent music venue of the classic but increasingly rare kind, and a Hull institution for 35 years. As luck would have it, when I went on Friday, the headliners were CrackTown, a local band playing their farewell gig. Admittedly, it wasn’t difficult to see why mainstream

success has eluded them (‘This next song’s about the utter futility of all human endeavour’). Nonetheless, their stirring mix of country, rockabilly and blues with often very funny lyrics — plus the warmth of the audience — made for a wholly memorable night.

But even at the sort of Hull event that’s been going on for years, the City of Culture was never far away. During the gig, band member the Silver Fox, whose duties are described as ‘harmonica, vocals, disdain’, gave it several non-disdainful mentions — and afterwards, he proved positively starry-

Made in Hull had more visitors than the British Museum, the National Gallery and the Natural History Museum combined

eyed on the subject. ‘The start it’s had. . .’ he said to me, with a disbelieving shake of the head. ‘If they can keep this momentum going, it will make people here feel very differently about Hull — and themselves.’

In fact, even at chucking out time on Saturday night, the City of Culture was impossible to avoid. Some of the punters (who, despite the *Sun*’s verdict, seemed a jolly lot to me) were going off to look at the Blade.

One young woman threw a plastic glass in the air — and when it clattered on the cobblestones, her friend adopted a tone of mock reproach. ‘City of Culture!’ she said sternly.

On Sunday afternoon at the university, the impact was more orthodox, but just as striking. *Lines of Thought*, an exhibition of drawings from, among others, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Degas and Picasso, is curated by John Bernasconi: a long-serving lecturer in art history and not a man, it seems fair to say, likely to be found outside Yates’s with a fag on. Yet, in his quieter way, he too is equally enjoying the City of Culture effect.

‘It’s rather exceeded all expectations,’ he tells me. ‘We’ve had queues outside before we open. I don’t think any of us quite believed the City of Culture’s figures [in advance] but they’re looking to be absolutely right. It has caught fire.’ So, I wonder, has the success of the first couple of weeks come as a surprise, as well as an obvious relief, to the organisers? ‘I think that would be fair,’ he replies.

Perhaps because of a residual snootiness of my own, this is not a sentence I necessarily thought I’d write before I went — but it may well be that something remarkable is going on in Hull.

Theatre

Playing dead

Lloyd Evans

Death Takes a Holiday
Charing Cross Theatre, until 4 March

Dirty Great Love Story
Arts Theatre, until 18 March

It could be the nuttiest idea ever. The protagonist of this American musical is Death, who secretly reprieves a beautiful Italian princess, Grazia, and spends the weekend at her father's palace where a house party is in full swing. The dad knows the gatecrasher's identity. But Death introduces himself to the others as a suave Russian duke. All the womenfolk promptly fall in love with him, including Grazia, who sets out to bag the mysterious foreigner. Where can this strange plot go next?

Nowhere. Once Grazia learns that Death has come to terminate her existence the story will end. So the script is padded out with additional entanglements between a sprawling crew of sub-personalities. There's a sulking rotter, a glamorous airman, a foxy widow, a sagacious doctor, a needy minx, a waggish footman, a nymphomaniac scullery maid and an amiable dowager in an advanced state of decay. But their complicated affairs are just delaying tactics, and we keep returning to the doomed central pair whose relationship is as stiff and conventional as a pre-arranged fix-up between royal cousins. They take rapturous lakeside strolls. They gaze adoringly into each other's retinas. They embrace at midnight and fill the air with ardent drivel. While she tenderly fondles his shoulder blade he gawks longingly at her throat. Only two lighting conditions are permitted to illuminate their gasping intimacies, the full moon and the setting sun. Then there's a surprise. A sexy American flapper drags Death into the drawing room and tries to seduce him with an upbeat jazz number, but the fun comes to an end and the show settles back into its grand and broody torpor.

It's certainly great to look at. The stylish costumes by Jonathan Lipman are sumptuously done. The principals (Zoë Doano and Chris Peluso) are superb singers, and both are blessed with divine good looks. But the show keeps barking its shins against its own battiness in choosing a non-human protagonist. Why does this matter? Death, at first glance, appears quite a promising dramatic personality compared with other figurative abstractions like, for example, Magnetism, Oral Hygiene or Trigonometry. But try putting any of the last three into a musical and you'll see the problem. And it's unnecessary. The conflict between love and duty might

have been channelled through the figure of a Bolshevik assassin who falls for the duchess he's been ordered to liquidate. Same storyline but with more potential for realistic development.

Astronomical sums have been lavished on this show. The 14 actors are joined by a 12-piece orchestra hidden in a sort of dungeon under the stage. Oodles has been splurged on wardrobe and sets. The director Thom Southerland gets impressive performances from a cast who are not all, shall we say, West End regulars. And for what? An exquisite, opulent bore.

Poets Richard Marsh and Katie Bonna have turned their romantic memories into a rhyming play. That's quite odd. Odder still, their rhymes entertain rather than irritate. Richard and Katie (named after the authors) meet when a stag do collides with a hen night. The pair consume a small reservoir of booze and awake the next morning in the same bed. Their romance falters but they have chums in common so they keep stumbling across one another. Richard's best mate is a foul-mouthed Yorkshire

*The Richard Curtis atmosphere
will send haters of soppy romance
skedaddling to the vomitorium*

bruiser enamoured of a honking Cockney sexpot who happens to be Katie's oldest schoolfriend. These enjoyable twerps become the solder that gradually draws the pair back together.

The affair faces the usual misunderstandings and infidelities. Katie falls for Matt, a swaggering hunk from Eton, whose appeal Richard can never hope to match. At first I wanted the large cast to be played by the proper complement of actors but I began to relish the ingenuity of the performers (Felix Scott and Ayesha Antoine) as they alter their identities without even a change of costume to help. Shifts of pose, of gesture, of vocabulary, of accent, the subtle elongation of a vowel are all it takes to indicate a change of personnel. These are performances to treasure.

In the end the inevitable happens and Aphrodite triumphs. Those who hate soppy romances (and I love them) should avoid this show because its Richard Curtis atmosphere will send them skedaddling to the vomitorium. And though it has the satisfying storyline of a romantic movie, could it become one? A couple of snags. Rhyme is not a common idiom in film. And the script is full of little verbal flourishes whose existence is purely ornamental. Rule one of screenwriting states that every line must be cut that doesn't either advance the story or explore the characters. And yet nowadays there's a fad for filming the unfilmable. How it would work I don't know but I'd lay money on this reaching the big screen.

Opera

Notes on a scandal

Alexandra Coghlan

Les Enfants Terribles
Barbican Theatre

Semele
Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Kids: who'd have them? Certainly no one who has ever been to the opera. If they're not murdering you, they're betraying you, defying orders or throwing themselves into the arms of the nearest unsuitable suitor. What happens when that suitor is a god, or — god forbid — their own brother or sister? Answers came on the back of two very different operatic postcards this week.

At the Barbican, bathtime gone bad. A claw-foot bath sits centre stage, a cold, white womb in which monstrous twins writhe in fleshy ecstasy. Backs arched, legs flexed into Priapic verticals, they coalesce the clenching pulse of orgasm and the surging agony of childbirth into a single, exquisitely choreographed moment.

Combine choreographer-provocateur Javier De Frutos with *Les Enfants Terribles* — Jean Cocteau's curdled fairy tale of an orphaned brother and sister whose mutual love is contorted into something inadmissible — and things were always going to get uncomfortable. What was harder to predict was the restraint and beauty of that discomfort.

Taking Cocteau's novel and Jean-Pierre Melville's film adaptation as a jumping-off point, Philip Glass's 1996 'dance-opera' is a theatrical hybrid, whose greedy quest after sensation heaps dance, song and spoken word together into a fantasy that outstrips its originals.

Glass distils the story down to just a central quartet of characters: siblings Paul and Lise, and Gérard and Agathe, the two outsiders drawn into their world of imagination. Originally each was doubled by both a singer and dancer. Here the characters are atomised still further, with four dancers each joining soprano Jennifer Davis and baritone Gyula Nagy (both Jette Parker Young Artists at the Royal Opera) in the central roles. The effect is bewildering, a sort of subjunctive reality in which what is and what might have been co-exist in real time. It's a technique that mirrors Glass's time-bending musical process — the repeating phrases that gradually phase and morph into variations of themselves.

There's a sly innocence to Glass's instrumental writing (scored for three pianos, meticulously directed here by Timothy Burke), the luminous arpeggios and scales transforming the music of the child-beginner into something mysteriously

adult. But the vocal lines add little. Deeply unsympathetic, their chattering functionality reduces singers to tuned percussion. Set against the expressive freedom of De Frutos's choreography — drawing on the vocabulary of both classical and contemporary dance — the restrictions imposed on Davis and Nagy are cruelly emphasised. Only mezzo Emily Edmonds (Agathe) finds the depth and range of tone colour to match her dancer-double.

The thrills here are in the visuals: the intricate duet for Lise (Gemma Nixon)

Monstrous twins writhe in fleshy ecstasy, backs arched, legs flexed into Priapic verticals

and Paul (Edward Watson) in which each, 'like two halves of the same body', fills the gaps left by the other; the alien strength of Zenaida Yanowsky's Lise dominating Watson's chameleon Paul; the exhilarating sense of motion achieved by Jean-Marc Puissant's ever-shifting sets and Tal Rosner's projections, now grotesque, now gloriously colourful against the chaste greys, creams and blush-pinks of the children. What could have been crudely erotic, obvious, instead remains a heady suggestion, suspended somewhere between innocent wish and obscene fulfilment.

But if the doings of Cocteau's siblings shocked inter-war Paris, their impact was as nothing compared to Handel's scandalous *Semele*. *Semele* is an opera disguised (with the aid of a few diaphanous choruses) as a modest oratorio fit for performance during Lent. But the composer was fooling no one, and his tale of a young woman who defies her father and rejects his chosen bridegroom in favour of a good time with Jupiter is Handel at his dramatic best.

It's rare these days to hear a contemporary orchestra tackle this repertoire, but the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (directed from the harpsichord for this concert performance by period specialist Richard Egarr) just about made their case, give or take some uncomfortable tuning from strings denied the cushioned landing of vibrato. The soloists were more unanimous, with Mhairi Lawson's *Semele* flirtatious through her coloratura showpieces, and Catherine Carby's Ino/Juno warmly sung, if never fully dramatised. Stealing the spotlight from the supporting roles were Christopher Purves, who set the hall ringing as *Semele*'s imperious father Cadmus, Rowan Pierce's charming Iris and counter-tenor Tim Mead, radiant as spurned lover Athamas.

The CBSO Chorus — the *raison d'être*, one suspects, of the unusual project —

romped their way through Handel's ensembles with energy, but the overall effect was still slightly unconvincing. With singers unsure whether or not to act within this concert setting, and performances neither strictly authentic nor gleefully anachronistic, this *Semele* felt less like an operatic wolf in oratorio's woolly clothing than the reverse.

Cinema

Metal fatigue Deborah Ross

Gold

15, Nationwide

'All that glitters is not gold,' wrote Shakespeare (*The Merchant of Venice*), and you have to hand it to the guy, as he's nailed it on the head. This *Gold* certainly glitters. You look at the poster and think: 'Oh, yes. Glistery.' It's directed by Stephen Gaghan, who wrote and directed the terrific *Syriana*. It stars Matthew McConaughey. It's based on a true mining scandal that is as outrageous as it is fascinating. But this *Gold* is not gold. It has its highly entertaining moments, and there is some fun to be had

Patrick George

(1923-2016)

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Detail of cat. 28. *Head of a Girl*, oil on canvas, 42 x 24 inches



The Hour is upon us

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The Telegraph

THINK AHEAD.

VIDEO



in McConaughey's madly over-zealous performance but it is derivative (of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Big Short*, *American Hustle*; with lots of men yelling into phones about money) and there are so many storytelling impulses on the go that none has any hope of ever hitting home. It isn't the destination, it's the journey, some people say, but I like to get some place, myself.

The inspiration for the film is the Canadian businessman David Walsh and the Nineties Bre-X mining scandal (look it up if you've a mind; you won't regret it). But here the action has been moved to 1980s America where a fictionalised character, Kenny Wells (McConaughey), is trying to keep his family's mining business afloat through a series of increasingly desperate schemes. His company, founded

It's not rags to riches. Instead, it's rags to riches to rags to riches to rags to riches – or rags

by his grandfather, which once occupied swanky offices, now operates from a dingy bar where Kenny and his few remaining employees yell down those phones as they hustle for business. No one wants to know him. He visits a banker, who dispatches underlings to send him on his way. The humiliation! (I loved that scene because I always love that scene. It is not an unfamiliar scene, I think we can agree, and of course we're set to wonder: will Kenny get to do the humiliating in time?)

McConaughey, meanwhile, has uglified up for this role. He has snaggle teeth, a greasy bald patch and a fat belly (which, seriously, is me most days, but no one calls me 'brave', which is annoying). Kenny is driven by one desire and one desire only and it's the desire to become obscenely rich. Nothing else matters. Even Gordon Gekko's proclamation that 'greed is good' is, frankly, too lofty for Kenny. Here, greed is everything. Here, greed is why you get up in the morning.

But how to achieve such riches? Well, Kenny has a dream, literally. He has a dream that there's gold in them thar Indonesian hills, and teams up with a geologist (a strangely somnolent Edgar Ramirez; he looks as though he can barely keep awake) who has a theory about where the gold must lie. Kenny chain-smokes and knocks back the whisky and tells his (inexplicably) long-standing girlfriend (Bryce Dallas Howard) that this is it, and yells some more down the phone until he's raised sufficient finance to start drilling in them thar Indonesian hills. And?

It's not rags to riches. Instead, it's rags to riches to rags to riches to rags to riches – or rags. (I'm not saying which as I don't want the Spoiler Police banging on the door and pulling me, my fat belly and my greasy bald patch out of bed at 3 a.m.

I need my unbeauty sleep.) I will only say that Wall Street becomes involved as everyone wants a piece of what may (or may not be) the biggest gold strike in decades. So it's yet more yelling down phones – can you believe? – as Kenny hangs on to his wealth, loses it, hangs on, loses it, hangs on. (Or loses it.)

We are meant to root for him, I think, but as his only defining characteristic is that rampant greed, and as there is no moral take on this rampant greed, one wonders if this film ever asked itself why we would. This is not a redemptive fable and if not that, then what? A celebration of a despicable human being?

I'm not sure if the film knows, what with its multiple-story impulses. This variously plays like a *Sierra Madre*-type adventure story, a thriller, a crime caper, one of those excesses-of-capitalism narratives, a bromance and a romance, even though Dallas Howard is required to do little except be long-standing, inexplicably. There are those highly entertaining moments, just as McConaughey has electric moments, even if his performance is one-note in its madly over-zealous way. And the banker and his underlings do get their comeuppance, which has to be satisfying. (It always is.) But all that glisters is not gold. Shakespeare. What a guy.

Exhibitions

Seeing everything in black and white

Martin Gayford

Bacon and Freud: Graphic Works

Marlborough Fine Art, until 25 February

Park Seo-Bo – ZIGZAG: Ecriture 1983–1992

White Cube, Mason's Yard, until 11 March

Sussex Modernism: Retreat and Rebellion

Two Temple Place, until 23 April

House Work

Victoria Miro, until 18 March

Two divergent approaches to printmaking are on view in an exhibition of graphic work by Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud at Marlborough Fine Art, Albemarle Street. For the former, media that depend on line, such as etching, were of little interest, since – as his friend Freud would point out – Francis couldn't draw very well. But, Freud would add, Bacon's painting was so brilliant that he made you forget that limitation.

Bacon's prints were essentially reproductions of his oils, signed and numbered by the artist. The etchings Freud made in the last three decades of his life were not like that at

all. Though the models for the etchings were often the same as those for his paintings, his approach was entirely distinct.

Just as much time and thought went into each print as into a work on canvas (I should declare an interest, as the subject of one of those in this show, 'Portrait Head', 2005). Freud's etchings, furthermore, were remarkably innovative. Working with a brilliant printmaker, Marc Balakjian, he would try out highly unorthodox techniques.

'Self Portrait: Reflection', 1996, is a case in point. The artist had posed for it in the mirror wearing a white shirt, but when a trial proof was pulled the large blank area at the bottom of the picture looked wrong, especially in contrast to the rest of it, which is very dark. The solution he finally found was for Balakjian to wipe that section lightly with an inky rag, so as to create a grey, mottled surface resembling cloth.

The effect is unique – as, indeed, is each individual impression, since Balakjian had to repeat the process whenever the plate went through the press. Freud's etchings are still under-appreciated, despite the inter-

Bacon's painting was so brilliant that he made you forget that he couldn't draw

national acclaim for his work. But among them, it seems to me, are some of the strongest things he ever did.

The paintings of the South Korean artist Park Seo-Bo, on view at White Cube, Mason's Yard, are a bit like that inked plate – without the self-portrait. He is one of a number of artists, mainly born in the 1920s and '30s, whose work is known as *Dansaekhwa*, meaning 'single colour painting', or, as we say in English, 'monochrome'.

Now, of course, there's been an enormous amount of that over the past century. It's curious that in Yasmina Reza's play *Art* (currently being revived) a white-on-white abstraction bought by one of the characters is regarded as a scandalous innovation. Actually, the first such work was produced by Malevich during the first world war. Sixty years ago, Yves Klein was specialising in paintings consisting entirely of his own, patented International Klein Blue.

So there is nothing untoward about monochrome abstractions, but these Korean ones have an unfamiliar effect because they come from a culture with different traditions. In the Far East, the distinction between 'abstract' and 'figurative' is not quite the same. There a mark made with a brush on paper has always been felt to be expressive in itself. The works by Park Seo-Bo in this show consist of paper, worked into the paint surface so it looks like a big brushstroke. This group of pictures is made up of these, like vectors pointing in different directions. The monochrome shades used are quiet – mainly shades of porridge and



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'Eli', 2002, by Lucian Freud

grey — but nonetheless the pictures grow on you. There's motion and energy in them.

Twentieth-century modernist art was an international phenomenon, reaching many parts of the globe: Korea, Japan, South America. A diverting exhibition at Two Temple Place demonstrates that it even reached Sussex. Almost every movement, it turns out, had followers of some kind on the South Downs.

It is hard not to reflect, however, as one goes round that the British avant-garde of the 1920s and '30s — that is, before Francis Bacon came along — often had a distinctly amateur air. That is part of its charm but meant, for example, that the Bloomsbury artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell were much more successful at home decorating than at serious painting. A linen chest painted by Grant somewhat in the manner of Matisse is one of the most beguiling items on show.

Décor was the strong point, too, in the wealthy collector Edward James's surrealist

mansion near Chichester, where you could relax on the celebrated sofa in the form of Mae West's lips (like most modernist furniture, it looks far from comfortable). A square of the celebrated carpet woven with the damp footprints of James's wife, the dancer Tilly Losch, is also on display.

Home — though not in a way that has much to do with Bloomsbury linen chests —

*Almost every art movement
had followers of some kind on
the South Downs*

is also the theme of *House Work*, a mixed exhibition at the Victoria Miro Gallery, St George Street, Mayfair. All the pictures on show depict dwellings. Most of the works are contemporary, indeed quite a few date from last year, although the earliest is a Chagall from 1926.

This selection is therefore bound together by subject matter rather than by move-

ment or period. But a lot of the works have an affinity with the idiom of Peter Doig (a couple of his pieces are included). That is, they are done not in front of a building but from imagination, and have a loose, slightly, well, home-made look.

The message of the exhibition is that when people paint or draw houses, they are probably depicting something else — feelings, recollections, fears. Thus, Celia Paul's 'My First Home' (2016) represents the bungalow in which she was born — in Trivandrum, India — seen through what looks like a haze of memory.

The fuzziness in a recent painting by George Shaw, on the other hand, is less warm and glowing. The painting depicts a dreary stretch of somewhere nondescript (which is, of course, its point). His title, 'Study for Landscape with Fuck All', though not one an estate agent would employ, fits quite a few places. In this country surroundings can be pretty monochrome too.

Television

The real George III

James Delingpole

Before he died aged 44 (probably of a pulmonary embolism, poor chap), Frederick, Prince of Wales, compiled a list of precepts for his son, the future George III. 'Employ all your hands, all your power, to live with economy,' was one. 'If you can be without war, let not your ambition draw you into it,' was another.

The result of such sensible parentage is that today, about the only things we know about our third-longest-reigning monarch are that his nickname was 'Farmer George', that he lost America, and that he went bonkers, providing a lucrative franchise for the significantly more famous playwright Alan Bennett.

This — as Robert Hardman's charming, moving and sensitive portrait *Genius of the Mad King* (BBC1, Monday) made clear — does him a great injustice. Apart from being a loving and, by Hanoverian standards, involved dad to his 15 children, he kept impressively up to date with all the advances in science and agriculture, was a patron of the arts and of exploration, popularised bathing and the seaside holiday,

mingled with his people (barking pleasant-ries at them with his trademark 'What what what?') and, after a 59-year reign, left his country peaceful and prosperous.

'It had been an age of bloodshed and revolution but not in George III's Britain,' concluded Hardman, while another historian noted: 'His contemporaries — Catherine the Great, Frederick the Great, these are revolutionary and damaging figures. They destroy things. Napoleon destroys everything. George III makes everything secure and safe.'

God, I would have found him dull to study at school. Yet would Britain have become half so great, in the ensuing century or so, without this genial cove who ran the country like a benign chief executive? An obsessive letter writer and micro-manager, he'd dash off screeds at all hours of the day (timed to the minute, so as to guarantee a prompt response), advising on everything from the sum required to buy off his dreadful eldest son's latest unsuitable mistress (£5,000 — about £750,000 in today's money) to the way Captain Cook should behave on his travels ('treat any locals you find with respect', 'make presents of such trinkets as you may have on board').

The reason we know all this is that his every jotting is kept in an archive at Windsor Castle, now open to all because it has

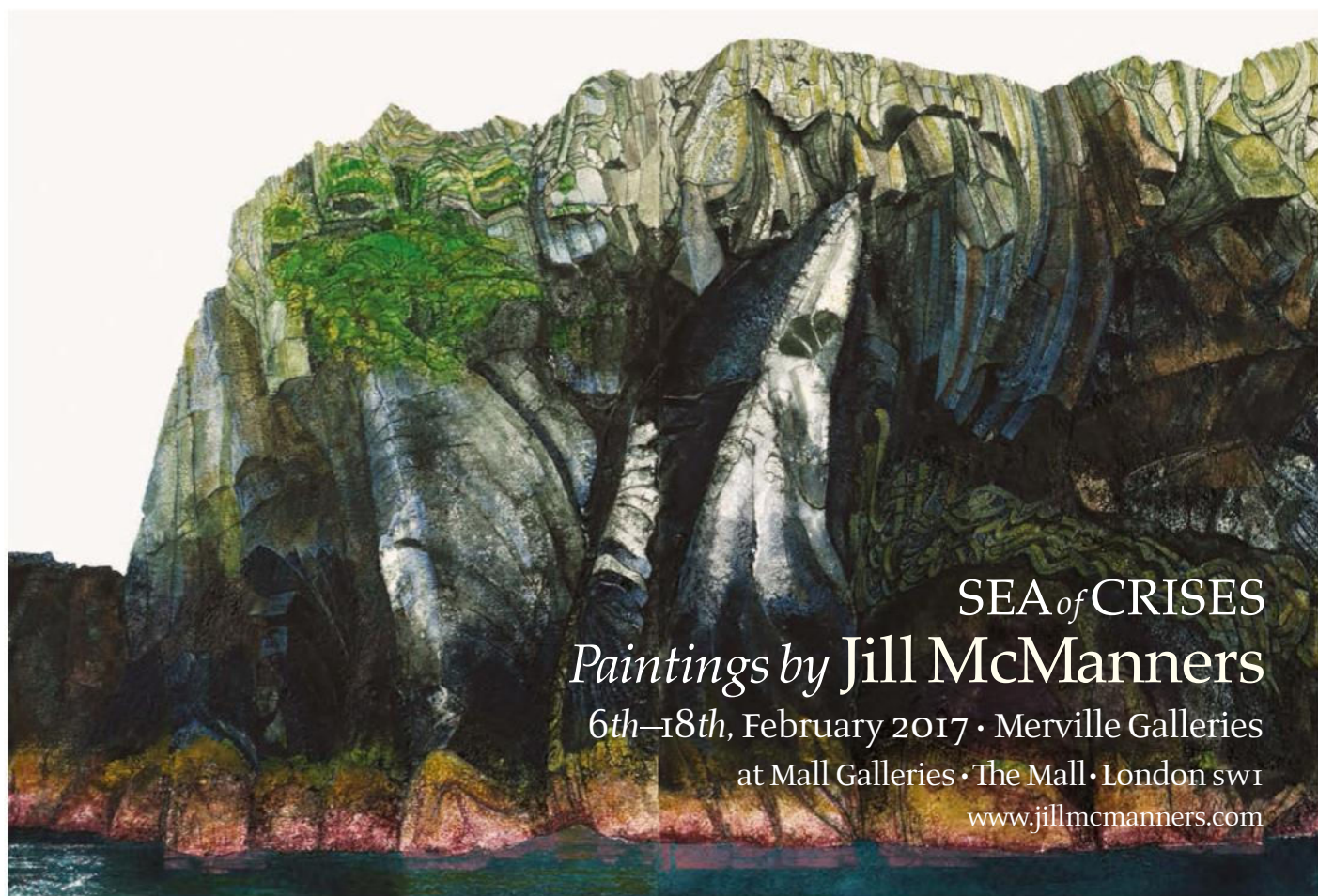
been photographed and put online. Hardman, who has been covering royal affairs for years, presumably got the gig because he is now so trusted by the palace. I'm glad because he's that rare thing: a presenter who's affable, presentable and informed, who doesn't have any of those tics or mannerisms that set your teeth on edge.

But when it comes to giving seriously good documentary, I don't think anyone beats Andrew Graham-Dixon. Presumably

Would Britain have become half so great without George III, who ran the country like a benign chief executive?

everyone agrees with me on this — and if you don't, you're mad. He's got the look (well-cut navy-blue suits, open-neck shirts and shades), the foreign languages and accents, the deep art-historical knowledge and the passion.

More than that, though, in his brilliant new series *Art of France* (BBC4, Monday) he comes across not as though he's delivering a lecture or rehearsing a script, but more as though he's engaging afresh and thinking aloud. Whether he's waxing lyrical about the fan vaulting in the world's first Gothic cathedral, the Basilica of Saint Denis, or noticing a page from the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* where a peasant is baring his bum, the



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effect is to make you feel as though you're sharing with him his journey of discovery. He has the gift of being able to look right into the camera with a total lack of self-consciousness. If I were one of his competitors, I'd want to kill myself.

Where I did initially want to disagree with him was when, responding to those people who think the hyper-Muslim enclaves in parts of Paris are in no way French, he

If I were one of Andrew Graham-Dixon's competitors I'd want to kill myself

came up with the usual right-on line about France being a mongrel nation, the product of numerous cultural influences and of violence greater than anything it's experiencing today.

But then he led us back in time and you realised he did have a point. Images of Protestants being butchered by Catholics in a market square and of a tree so abundant with dangling hanged corpses it must have been a real job fitting them all up there. Watching it immediately after the George III documentary, I felt rather smug: those barbaric and weird continentals are so much more prone to violence and revolution than us stolid and phlegmatic English.

Home

I haven't found a town
That I can call my own,
I haven't found a place
Where I can head for home,
Nor have I seen the face
That I cannot disown
As just a passing phase
On transitory ground;
An exit from the maze
Has also to be found.

I haven't made the time
To make my feelings known
But you're the only one
In whom I find my own
Affinity and base,
Identity and home;
You are the place where I'm
Most likely to be found
And all I've ever known
Of certitude and grace.

—Duncan Forbes

Radio Sign of the times Kate Chisholm

As if on cue, *The World At One* on Monday (Radio 4) ended with a short (too short) interview with an Austrian documentary film-maker who recently made a film about Brunhilde Pomsel, secretary to Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. The announcement of her death in Munich, aged 106, prompted the conversation, which happened to follow all the stories about the repercussions of President Trump's executive order banning those from certain countries from entering the US. The significance was not lost on the ever-astute Martha Kearney.

Florian Weigensamer described Pomsel in great age as 'just incredible'. She was 'quick-witted, funny, a great storyteller'. But, said Kearney, 'She was working at the heart of the Nazi machine, wasn't she?'

'She was not one of those avid Nazis,' replied Weigensamer. 'She was just one of those millions of followers that the system was built on...'

He went on to explain, 'She ended up working for one of the worst criminals in history just because she always looked the other way, and just because she was looking for her own advantage, and just because she always led a very selfish life. Not because she was a very political person... She always maintained that she had no idea what was going on.'

Of course, it was important to take into account her age at the time of the film. Memory cannot always be trusted. But Weigensamer pointed out how Pomsel claimed to have known nothing about Kristallnacht, yet at the same time she did recall how on that night in November 1938 the shop next door, owned by Jews, had been destroyed. And that her close friend, also Jewish, just disappeared. Did she ever try to find out what had happened to her? No.

Perhaps the interview resonated so powerfully because of the social-media atmosphere that is currently being stoked by events. Yet what struck me afterwards were the words Weigensamer had chosen to describe Pomsel and what she had done. He was so matter-of-fact. There was no overt criticism of her; just a bald account of what she had said, how she had appeared to him. His meaning, his intention, was clear, but the language he used was plain and unadorned.

Later that afternoon James Fritz's award-winning play, *Comment Is Free* (Radio 4), was also very timely, if also not given enough time (just 45 minutes) to really explore the subtleties of its subject. Alistair Cooper is a controversial media man whose outrageous opinions divide the nation, arousing a

storm on Twitter and a polarised conversation in which language is confined to a very limited vocabulary from the dictionary of hate. His wife Hilary (brilliantly played by Rachael Stirling, in spite of having to talk through tears for most of the time) at first sees no harm in her husband's rent-a-mouth outpourings, not taking them seriously and enjoying with him all the attention. But when he's violently stabbed outside their home by someone who wants to shut him up, for the sake of the nation, she begins, too late, to understand just how dangerous a game Alistair has been playing.

Unusually, Fritz's play has just won this year's Imison award (for best original script by a writer new to radio) and the Tinniswood prize (for the best original audio script). I can see why. It's short, sharp, dramatic and has been given a cool, clever production (by Becky Ripley). But listening to it felt like being hit with a blunt instrument, rather than teased by a rapier. Hilary's conversion is too pat to be convincing, and the role of the chorus, or 'noise', is just to spout hate, or love, rather than being used as a

Goebbels's secretary was not an avid Nazi. She was just one of millions of followers the system was built on

commentary on why free speech matters and what personal responsibility might mean. Drama can be a way of unravelling the subtleties that lie behind some big questions; Fritz's play exposed the problems surrounding free speech and social media without pushing us to think harder, question deeper, reflect more honestly.

The announcement this week of Classic FM's 25th-birthday commissions (in partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Society) is a significant step for the commercial station that was launched in 1992 as an easy-listening alternative to the BBC's Radio 3 — its mission 'to make classical music relevant to everyone'. Young composers, born in or after 7 September 1992 (when the station first hit the airwaves), are invited to apply for the chance to have their work performed at one of the birthday celebrations during the year and broadcast on-air to Classic FM's 5.3 million listeners. No longer content to be just a playlist, the station is attempting to become a player in the music world.

Radio 3 meanwhile has just announced its own new commissions for International Women's Day on 8 March. Kate Whitley has been asked to set to music extracts from Malala Yousafzai's 2013 speech to the UN which called for 'One child, one pen, one teacher, one book can change our world'. It's all part of the station's commitment to diversify its audience, reach out beyond those who already listen, as the controller, Alan Davey, said in a recent speech. And, no doubt, a timely response to Classic FM's extraordinary success as a station.

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British placenames

By Mark Mason

British placenames are so good you can read the map for entertainment rather than navigation. Hardington Mandeville, Bradford Peverell, Carlton Scroop — they sound like characters in a novel. In fact, P.G. Wodehouse often raided the atlas when writing: Lord Emsworth is named after a town in Hampshire, while a village in the same county gave Reginald Shipton-Bellinger his surname. There's plenty of silliness out there — Great Snoring in Norfolk, Matching Tye in Essex, Fryup in Yorkshire. Some good old-fashioned smut, too: Lusty Glaze, Pant, Bell End and a couple of Twatts. Kent boasts a Thong — and it's only a mile or so from Shorne.

But enough of your sniggers. Our placenames are educational, telling the history of who was where, when. 'Pen' (as in Penzance) denotes a Celtic settlement: it means 'hill' (as does the Old English '-dle', so Pendle Hill in Lancashire means 'Hill Hill Hill'). Then the Romans built their military camps or 'castra', so we got Colchester, Leicester, Doncaster and the like. Any name ending 'ton' or 'ham' is probably Anglo-Saxon: the former meant 'farm', the latter 'homestead'. There's a Ham near Sandwich in Kent, so a road sign pointing to them both reads 'Ham Sandwich', and is constantly being nicked.

When the Vikings turned up, they used



A storm brewing over Hill Hill Hill

their own word for homestead: 'by'. Hence Whitby, Derby, Ashby and so on. Then William the Conqueror gave land to his French mates, and Ashby got its de-la-Zouche, just as Leighton Buzzard owes it name to Theobald de Busar rather than birds of prey.

A '-ley' ending denotes a meadow or clearing. The one settled by someone called Wemba became Wembley, meaning football fans are right to chant it as three syllables. In Essex a clearing settled by a man

named Ugga became the modern village of Ugley: you can understand why the local WI branch changed their name from the Ugley Women's Institute to the Women's Institute of Ugley.

Pronunciations are notoriously tricky. Mousehole is 'Mowzel', Kirkcudbright is 'Kirkcoobree' and Belvoir — home to *Test Match Special's* Jonathan Agnew — is 'Beaver', which often makes Phil Tufnell snigger. Americans are famous for saying 'Edinburo', but we shouldn't forget the Canadian who pronounced Loughborough as 'Looga-barooga'.

It's no surprise that the British, a nation of crossword lovers and Scrabble addicts, should enjoy a little verbal analysis of their placenames. Ae, a village near Dumfries, holds the title of shortest name, while Bricklehampton in Worcestershire is the longest name not to repeat any of its letters (14 — more than half the alphabet). But the longest of all is of course Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch, though the Welsh village did cheat slightly, choosing the name in the 1860s as a publicity stunt. That didn't stop Channel 4 weatherman Liam Dutton including it in a 2015 forecast. His successful pronunciation has clocked up nearly 15 million views on YouTube.

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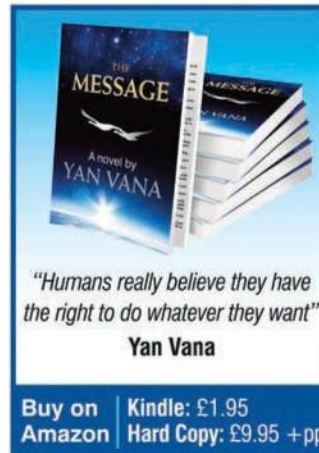
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'Here is a war of civilisations being fought through hamburgers on Twitter'
— Tanya Gold, p62

LIFE

High life Taki



When I saw an email from Lucy, the lady who has the unenviable task of editing my copy each week, I knew something was wrong. And sure enough it was. The bad news was that my first editor at my beloved *Spectator* had died. Forty years, gone in a jiffy.

It was back in 1977, and I had gone to Turin to pick up a new car on my way to Paris. Back then one had to drive the first thousand miles slowly, while breaking in the engine. (Yes, I know: a bit like wearing spats and a monocle, but that's how it was in those prehistoric days.) Driving a fast car slowly is like lying next to a beautiful girl but not being allowed to touch her: very frustrating. So to pass the time I thought up a story and memorised every word; it took about eight hours. I then typed it up and flew to London.

I had met Alexander Chancellor only once. I was introduced to him by the *Specie's* then deputy editor Simon Courtauld in the course of an unbelievably riotous summer party. (Everyone was drunk.) Over the telephone he told me to meet him at Brown's hotel, where, I believe, he was having a drink with an MP, Norman Lamont, now Lord Lamont. I didn't stay long. I handed him my copy, said I hoped that he could use 'this fluff', and left. The piece was about how one could immediately tell an Englishman abroad. (They had bright-red peeling noses, knees and elbows, used flashlights to go over the bill in dark French nightclubs infuriating the Algerian waiters, and danced in a spastic manner scaring nearby French couples.)

It was, as the saying goes, the start of a beautiful friendship. Alexander had the idea of pairing me off with Jeffrey Bernard, the notoriously alcoholic bohemian, who hung out in Soho with fellow drunks while I filed stories from my boat in the Greek islands, Gstaad and the south of France. He also brought in Auberon Waugh, Ferdinand Mount and Michael Heath, talents that other newspapers would pay far more to employ but would not grant the latitude that Alexander offered. For example, Waugh would

write how disgusting it was to be poor, how smelly and unattractive to the eye, but with tongue deeply in cheek. The *Specie* took off and has yet to look back.

Three or four years into his editorship, Alexander's love life had a hiccup. I will not dwell on it because everyone involved is still alive and I don't know the details in any case. I remember him coming to New York and during dinner at a very chic restaurant — having had much too much to drink — he revealed something important: his basic good manners and humanity. 'The column was crap,' he said. 'It simply didn't work.' Well, why wasn't I fired? I asked him. 'You were never around, always flitting about Gstaad and Antibes, and I couldn't fire you over the telephone.'

Once, driving him to a party in London, where a romantic debacle of his was going to be present, I deigned to suggest that where the fair sex was concerned he should confer with the likes of me. He laughed in that particular screeching way of his, 'Maybe you should write an advice for lovers column.' He then disappeared for a long time and the magazine was edited by Simon Courtauld, although none of us knew it. Alexander had gone to the Middle East in order to get over a romantic upheaval. We, the lowly scribes, heard nothing until one day a telegram arrived. It was from Egypt and it concerned yours truly. In it Alexander announced that the pillow used by extremely obese Arab women while making love in order to lift their nether regions was called a Taki. (Years later, Nicholas Soames made the same discovery, and sent a similar telegram, although to this day I believe that Nicholas bought a Taki for his own use.)

Alexander must have been the first-ever editor to run a major weekly by moving about in a leisurely manner and operating at a congenial, pre-digital pace. When Clay Felker, a legendary American editor, came

over for lunch, he was incredulous. 'How can this thing appear each week for 200 years? No one ever works, they're always in the pub.' Eventually, it caught up with him. Our benevolent proprietor Algy Cluff fired Alexander and named the then disgustingly young Charles Moore top banana. Alexander flew to New York and stayed with me. He accepted his fate with a shrug; not a word was said against Algy.

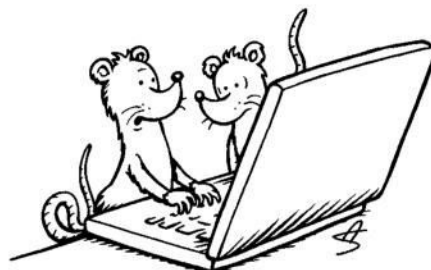
After Tina Brown hired him to write the Talk of the Town for the *New Yorker*, which she edited for a while, I saw quite a lot of him. Tina, an obsessive climber and go-getter, did not stick by him. He was surprised to discover a very large Christmas tree being raised in Rockefeller Centre and wrote about it, unaware that it was an annual event, as old as the building. Fellow hacks made fun of him, but they were basically anti-Alexander because he refused to take them — or himself — seriously, as grave a mistake to make among American journalists as plagiarism.

Towards the end of his life he seemed to have found peace. He smoked and drank less and the few times I ran into him at *Specie* summer parties he warned me against exercise, 'which will surely kill you'. He followed that remark with his characteristic screeching laughter. He was the first of my seven editors and I owe him, as well as the other six, the happiness that my 40 years writing for *The Spectator* have given me. Goodbye, sweet first editor. As we Greeks say, may the earth that covers you be soft.

Low life Jeremy Clarke



Dr Mindlin called. I needed cheering up? If I fancied a week in Antigua as his guest I should be at Gatwick airport by 9 the next morning. I packed in 15 minutes, caught the last bus to Nice, flew to Gatwick. Next day he flew us to Antigua and we checked in at an upmarket beach resort hotel called Blue Waters. While the Doc negotiated a business deal, I swam in the warm sea and read my book and worked out in the freezing gym



'I'm following the Pied Piper on Twitter.'

and slept. A business associate of Doc's came over from St Kitts to assist him. Joseph had a snowy beard, an unruffled manner and an avuncular chuckle. The three of us took meals together and Joseph drove us on a sightseeing tour of the island's capital in his hire car.

On Sunday morning I overheard Joseph say he was going to church. Everyone on the island was going to church, it seemed. Even the lady who stood at the hotplate and made omelettes every morning, and was the only outwardly discontented local person I encountered all week: yes, she too was going to church. So I went with Joseph to church. Before I left, Doc said that if I ever found any irrefutable proof that there is a God I was to let him know.

My vision of a pastel-coloured Victorian clapboard church shaded by palms was far from the reality. We swung on to the vast cement forecourt of a new Pentecostal church that resembled a multiplex cinema. A team of stewards in red T-shirts beckoned us towards a parking spot. We asked the final one how long the service would be. 'If the spirit leads, my brothers, who knows?' he said. We joined a stream of worshippers in their Sunday best funnelling through the doors. A woman intercepted me and asked me if I was a visitor and if so would I sign the visitors' book. I apologised to her for

not being more smartly dressed. When I'd packed my suitcase for Antigua, I explained, I hadn't prepared to come to church. She looked me significantly in the eye, and said, 'Sir, I am telling you. You are prepared.'

As we walked into the auditorium the place was rocking. We found seats right in the centre. Up on the stage a choir and a five-piece band had already found the groove. A wide, moon-faced woman with a voice as spine-tinglingly pure and massive as Aretha Franklin's was belting out a song, the lyrics of which were projected on to an overhead, cinema-sized screen. The congregation, about 500-strong, was singing with

*Every face was lost in desire for
the Holy Spirit to come down and
consume them*

her and moving to the rhythm. The woman next to me was singing with her eyes shut and swaying, arms outstretched. Her bright-green false fingernails languidly brushed my cheek. In front, three young women were shaking their hips, now this way, now that, like a trio of lithe backing singers. Beside them an elderly lady in a hat worthy of Ascot was seated and conducting amiably with her forefingers. Next to her, a young man with a middleweight boxer's back and a gleaming bald head was jiving. Every face was lost in desire for the Holy Spirit to come down and consume them. The singing was electrifying. I held out strenuously against unbuckling my mind and joining in, but resistance was useless. I could feel Joseph standing motionless beside me, and I sensed, too, that his own resistance was crumbling. This I took as his permission to cast off and I began to move. I moved my body as I might move it when drunk at a party to, say, 'Memphis Soul Stew' by King Curtis. I could sense those around and behind me introducing some extra liberation into their own dance moves to welcome me to the party. I looked at the woman beside me. She added a low, formal bow of welcome to her dance routine.

The love song to the Holy Spirit went on for about 20 minutes. The intensity varied as tides of powerful emotion swept over the congregation. Finally, the words on the screen changed to other words, and Aretha Franklin stepped back, and another female took the microphone to lead us with a warmer, mellower voice that might be compared perhaps to that of the great Dionne Warwick. My undermined reason was unable to determine whether the words we were singing over and over again were trite or unfathomably deep.

We sang and danced for an hour without ceasing. Then the preacher bounded onstage and gave a roaring hour-long sermon, the sole purpose of which, it seemed to me, was to extract as much money out of us as possible. I hated him. But the singing, oh, the singing.

Real life Melissa Kite



As if by magic, a sign that I am doing the right thing by moving out of London arrived in the post.

And not a moment too soon, for with all the to-ing and fro-ing over arcane anomalies in the floorplan of my flat I had become so heartily sick of the conveyancing process I was almost ready to jack the whole move in.

Two identical, suspiciously thin and official-looking A5 sized envelopes arrived at the same time. This is either the Inland Revenue telling me I am going to jail for believing that half-asleep guy at their call centre who told me I shouldn't worry too much about my tax bill, or it is something even worse, I told myself, fingering the envelopes gingerly.

I ripped one open without further ado and a letter from Transport for London came out. It featured the usual photo of my Volvo doing something it shouldn't.

The last one was only a few months ago, and pictured Vernon — for that is the Volvo's pet name — looking shifty in an unlit yellow box junction in Raynes Park. That'll be £65 please, the TfL letter declared on that occasion. I tried to blame the builder boyfriend because I had only been in the box junction at all after he insisted I swing by his builder's yard and pick him up.

After a long dispute as to where moral responsibility for the fine truly lay, with the picker upper or the pick-up-ee, we decided to split the fine two ways. And they say romance is dead.

This time, I was on firmer ground. The picture showed a shifty-looking Vernon skulking in Elsyng Road in Wandsworth on a red route.

'Ha! I knew it!' I screeched. If I peered at it really closely I could just make out the builder b in the picture, standing in the gutter behind the opened passenger door.

I actually wish the police would do him as well. Teach him a lesson. What is it about men when they want to go? They are like four-year-old children.

We had been driving into London from the country with him getting more and more irritable. I had thought, oh here we go. It's either food or toilet. If I can't effect an immediate solution for him in these areas he is apt to become disconsolate very quickly.

As we climbed East Hill towards Wandsworth Common he suddenly declared him-

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self 'fed up with it all' — and by 'all' he could have meant anything from my driving to the fact that Brexit is taking too long.

A few minutes later, as we skirted St John's Hill, he snapped: 'Pull over now! Quick! I can't wait!'

'Oh, for goodness sake, we're nearly home,' I said. 'Please, can't you just wait a few minutes longer?' But I knew it would be no good.

'Now! I need to go now!' It was futile

protesting, so I said: 'And where do you propose I stop?'

We were on that bit of the south circular skirting the common where you cannot stop for even a second without a cacophony of beeping and a bus ploughing into the side of you. If we were pulling over for his convenience, it was best to let him make the decision where, and be it on his head when it all went wrong.

'Turn left into Elsynges! Quick!' he shout-

ed, jumping up and down in his seat, throwing the seat belt off and swinging open the passenger door like Starsky and Hutch as we screeched round the bend.

'This is a bad idea,' I said, not knowing exactly why but knowing full well there would be some form of comeback. Naturally, there was no obvious sign warning us not to stop but there never is. They like to make it a surprise when the envelope comes.

The BB stood behind the open door making those loud exhaling noises men seem to think are perfectly reasonable sound effects and I sat there dying of embarrassment even though it was pitch dark. 'What if the people in that house see?' I asked. 'Don't mind them,' he said, and then shouted in their direction 'Welcome to multicultural Britain!'

'I don't see what that's got to do with it,' I said. 'Well, everyone else is going medieval, aren't they?'

He's right. I couldn't argue. I've seen people do far worse in the bushes on Tooting Common.

However, when the fine came, two fines, in fact — they sent a duplicate notice with identical photos but a different penalty charge number, so they seem to want paying twice — I handed them straight to him. 'There you go. That was an expensive pee, wasn't it, at £130?' Affecting insouciance, he claimed he was happy to pay it.

Rounds

i.m. Sam Gardiner

1

The bus-driver who picked me up in town
had driven me in that same morning, amusing
himself while I did my rounds doing
his own small extra round of the empty roads.

2

Confusing my entries and exits in Gretna once,
mistaking a wedding for a funeral,
I learned the first and last houses in Scotland
were the same place, saving me all sorts of time.

3

The plan was, talk you round to stay for just
one more before we parted and off you went
for a bus over the Humber Bridge, thoughts
of driving the long way round long gone, historical.

4

Heaven, like the ruins of Rome, is full
of cats chasing their tails and sorely let down
when they catch them, wondering what remains
if not to swallow themselves whole and vanish.

5

Needing to fact-check your obituary
and finding myself with no other contact
email address than yours I thought I'd try it
and sure enough you wrote back straight away.

6

As we talked, the bus for your funeral over
the bridge backfired as though firing off rounds
and — tiring of my claims that Purgatory
goes round and round — the driver left without you.

— David Wheatley

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The turf

Robin Oakley



Away from frosty Britain, lecturing my way across the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro, life has been dominated more by Donald Trump than by Dickie Johnson with passengers seeking refuge in jokes about the new president. 'Why does Donald Trump keep marrying foreign women?' 'Because there are some jobs Americans just won't do.' 'What can Melania possibly see in him?' 'Five billion dollars and high cholesterol' and 'How does Donald Trump hope to get six million Mexicans back home?' 'Juan by Juan.' Well, it's either humour or take to drink.

When I heard that the Jockey Club plans to sell off Kempton Park, home of the King George VI Steeplechase, for housing development I thought that, too, must be some kind of sick joke, but it isn't. Now I am not going to launch into a diatribe against yet another section of a remote establishment, reaction against which has in part explained both the rise of Trumpism and Brexit. I won't because since it ceded its powers to discipline racing in 1993, and handed day-to-day control of the sport to professional managers in 2006, the Jockey Club has probably done more good to racing than ever it did at the height of its powers. To paraphrase American secretary of state Dean Acheson's famous verdict on Britain, the Jockey Club lost its empire but has found a new role, based on land, intellectual property, media, music and catering. It churns out healthy profits on a £181 million annual turnover.

Thanks to Nicky Henderson's father Johnny, a group that later became Racecourse Holdings Trust was formed in 1964 to save Cheltenham from urban sprawl. The Jockey Club played a major part, too, in rescuing Aintree from developers, and RHT eventually morphed into Jockey Club Racecourses, which now operates as a trust running 15 racecourses. No profits are handed to shareholders; instead all are reinvested in racing. Between 2010 and 2015 the Jockey Club injected £103 million-plus into prize money with another £20 million in 2016. Its racecourses are involved in a £145 million investment programme to improve the quality of racing and widen its appeal to new audiences. The group has pioneered the use of frost covers to preserve racing fixtures that might in the past have been lost to bad weather, and it stages 25 per cent of the UK's racing programme, including Cheltenham, Aintree and the Derby.

So why the controversial decision to sell off Kempton, a course whose statues of Desert Orchid and Kauto Star signal the quality of the jump racing it has been capable of attracting, and use the profits to boost prize money in general, build an all-weather racetrack at Newmarket and boost Sandown Park just a few miles away? The answer, I fear, is that while ten of the group's 15 racecourses stage jump racing, the Jockey Club still hasn't lost its Newmarket orientation nor has jump racing figured among its top priorities. The story of the disappearance of Lord Sefton's binoculars shortly after the National Hunt Committee, until then jump racing's powers-that-be, merged with the Jockey Club in 1969 was symbolic. 'What can you expect,' he was heard to protest, 'now that we're in with the National Hunt Committee?'

It may well be convenient for the huge number of trainers in Newmarket, where only a handful of jumpers are trained, to

I thought the Jockey Club plans to sell off Kempton Park for housing must be some kind of sick joke

have a new all-weather track built on their doorstep. But few racegoers who do not live in the area will travel to watch the cheapest deadbeat horses at Headquarters race around it. The Jockey Club is supposed to be dedicated to 'increasing the appeal of racing to a wider public'. A new Newmarket venue for whippet-racing will not do that, while gate money demonstrates the growing appeal nationwide of watching jumpers trained at Lambourn, in the Cotswolds and in the south-west.

As for boosting Sandown, the Jockey Club does not need to murder Kempton to do that. And if Sandown's already attractive fare is made more toothsome still by the addition of the King George, who will that help? Attracting crowds of 20,000-plus to Sandown will only increase further the number of those who give up going racing because sitting in two-hour traffic queues on the way to and from the racecourse is not their idea of fun.

Killing off one of London's two remaining jump tracks cannot possibly boost the sport. Levies or Racing rights will not produce funds for ever: to sustain the sport long-term, racing needs people to come and watch it. I have been a lifelong devotee of the sport because as a boy I used to wheel my bike down the road, prop it against the fence and stand on the saddle to watch horses thundering by, the jockeys in their multicoloured silks shouting at each other and the crescendo from the distant stands building. Hurst Park, just across the Thames from Kempton, was sold off for housing in the 1960s. If the Jockey Club chooses to do the same with Kempton, racing will take one more step towards the abyss.

Bridge

Janet de Botton

Not surprisingly, Reykjavik has become a tourist destination again. Delicious restaurants, all those geysers and, if you're lucky, the Northern Lights come out to play. But for bridge players there is another incentive to get out your warmest parka — possibly my favourite bridge tournament of the year held on the last weekend of January. Sponsored by Icelandair, it kicks off with two days of pairs and continues with another two days of teams. It always goes by so quickly that the Brits on the murderously early flight home on Monday morning all commiserate with each other that it's a whole year till the next one.

This year Swedish world champion Peter Bertheau joined my team, and jolly welcome he was — topping the Butler with Mr Hoftaniska and helping us secure second place. Team Denmark, four young internationals, won.

Here is Peter executing a neat little end position on this hand:

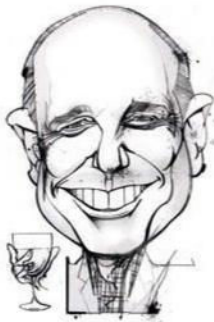
Dealer East

E/W vulnerable

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	X	3♦	Pass
All Pass		Pass	4♥

West led his singleton Diamond which Peter won with the Ace and drew trump in three rounds. At trick four he gave East a Diamond and ruffed the next one. Needing to find out East's shape, Declarer played off King and Ace of Clubs, and when East showed out on the second round he was marked with a 2-3-7-1 hand. Now Peter played a Spade to dummy's King and awaited East's card: if he keeps the ♠Q, he will win the next round and have to give declarer a ruff and discard — so he unblocked his Queen. Peter now changed tack and exited with a Club — endplaying West who had to give Declarer a trick with the ♠Jack. Very neat indeed.



Phew, done it! Dry January, that is, and 31 whole days on the wretched water wagon, clinging on by my fingertips. Well, 31 whole days apart from a two-day, champagne-soaked trip to Pol Roger (about which more anon on our *Spectator* Wine Club website) and three days with the mis-sus in the Loire Valley (ditto).

But having spoken to my legal advisers I understand that I'm in the clear. Apparently, because I was drinking outside UK jurisdiction, it doesn't really count and I can still claim to have had a dry January in this country. Doncha just love lawyers?

As a result, I — and I'm sure scores of similarly virtuous *Spectator* readers — am raring to go now we're in February, a dreary time, known appositely to our Anglo-Saxon forebears as 'Mud Month'.

And what better way to ease oneself off the wagon than with this sextet of wines from Private Cellar? Private Cellar's Laura Taylor, who put up the wines for selection, has been equally abstinent and if anyone understands our predicament, she does.

The 2015 Domaine Laguille (1), an Ugni Blanc/Colombard blend from the heart of d'Artagnan country in Gascony, is deliciously light, fresh and fruity with a welcome dry finish. It won a silver medal at *Decanter* magazine's 2015 World Wine Awards and makes the perfect first drink of the year, being a mere 11.5 per cent alcohol by volume. £8.40 down from £8.80.

Goodness me, I loved the 2013 Châteaude Fesles (2)! An unblended old-vine Chenin Blanc from an 11th-century vineyard in Anjou, it's full of quince, peach, citrus, honey and something savoury I couldn't quite put my finger on. The wine spends a short time in large oak vats and then six months on the lees, which adds just a touch of body. It's a grown-up wine and no mistake — a Chardonnay of this quality from Burgundy would be twice the price and no better. £12.85 down from £13.35.

The 2015 Marqués de Castilla Tinto (3), a juicy blend of Tempranillo, Syrah and Merlot from Cristo de la Vega in La Mancha, is all about easygoing affability and that crucial element to any wine: drinkability. It's full of red-berry and dark-berry fruit and is succulent and moreish in the extreme. Readers who remember the oak-aged version we offered in October will enjoy its sheer exu-

berance. £8.25 down from £8.75.

The 2011 Private Cellar House Claret (4) was Private Cellar's first foray into house wine and has been a success. In truth, it's an estate-bottled claret from Château Argadens — a highly regarded Sichel fam-

What better way to ease oneself off the wagon than with this sextet of wines?

ily-owned Bordeaux Supérieur — rather than a bland blend made to a marketing manager's recipe. It's ridiculously priced in my view; if it were £15 a pop it would still be cracking value. £11.00 down from £11.25.

The 2014 Château Camp de la Hire (5) is a Côtes de Bordeaux from Castillon, a woefully underrated region on the fringes of mighty Saint Emilion. Made of 60 per cent

Merlot and 40 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, it's full of ripe, luscious blackcurrant and mulberry fruit with whiffs of cigar-box and cedar. 2014 was a fine year in Bordeaux and although this is charmingly precocious and ready to drink, it'll be even better this time next year. £11.75 down from £12.25.

Finally, the spectacular Simonnet-Febvre Crémant de Bourgogne Brut P100 NV (6). When we offered this before it flew out the door and it's obvious why: it's an absolute beauty! 100 per cent Pinot Noir, produced using the Champagne method, it's from the only producer in Chablis to make fizz. I can't praise it enough; it's creamy, toasty, fruity and absurdly tasty. I've had champagnes three times the price that I liked three times less. It's a copper-bottomed bargain at £15.50 down from £16.50.

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

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	4	2011 Private Cellar House Claret, 13.5%	£135.00	£132.00	
	5	2014 Château Camp de la Hire, 13%	£147.00	£141.00	
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Chess

Serendipity

Raymond Keene

My two previous articles dwelt on Richard Réti's introduction of the so-called hypermodern systems. Characterised by the double fianchetto of White's bishops, Réti swept to victory with his invention against both Bogolyubov and Capablanca, as detailed in my columns. A fortuitous coincidence with the publication of *Réti: Move by Move* by Thomas Engqvist (Everyman Chess) was the victory by the young Hungarian Richard Rapport against world champion Magnus Carlsen at the recent Tata Steel tournament at Wijk aan Zee in Holland.

The tournament was won by the resurgent former Philippine, now USA grandmaster, Wesley So, who appears to have become invincible in his latest competitions. With his victories in the St Louis Sinquefeld Cup, the London leg of the Grand Tour, a gold medal in the Olympiad and now Wijk aan Zee, So seems to be positioning himself as the natural challenger for Carlsen's crown.

Rapport-Carlsen: Wijk aan Zee 2017; Réti Opening

1 Nf3 d5 2 b3 Bf5 3 Bb2 e6 4 d3 h6 5 Nbd2 Nf6 6 c4 c6 7 g3 Be7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 a3 a5 11 Qb1 Bh7 This is a classic position from the Réti Opening. Indeed, the black formation was introduced by Emanuel Lasker in his game as Black against Réti himself at New York 1924, the tournament where Réti's Opening truly hit the headlines. **12 b4 axb4 13 axb4 Qb6 14 Bc3 Rxa1 15 Qxa1 Bxb4** (see diagram 1) White can sacrifice his b-pawn with impunity, since he will easily regain it and invade the black camp with his rook. The strategic point of White's play is to try, as far as possible, to restrict the activity of Black's bishop on h7. **16 Bxb4 Qxb4 17 Rb1 Qd6 18 Rxb7 e5 19 d4** In the light of my previous comment this thrust might seem odd. However, although Black's bishop has now been apparently liberated it is biting on thin air. Its pseudo-activity is more than compensated by White's increased mobility. **19 ...**

Diagram 1

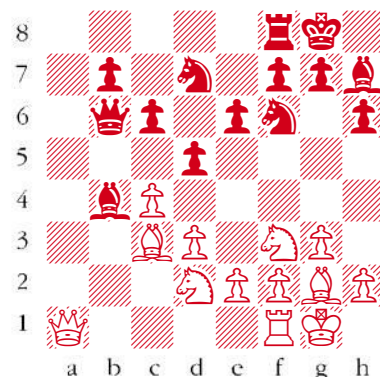
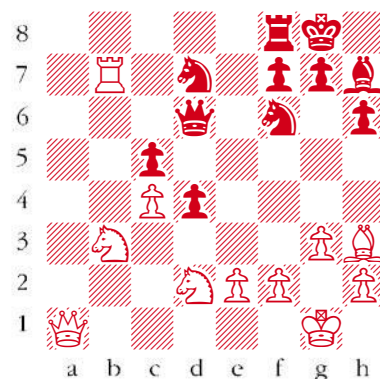


Diagram 2

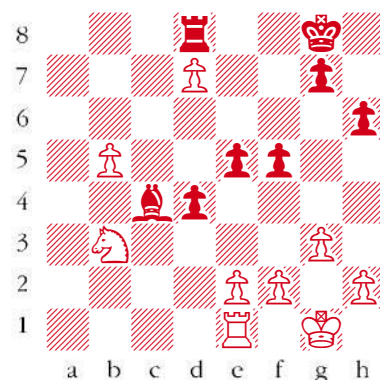


exd4 20 Nxd4 c5 21 N4b3 d4 22 Bh3 (see diagram 2) **22 ... d3** Apparently powerful but after White's reply, the black bishop is once again biting on granite. **23 e3 Ne5** The best chance was **23 ... Rb8** to reduce White's attacking units. **24 Bg2 Rc8 25 f4 Neg4 26 e4** Black's pieces have found themselves in a terrible tangle and White now wins material. **26 ... Re8 27 e5 Nxe5 28 fxe5 Rxe5 29 Rb6 Qe7 30 Rb8+ Ne8 31 Bc6** White deals with Black's threats by ignoring them. The following transaction leaves Black hopelessly behind on material. **31 ... Re1+ 32 Qxe1 Qxe1+ 33 Nf1** Black resigns

PUZZLE NO. 442

White to play. This position is from So-Wojtaszek, Wijk aan Zee 2017. White has only one move to win. Can you see it? Answers to me at *The Spectator* by Tuesday 7 February 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 Re8
Last week's winner Richard Burrow,
Bollington, Cheshire



Competition

Creature discomfort

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2983, an assignment inspired by W.W. Jacobs's macabre mini masterpiece 'The Monkey's Paw', you were invited to supply a chilling short story featuring an animal's body part. Brian Allgar's tale about Donald Trump, a stallion and a DIY organ transplant operation was an unlucky loser. The winners, printed below, £25 each. The extra fiver goes to Frank Upton.

'Sea View'. Yes, you could glimpse Morecambe Bay from the gate of the high, gruff, stone farmhouse. She would auction it, of course, with the owners disappeared. The key turned and, with a verdigris smudge on the shoulder of her coat, Alex was inside and engulfed by an insidious miasma of fungal spores. Her torch bleached a gigantic nodding polyp of dry rot. Each room had its own presiding idolon in the form of a bloated fruiting body. Alex dared not risk the stairs but forced herself to enter the 'feature farmhouse kitchen'. Here the puffy fungi were gathered in a chillingly obscene tableau. The scientist in her bade her inspect one of the smaller growths, the shape of a child's play table. Two symmetrical cones near one end of this excrescence puzzled her. She touched one of them.

It was a cat's ear.

Frank Upton

There were those who claimed the fossilised frog's leg had the power to turn back time: *three kisses, with your feet in fresh water, and eternal youth shall be yours.*

The thief, a practical fellow, would usually have scoffed at such superstitious nonsense. But not at the money his ageing client had offered him. He slipped the ancient limb from its glass casing (so much for museum security!) and made his getaway.

Who knows? Perhaps on a drier, less puddled night, he'd have resisted temptation. Maybe if he hadn't discovered his first grey hair that morning ... But what if it was true, after all? Why not reap the benefits and the cash? He pressed his lips to the little stone knee — once, twice, three times — and vanished into the darkness.

Museum staff discovered the missing leg next morning. And a stray tadpole, floundering in the drying puddle beside it.

Jennifer Moore

Mrs Santini was dressed for a Mob funeral, her eyebrows were continuous and she gripped her purse like a buzzard on its roost. 'Mr Marlowe, you need to find my Geraldo,' she said.

'Your husband?'

'My rabbit.'

I let the idea circle my brain till it ran out of gas. She looked at me as if measuring me up for the gallows, then laid a portrait of McKinley on the desk. I got the details, banked the \$500 and set out, a private eye on a case.

It wasn't the hardest case. Rabbits leave a trail. I located Geraldo two miles from Mrs Santini's, with an unemployed barman called Marvin. Geraldo had somehow lost a front paw. Marvin took ten bucks for him.

Case closed. Except a week later I heard Marvin had won the lottery jackpot, then been shot dead waving the mascot that had brought him luck.

Basil Ransome-Davies

Walt Mulley never fully came back from the war. Took himself off into the Outback where the aboriginals watched inscrutably as he divested himself of what humanity remained. Employing hoarse incantations of his own devising, Walt fashioned a dark God from a dingo skull, hanging this bloody remnant about his neck and feeding its power with hymns guttural and obscene: travellers happening across him reckoned they heard Walt's God answer as theirs never did. I worked shop with my dad back then and remember his stern instruction never to charge Walt for his bits on the rare occasions he happened by town. Those who crossed Walt and his dingo God didn't live a week before illness or accident got them. Walt's dead now, of course; we only found the kiddies that found his body by following howls — half human, half dingo — carried on a freakish wind.

Adrian Fry

'Perhaps it was a premonition,' said Jake as he and Meg lay down in the grass, taking a break from hay-making. 'I dreamt I was camping and, in the dead of night, heard something scratching against the canvas. Next day, searching outside, I spotted a trail of bent grasses splattered with blood. Following the trail I beheld the severed hand of a mole, ghostly pale, clawing its way ahead of me through the undergrowth just out of reach. Down on all fours in a frenzied chase, I scampered after that hideous appendage and, lurching forwards, stretched out to seize it.' Demonstrating the action he flung out his arm unaware of the nearby labourer's scythe. Meg screamed but was too late to save him. All she could do was stare in horror at Jake's severed hand, sliced off at the wrist, bleeding into the ground, just out of his reach.

Alan Millard

Thus did Delichon approach Alauda the Tune-weaver, begging the secrets of birdsong and flight; these she imparted. Instantly the syrinx of a lark formed in his throat; plumage festooned limbs. 'Shall I henceforth soar and trill?' he demanded. 'Indeed, and well. Yet never attempt the tritone.' But Delichon was an arrogant man, impervious to counsel; ignored the urgent words of the prophetic. Daily he crafted arpeggios, triads, scales harmonic and melodic; perfected the modes Dorian, Phrygian, plagal. In the deep countryside he would take wing from pleasant meadows, sweetening the skies with heavenly music. Farm labourers gazed up in wonder, cattle lowed in bovine delight.

'What must I avoid?' the man-lark mused.

Exultant, he produced resonant tritones; fell silent and plummeted to earth, quite dead. For he had unlocked the augmented fourth, the Devil's discord, hideous and fatal to mankind.

Mike Morrison

NO. 2986: YOU'RE TOAST!

You are invited to submit a poem about a deadly foodstuff. Please email entries, where possible, of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 15 February.

Crossword

2295: Juicy

by Pabulum

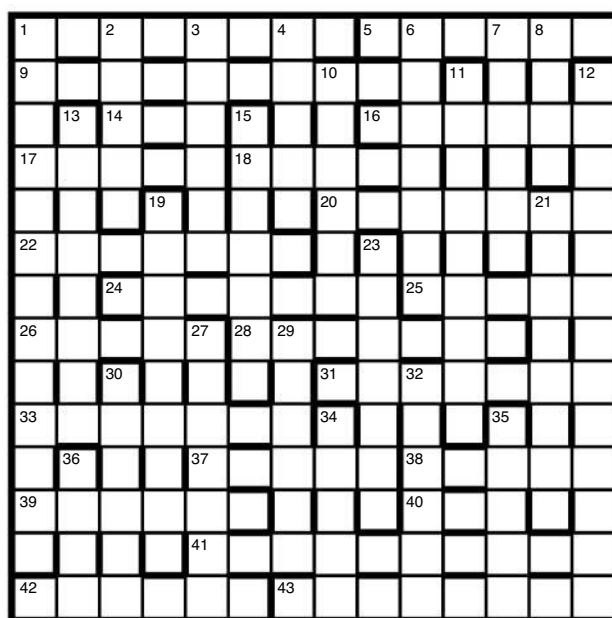
An unclued light is a name shared by two persons, one of whom is fictional. Remaining unclued lights give names connected with one or other of these persons. Solvers must shade the shared name. Elsewhere, ignore an apostrophe and two accents.

Across

- 1 Highcombe wingless fly's sent up (8)
- 5 Rush job (6)
- 9 Seaplanes flying across bass, fishes ... (10)
- 14 ... some chase across ocean (3)
- 16 One adopting fashion pdq (6, two words)
- 17 Enzed's remote place ducks nearly all rage about (5)
- 20 Fly circling live young fish (7)
- 22 Seabird confines shorebird in old soup dish (7)
- 24 Queen, say, cheers over at race-meeting (7)
- 25 Oil source in African republic we Scots secured (5)
- 26 Local wanderer's dog nipping rector (5)
- 31 Rider from Detroit jumping (7)
- 33 Sore bore starts to lecture you (7)
- 38 Stripped mourner swims in river port (5)
- 39 Alto's dry — cease to listen! (6)
- 40 Biscuit, crumpet or fruit? (3)
- 41 Easy English tests involved little discourses (10)
- 42 Pool contains silver fish (6)
- 43 Extremely high anxiety about terrible ire (8)

Down

- 1 Scholar's receiving post containing black and



- yellow alloy (13, two words)
- 4 Blades go visiting El Salvador (5)
- 6 Wing's housing den of vice devoid of columns (7)
- 7 Partial doyenne admired the Muses? (6)
- 8 Every fruit tree's polled (4)
- 11 What horse has to devour with relish (9, two words)
- 12 Maybe St John converted vile stationer (13)
- 13 Shoot beings gnawing animals! (8)
- 15 Foray by seraph fluttering round Gabon (7)
- 19 Baker works just to make neither profit nor loss (9, two words)
- 21 Aloof ace perhaps in former squadron (8)
- 23 Stratified lake area weirdly reedy (7)
- 29 Gold coins displaying king and queen? (6)
- 30 Assembly place king acquired lacking pillar (6)
- 34 Parrot winged by tin dagger (5)
- 35 Canadian hill only half grass (5)
- 36 Eye problem index left out (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 20 February. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2295, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2292: DISCOVERY

Thematic names are 1A/22 and 25/34, author of *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA*. Thematic phrases appear in the shape of a double helix with mirror symmetry around the grid's central axis.

First prize Hugh Dales, Dysart, Fife
Runners-up P. West, Birmingham; Christine Twickel, Tidmington, Shipston-on-Stour

Status Anxiety

Rebel with a dodgy cause

Toby Young

I feel conflicted about Jon Platt, the parent at the centre of the court case about unauthorised school absences. On the one hand, there's much to admire. When he was fined £120 by Isle of Wight Council for taking his daughter on a trip to Disneyland during term time, he decided to fight back. He got the decision overturned in magistrates' court, the council appealed to the High Court, the lower court's decision was upheld, and the council then appealed to the Supreme Court. Yet in spite of this gruelling legal process, Mr Platt hasn't backed down.

When interviewed on television, he seems genuinely angry about being told when he can and can't take his children on holiday. He doesn't regard himself as a deadbeat dad — his daughter's attendance rate at school is above 90 per cent — but believes the new rules, which were introduced by the government in 2013, are too severe. Seen in this light, he's a conservative hero: a doughty yeoman standing up for his liberty by taking on the overmighty state.

Having said all that, I don't have much sympathy for his cause. I supported the government's decision to introduce bigger fines for parents who take their children out of school without permission, not least because unauthorised absences make life



It's not Isle of Wight Council that Jon Platt is cocking a snook at, but his daughter's school

more difficult for teachers. Having helped to set up four schools, I know that teachers think carefully about the sequence in which children should be introduced to the different units of study within each subject. They design schemes of work and plan lessons with this in mind. A child who skips a day of school — or worse, a week — may well have missed out an essential step. If a teacher is conscientious, as the majority are, they will feel obliged to get the relevant worksheets to the child, explain to their parents what it is they've missed — and in some cases, give up their lunch break to sit down with the child and go over the material.

When you bear in mind the workload that teachers already have to cope with, the behaviour of Jon Platt seems incredibly disrespectful. It is not Isle of Wight Council that he is cocking a snook at, but his daughter's school. The principle he's standing up for — and which he's worked himself up into a lather of moral indignation about — is his right to massively inconvenience his daughter's teachers just so he can go on a family holiday when the costs of overseas travel are lower. Not such a noble cause after all.

There's another consideration, which is the harmful impact of Mr Platt's actions on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I challenged him about this on television last year and he described me as a 'disgusting obnoxious man'. To his ears, I was claiming that if you don't threaten low-income families with draconian fines for unauthorised absences they won't bother sending their children to school.

Obviously, that's not true. The vast majority of parents play by the rules, which is one reason travel costs are so much lower in term time. Nevertheless, there's strong evidence linking poor attendance to poor academic attainment. Of those children who miss 50 per cent of school, only 3 per cent get five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including maths and English. By contrast, of those who attend 95 per cent of the time or more, 73 per cent achieve that standard. And while it's true that only a minority of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are persistent absentees, it's also true that they make up a disproportionately large percentage of the total. A study in Sheffield in 1984 found there was a higher correlation between persistent absenteeism and free school meals than any other demographic variable. The truth is that if you reduce the penalties for unauthorised absences, you make it harder for schools to close the attainment gap.

Now, as a conservative, I've often been on the other side of arguments like this. For instance, opponents of school choice will invoke the welfare of children from low-income families, claiming it leads to greater social segregation. But the standard rebuttal — that the needs of some don't trump the rights of others — doesn't apply in this case. Mr Platt doesn't have the right to take his daughter out of school whenever he pleases. In accepting a place at the school, he implicitly agreed to abide by the rules. He may be a doughty yeoman. But he's also a selfish bastard.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Should Many Clouds have been racing last Saturday?

Roger Alton

Few things in sport are more thrilling than a great racehorse giving its all. That's why the death of that noble steeplechaser Many Clouds on Saturday was so sad, so epic too. Courage is an over-used word in sport, but Many Clouds really was very brave indeed. He won the Grand National on strength-sapping ground in 2015, and at the weekend fought back to beat the best chaser of the present day, Thistlecrack, by a head. Seconds after crossing the line in the Cotswold Chase at Cheltenham, this most magnificent of horses collapsed and died. It was a pulmonary haemorrhage. Many Clouds had literally given his all. Now his ashes will be scattered in the Isle of Man where he spent his summer holidays. Someone, please make a film of this extraordinary story.

But there are issues for the sport here, too. The anti-racing lobby was out of the blocks quicker than Usain Bolt, and castigating the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) for allowing Many Clouds to race in view of past breathing problems. His trainer Oliver Sherwood defended the



Exciting though it is, horseracing should examine itself without blinkers or blocked ears

decision as an operation had apparently sorted the problem out. Racing will close ranks, but was this a step too far for Many Clouds? Exciting though it is, the sport should examine itself without blinkers or blocked ears. Of course it is very rare for a horse to drop dead, though a fair number do have fatal falls at hurdles and fences. Whatever the truth, we should never have lost Many Clouds.

Ever since Alan Hansen decided to spend more time with his golf clubs, Alan Shearer has become an increasingly authoritative pundit. But he was talking through his expensively betrousered rear end the other day with an attack on clubs in the Premier League and the Championship for fielding weakened teams in the FA Cup. Fans were being 'cheated', said Gosforth's finest son. Well, I have news for you, Al. I was at the Kassam stadium on Saturday when lowly Oxford United walloped Newcastle 3-0. Newcastle had made a few changes certainly, but they are still a Premier League club in all but name, with one of the most experienced managers in European club football. And there wouldn't have been a single member of Michael Appleton's yellow-and-blue army who felt cheated. We were delirious, in fact. Now there's a trip to Middlesbrough in the next round. Let's hope Boro field their reserves too: I promise we won't feel cheated.

It was alarming to see Eddie Jones's expressive features disfigured by some colossal bruises and soothing bandages when he appeared at the launch of the Six Nations last week. What started out being described as a pavement-related injury in icy conditions later transformed into a bathroom-based incident. Perhaps we will never know. It's all very rum, but rugby is full of dark arts. I hope to see more of them on Saturday when England take on France in the opener at Twickenham.

It's an evening kick-off, which raises the distressing prospect that the Twickers crowd will have had an even longer time to get totally legless. Quite why it's thought impossible to enjoy sport without being more or less insensible through drink is beyond me. Twickenham tickets are not cheap (most are well over £100) and even the most mild-mannered among us can get extraordinarily irritated at the continual procession of spectators heading for the bars and loos. The match is only 80 minutes after all, and as Sir Clive Woodward pointed out in a forthright piece recently, Twickenham is not primarily a public bar. It's an elite sports stadium.

Without wishing to sound like a spokesman for the Salvation Army, it would be nice to think that the majority of the 80,000 who will be there on Saturday will treat it like that. Fat chance, though.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My granddaughter has asked to use our barn for her 21st birthday dance in June. We can only sleep 30 in the house, but she won't let me arrange billets with neighbours for the other 70, saying 'everyone will sleep in their cars'. This seems short-sighted.

It goes against the grain not to offer folk beds after a late-night shindig. Should I overrule her?

— E.C., Adelstrop, Glos

A. The reason the young no longer need beds after 21st dances is first that they tend to stay up all night

and second they are prurient about drink-driving, so would in any case be unable to drive to a guest billet on public roads. The well-prepared will bring duvets and pillows in anticipation of sleeping in their cars between, say, 7 a.m. and 10, so if you wish to be hospitable, make it clear that they are welcome to come inside and stretch out more comfortably on your floors during this period. They will sleep in mixed-sex rows without inhibition, and without hanky-panky — for various reasons, the boys aren't interested.

Q. My husband is on a strict diet for health reasons. Because he finds it impossible to resist cheese and chocolate, I no longer have any in the house for him to be tempted by. My problem is that I also have two strapping, hearty (and thin) sons with young men's

appetites, both of whom love cheese and chocolate and want to be able to eat it when they come home. It seems divisive to never have any for them to enjoy, but every time I do buy some and hide it, no matter how ingenious the hiding place, my husband always finds it and eats it.

— J.F., London SW12

A. Purchase a lockable metal cash box from a hardware shop. You need one with three keys. Place the contraband inside this box, which can live in your fridge, and issue a key to each of your sons.

Q. A new colleague has been employed on a short-term contract to cover maternity leave. She comes highly recommended by a reliable source and is undoubtedly a very nice person but I am going to have to share

an office with her and, during our brief interview, I found she laughed after everything she said and after everything I said. It's probably a nervous laugh but I can't be doing with it. My work is difficult enough without someone laughing like a hyena all day. Mary, I don't want to give this slightly insecure girl a complex, but if the laughing doesn't calm down after the first day or so, once she starts to feel more secure, what should I do?

— Name and address withheld

A. Each time she laughs, inquire gently, 'Oh do tell me what's so funny. I could really do with a good laugh. Oh go on — please tell me...' Be persistent in asking her every time. This method will jolt her awareness to the nuisance and should eventually help to curb the hysteria.

Food

Vanity project

Tanya Gold



The Waverly Inn is the house restaurant of *Vanity Fair* magazine in New York City. It is part-owned by Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, whose life, at least since Trump rose, is dedicated to the realisation of social justice using his favourite weapon, which is being friends with celebrities. Carter's political engagement is like a blusher brush's political engagement. It is unfit for purpose, and it is too late anyway.

Even so, Carter has declared war on Donald Trump by slagging off his restaurant in New York City — the Trump Grill in Trump Tower, which I reviewed, or rather crawled out of whimpering, in my last column after attempting to eat a taco bowl to prove I don't hate Mexicans.

The best analogy I can summon for this stupid war is from Weimar Germany: the Social Democratic Party of Germany, but celebrities now, are telling the National Socialist German Workers Party: your sauerbraten suck.

Carter dispatched a *Vanity Fair* writer to review the Trump Grill. It was cruel, like dropping a debutante

Hitler might have had the restraint to ignore an attack on his restaurant. Trump couldn't

into 'Nam with a grenade made by Prada. She duly described it, quite correctly, as the worst restaurant she had ever imagined, even in hell.

Adolf Hitler might have had the restraint to ignore my theoretical attack on his restaurant. Trump, of course, couldn't ignore *Vanity Fair*'s; he doesn't have it in him to ignore a slight. The Waverly Inn, he wrote on Twitter, has the worst food in New York City, a judgment which will end his career as a restaurant critic, and so he must remain a human Wotsit with malignant narcissism and a pile of nukes.

So here is a war of civilisations being fought through hamburgers on Twitter. This is worse than a war of civilisations being fought on Twitter without hamburgers, because hamburgers don't matter.

The Waverly Inn, which is in the West Village, is not the worst restaurant in New York. It is not even the smuggest, although it is very smug, and not the kind of place where you will find people wearing cheap clothing that says 'American Patriot'. The

Opentable blurb says it exists for 'the city's best and brightest', which I suspect is mugged from a Waverly Inn press release with *Vanity Fair* fingerprints on it, although I cannot prove it.

It lives in the basement of two brown townhouses. There is a crowded bar; further in, a crushed dining room with wobbly pseudo-decadent art and too many tables; at the back, a double-height room remade as a fake garden. The trees around are bright with fairy lights, it is true, but the toilet is so small I fall into the bowl, and I do not feel like a celebrity then. I feel like a tourist who has fallen into a toilet bowl where celebrities have been.

What do these cracked Gatsbys get for their dollars? Good service, yes; the waiter is charming. (Almost all service is good these days, even in London. It is the financial crisis.) The famous chicken pot pie is adequate; the hamburger, which I requested be served medium rare, is rare; the chips are oversalted; the puddings are over-sugared; the salad is fine.

But there is a restaurant more charming and less expensive uptown. It is called the 21 Club and, if you ask them, they will take you to the cellar and show you Richard Nixon's lost collection of wine.

So not as bad as the madman calls it, but still overpriced and duplicitous fairy dust for idiots who, consciously or not, want to eat *Vanity Fair*. They want to pulp its shiny pages on their tongues, digest the advertorial and be reborn as soap; and — who knows? — it might happen. These are crazy days.



'That's it! They're playing my ringtone!'

Waverly Inn, Bank Street, New York, tel: 00 1 917 828 1154.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Italianish

Waiting for my husband in a Rome hotel, I was reduced to reading some of the weekend newspaper supplements. The Italians think themselves highly fashionable, and using words from English cements the image. *La Repubblica*'s weekly magazine called *D* has two sections with English names: *Beauty* and *Lifestyle*. Coverage of Paris Fashion Week was headlined 'Parigi Fashion Week' and a discussion of cosmetics was headed 'No make up'.

This is the sort of thing that drives the Accademia della Crusca into a frenzy. The academy has been making



judgments since its foundation in 1583 on the use of the national language. *Crusca* mean 'bran' and the academy likes to sift out indigestible foreign bran from the fine home-ground flour.

Its latest battle has been with the Italian parliament, which incorporated an English phrase *home restaurant* into a new law regulating food provision. At least *home restaurant* means a restaurant that someone runs in their own home. Quite a few

loan words have been given new meanings in Italian. As in French, *smoking* means 'dinner jacket' and *footing* means 'jogging'.

Spot, short for *spot pubblicitario*, means a television advertisement. *Stage* means a dose of work experience. A little less easy to understand is *tight* for 'morning coat'. My husband's morning coat is a bit tight nowadays, but most people's aren't. I wonder whether it was borrowed in the 19th century from *tights* when that word in English meant tight-fitting breeches as part of formal dress.

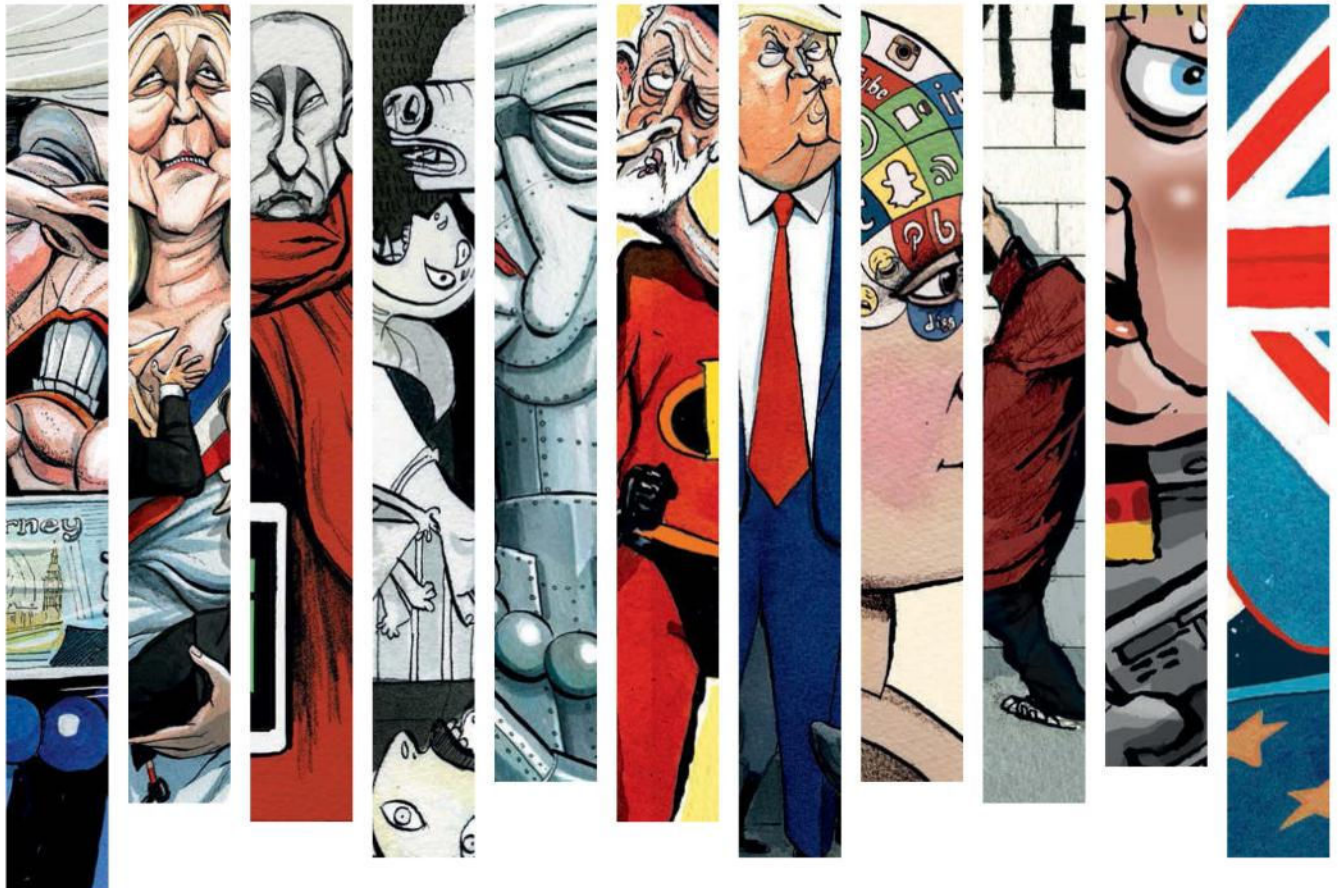
I was puzzled by the use of the word *spider* to mean 'convertible

car', but my husband, when he eventually turned up, explained that Fiat made a sports car called the Spider from 1966.

A very specialised piece of borrowing is of *tilt*, as on a pinball machine, in the phrase *andare in tilt*, meaning 'go haywire', 'seize up' or (for computers) 'crash'. I think that in informal speech Italians mean by *fare tilt* 'become incoherent'.

The English might complain with some grounds about such repurposing of their vocabulary, but somehow we have always tolerated free movement of words in the single linguistic market. — Dot Wordsworth

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