

THE NEW STATESMAN

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Spirit of the Age

Why tech billionaires are the new revolutionaries. By Bruno Maçães

Stephen Bush on
Labour's uncivil war

Jesse Armstrong on
the return of *Succession*

Rachel Cunliffe on why
puritans are on the rise



Set a device bedtime



Alison and Holly (12)
Derby

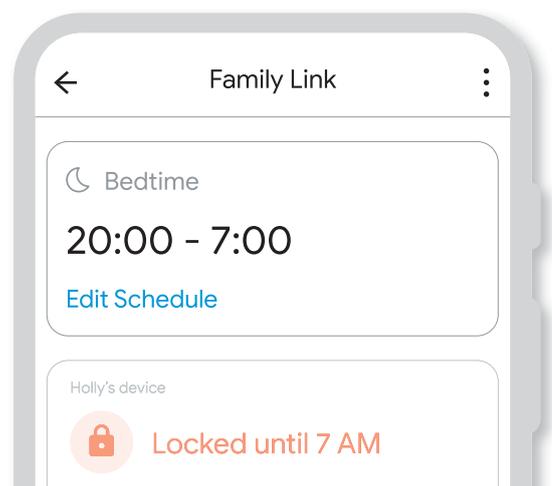
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Bringing Big Tech down to Earth

The Covid-19 crisis caused an economic recession like no other. As Adam Tooze, the historian and *New Statesman* contributing writer, notes in his recent book *Shutdown*, never before in the history of modern capitalism had close to 95 per cent of the world's economies suffered a simultaneous contraction in per capita GDP.

But for some, the pandemic marked the acceleration of a new gilded age. As online content consumption doubled, the world's largest technology firms reaped a windfall. Apple enjoyed its most profitable quarter ever at the end of 2020 (\$28.7bn), while Amazon's net profits increased by 84 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019. The personal fortune of Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos rose by \$24bn in March-April 2020 alone and the world's 20 wealthiest tech leaders are now worth a combined \$1.2trn.

Yet as Bruno Maçães, the author of *Geopolitics for the End Time* (2021), writes in this week's cover story on page 20, their ambitions stretch far beyond simply enriching themselves. "Facebook, Tesla, SpaceX or Amazon want to change the world, creating new experiences that were once the preserve of science fiction," he writes. These include "a privatised global financial system; the colonisation of space; advanced artificial intelligence; autonomous cars that can be summoned across the country using a mobile phone; swarms of delivery drones; and an interface linking the human brain to the internet through a surgical procedure".

In their scale, ambition and culture, such firms increasingly resemble nation states. If Amazon was a country, it would be the 14th richest in the world. But it paid just £18.3m in UK corporation tax in 2020 despite its revenue rising by more than 50 per cent to £20.63bn.

For too long, politicians have been dazzled by tech leaders and their utopian declarations. In the UK, Amazon was awarded national and local government contracts with a lifetime value of up to £630m between 2015 and 2020. Tech firms, in turn, felt no obligation to the public realm. Apple's chief executive Tim Cook once described efforts by the European Union to force his company to pay more tax as "political crap".



If Amazon was a country, it would be the 14th richest in the world

By shifting their profits to low-tax jurisdictions, such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the British Virgin Islands, tech firms have deprived treasuries of billions in revenue. In 2016 – the most recent year for which reliable data is available – the biggest US multinationals, including Google, Apple and Microsoft, offshored \$1.4trn in this manner (almost 2 per cent of global GDP).

But the pandemic, and the inordinate power of Big Tech, has prompted an overdue reckoning. The minimum global corporate tax rate of "at least 15 per cent" proposed by Joe Biden would end the race to the bottom that has taken place in recent decades. Mr Biden has also appointed the legal scholar Lina Khan, one of the foremost critics of Big Tech, as head of the Federal Trade Commission – the body that has launched an antitrust suit against Facebook (which owns WhatsApp and Instagram). The antitrust division of the US Department of Justice is preparing a similar monopoly lawsuit against Google over its digital advertising business (the firm accounts for 56.8 per cent of US search advertising revenue).

Earlier this year, the German parliament passed a pioneering law allowing regulators to intervene before market abuse takes place, rather than merely after the fact – a move designed to limit the breakneck expansion of tech firms. Following the German election on 26 September, the Social Democrats, who championed the measure, are now expected to lead a new coalition government.

In a hyper-digital era, Big Tech has made itself indispensable. But the innovations it depends on are more often the product of collective endeavour than individual genius. As the economist Mariana Mazzucato charted in her book *The Entrepreneurial State* (2013), the 12 key technologies behind the iPhone, such as the touch screen, the Global Positioning System and the internet itself, were all products of state-funded research.

Future innovation depends not only on dynamic companies but on a robust public realm. As billionaire titans vie to conquer outer space, the job of governments is to bring them down to Earth. ●



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IN THIS ISSUE

20

Spirit of the age

Bruno Maçães on the god-like ambitions of Big Tech

26

Letter from Paris

Andrew Hussey on the pundit-politician Éric Zemmour

30

The dark art of satire

Anna Leszkiewicz meets *Succession*'s Jesse Armstrong

38

The end of the circus?

Samuel Moyn on the fall and return of Donald Trump

42

How to be a Tory

Emily Jones on conservatism's intellectual void

46

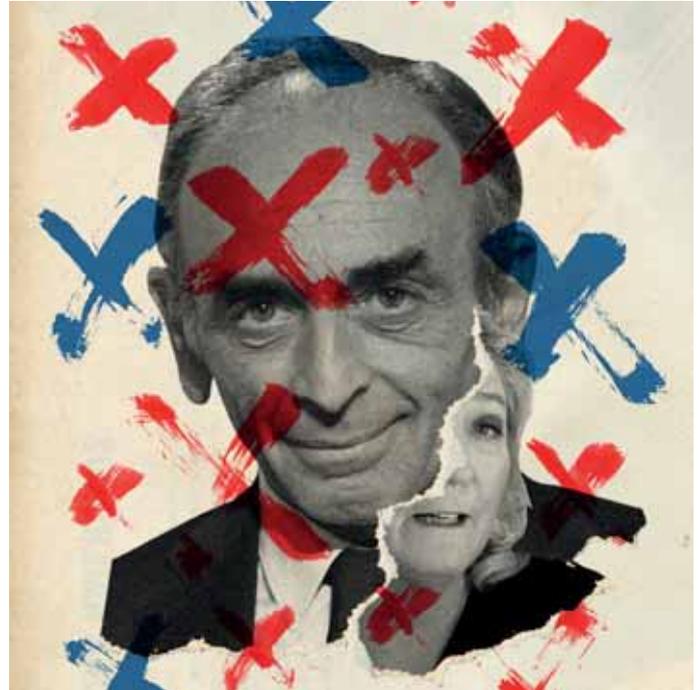
Safe spaces

Erin Maglaque on the history and future of quarantine

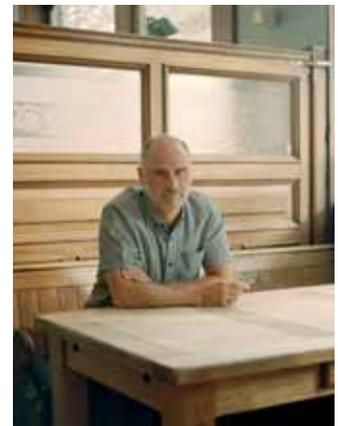
59

Nature's psychedelics

John Burnside on the mind-altering power of plants



Letter from Paris: on the "TV-friendly fascist" Éric Zemmour



Showrunner: Jesse Armstrong



How plants augment reality

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MORE IN THIS ISSUE

Up front

- 3 Leader
- 8 Correspondence

Columns

- 19 Stephen Bush on the Angela Rayner
- 25 Jeremy Cliffe on the German election
- 29 Philip Collins on the Tories' identity crisis
- 35 Rachel Cunliffe on the new puritans

The Notebook

- 11 Philippa Nuttall on Europe's energy crisis
- 13 Diary by Jeremy Bowen
- 14 Helen Joyce talks to Harry Lambert
- 16 In the Picture

Features

- 20 Bruno Maçães on the age of tech billionaires
- 26 Andrew Hussey on the French right-wing polemicist Éric Zemmour
- 30 Jesse Armstrong on power, politics and the making of *Succession*

The Critics: Books

- 38 Samuel Moyn on *Landslide* by Michael Wolff
- 41 The NS Poem by Gboyega Odubanjo
- 42 Emily Jones on *Conservatism* by Edmund Fawcett
- 44 Freddie Hayward on *The Age of Unpeace* by Mark Leonard
- 45 Reviewed in short
- 46 Erin Maglaque on *Until Proven Safe* by Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley

The Critics: Arts

- 50 Robert Colls on boxing, from fisticuffs to Fury
- 53 Film: Ryan Gilbey on *The Green Knight*
- 54 Television: Rachel Cooke on *Blair and Brown: The New Labour Revolution*
- 55 Radio: Anna Leszkiewicz on *A Home of Our Own*

The Back Pages

- 59 Nature: John Burnside
- 61 Deleted Scenes: Pippa Bailey
- 63 Down and Out: Nicholas Lezard
- 65 Crosswords and Subscriber of the Week
- 66 The NS Q&A: Yotam Ottolenghi

On [newstatesman.com](https://www.newstatesman.com)

Comment



Martin Fletcher

Keir Starmer must finally start attacking the government over Brexit

Emily Tamkin

Why did it take so long for R Kelly's victims to get justice?



Rachel Cunliffe

How the Treasury is planning to penalise young people – again

Chris Deerin

Can Scottish Labour ever escape the political wilderness?

Podcasts



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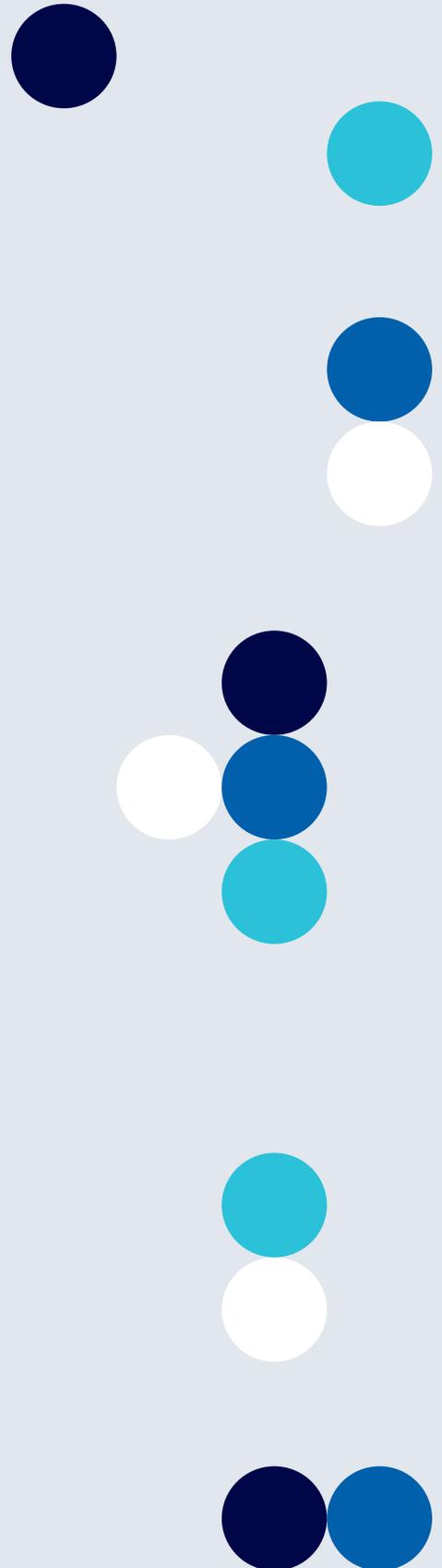
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Letter of the week

A different class of party

There is a symmetry between the two articles on Labour's current debility (Politics, and "The noise before defeat", 24 September). Both are summed up by Philip Collins: "After a century in which first socialism, then nationalisation and then equality ceased to provide the party with its intellectual ballast, Labour is left unsure quite what it stands for."

At the turn of the 20th century and the establishment of the Labour Party, the condition of the working class warranted drastic action that neither the Liberals nor Conservatives appeared capable of. This lacuna was filled by the Labour Party. Its base, underpinned by the trade unions, never had much ideological content despite the intellectual veneer of the philosophical socialists, and this was its eventual downfall. Many Labour supporters committed to the party by class had views far to the right of mainstream socialism. Ever since the party's high electoral point of 1951 it has failed to confront this contradiction.

The lesson today is that there is no political future for a party that has to rely on class. Progressive politics in Britain today, as well as in Europe and the US, has to espouse sound intellectual philosophies that can sustain the argument for crucial and necessary policies that are currently unpopular, whether on climate change, migration or the high cost of maintaining public services. The Liberal Democrats could do this but they show no sign of the rigour required. And Labour appears to have little awareness that relying on class loyalty cannot deliver a Labour government. The Conservatives must be laughing.

Michael Meadowcroft, Liberal MP 1983-87, Leeds

Going nuclear

China bullies Australia with "bans and restrictions on its exports", and this justifies the Australian PM's breaking the global rule that the Southern Hemisphere should not be nuclearised, argues Helen Thompson (Newsmaker, 24 September).

According to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in May Australia exported 20 per cent more iron ore and 28 per cent more meat to China than the previous month. If China wanted to put pressure on Australia it could cripple Australian exports. The French submarines Australia commissioned were originally designed to be nuclear-powered but Australia demanded they be diesel-electric. The damage done to the broader alliance of democracies is serious. New

Zealand and Indonesia are upset at the Australian government for bringing nuclear power into their shared ocean.

The deal exerts no pressure on China to slow down repression in Hong Kong or treat the Uyghurs decently. Emmanuel Macron's ratings have risen as France sees Australia behaving with duplicity, apparently in cahoots with a Francophobe English government and media.

Denis MacShane, former Europe minister and senior adviser at Avisa Partners, Brussels

A new union?

John Home Robertson (Correspondence, 24 September) raises the possibility of Scotland joining Northern Ireland in the single market. This would not breach any

principle that has not already been breached; the border that has already been created inside the UK would simply be extended. If Holyrood was given the power to join Northern Ireland in that way, it would weaken Scottish demands for an independence referendum, given that those demands are largely driven by the UK government's decision to leave the single market. I would have thought that Boris Johnson, with all his rhetoric about "our precious Union", would welcome that.

Alan Pavelin, Chislehurst, Greater London

John Home Robertson must feel he is reliving the Sixties, when his mentor, the late John P Mackintosh, was fighting the European cause – not against Little Englanders, but a defiantly antagonistic Labour Party. Gordon Brown (Politics, 17 September) knows the damage this did to the party, not least in provoking the founding of the SDP. In addressing the need to revise the political structures in the UK, Brown's proposals would not preclude a future inside the European Union.

The irony of our predicament is that the SNP and the Tories need each other. Neither wants another referendum. Nicola Sturgeon knows a vote for independence is unlikely, and Johnson knows that another referendum so soon after Brexit would provide a precedent for any campaign to insist on "putting it to the people". Referendums are a populist's means of undermining parliamentary democracy.

Lorimer Mackenzie, Duror, Argyll

Demoralising decades

I retired in 2005 from nursing in the NHS. The community mental health service that I helped develop was being quietly taken apart, and my last two years had been stressful. Phil Whitaker's sentence, "The demoralising inability to provide the standard of care they trained for, in a system that has been progressively starved of resources relative to need" (Health Matters, 24 September) literally makes me weep. It applies to all public services and it has been going on too long.

*Caroline Tilley
Emsworth, Hampshire*

At fault

Following the unforced error in the description of Heather Watson in Jonathan Liew's article on Emma

Raducanu (Newsmaker, 17 September), there is another in the review of Billie Jean King's autobiography (Reviewed in Short, 24 September). King was the dominant and largely unchallenged female player of her era and a pioneer for better treatment of women players. To say she is best known for beating the male player Bobby Riggs is wrong. It's like saying Paul McCartney was best known for performing with the Frog Chorus.

Andy Leslie, West Grinstead, Horsham, West Sussex

A lesson in fractions

Even a drama-seeking journalist must realise that 27 per cent is nearer to a quarter than a third. So why the "Chart of the Week" (24 September) caption "China has increased its defence spending by almost a third" rather than "more than a quarter"?

Dietmar Küchemann, London SW1

Power posers

I enjoyed the choice of images of world leaders on last week's cover (24 September). Biden strikes a pose, Macron paces anxiously, and Johnson seems bewildered, while on the other side of the submarine, Xi Jinping looks like a man who is unconcerned about anything these three might do.

Danny Bootle, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Keep it brief

Congratulations on the introduction of the NS Crossword In Brief. As a long-time solver and fan of US puzzles – and someone for whom cryptics remain essentially a foreign language – it's great to see a tractable crossword with fresh, current entries.

Kelly Varnsen, Ilkley, West Yorks

Thank you for providing the NS Crossword In Brief as an alternative to the nigh-on impossible cryptic crossword. However, in the latest issue (24 September) I was confused as to how I was supposed to fit "Markievicz" in the five boxes for the first female MP. Then it occurred to me that Markievicz's title was Countess, not Lady, as the clue demanded. Then I realised that the setter had mistaken the first female MP to actually sit in the Commons for the first female MP ever.

Christopher Rossi, Enfield, Greater London

Idle hands

I read Will Dunn's article ("The fidget business", 17 September) with interest. As an academic I attend a lot of lectures and conferences, and regularly take out my knitting while I am listening. It is a great aid to concentration. Responses from fellow audience members range from polite intrigue to visible disapproval, and sometimes (especially when I was an anxious PhD student)

I have felt too self-conscious to risk it.

As events moved online, it seemed more acceptable to occupy one's hands creatively while listening to a lecture, and I have seen people knitting, colouring, and even dress-making through online conferences and meetings. I hope that as such events return to being held in-person, this wider recognition of the cognitive benefits of the tactile will endure. I have socks to finish!

Lucy Razzall, London EC1R

Songs for solitude

Pippa Bailey's column on being alone was tremendous (Deleted Scenes, 17 September). I suggest she listens to "Flowers in December" by Mazzy Star, or the whole album, *Among my Swan*, and "Five String Serenade" on *So Tonight That I Might See*. Music can save our souls.

Charlie Godfrey, Tonbridge, Kent

Money makers

Instead of relying on the kindness of strangers, perhaps Nicholas Lezard should do the British thing and either marry someone with money or tap his well-heeled friends for cash. Or, God forbid, get a proper job.

Peter Lee, South Yorkshire

We reserve the right to edit letters

Outside the box **By Becky Barnicoat**



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THE NOTEBOOK



ABSTRACT AERIAL ART

Comment

How politics fuelled the energy crisis **By Philippa Nuttall**

Humanity must “grow up” to stop the climate emergency, Boris Johnson told the UN General Assembly on 22 September. The energy crisis is proof of a global lack of maturity. Despite headlines about increases in wind and solar power and electric cars, greenhouse gas emissions and energy use continue to rise, and the world’s thirst for fossil fuels remains insatiable. Failure to deal with these trends as part of an organised and just transition will lead to further environmental destruction, and social and economic chaos.

Today’s soaring energy bills are a glimmer of what could happen if we don’t change tack. There are a myriad of reasons for the spike in gas prices, but a dearth of systemic thinking at home is one reason UK citizens are being disproportionately affected. A lack of long-term funding and consistent policies to insulate homes and install electric heat pumps means that Britons live in some of the least energy-efficient ►

◀ homes in Europe, and remain reliant on gas. “Bad political ideas have helped pave the way to volatile gas prices,” says Tom Burke, the head of the climate think tank E3G. “This is not an energy crisis, but a crisis of politics.”

Likewise, the UK regulator allowed small energy companies to enter the market without sufficient protection against price volatility. And UK citizens are swallowing the price increases with little, if any, government support. Meanwhile, Spain will redirect the windfall profits of a number of power producers, worth around €2.6bn, to consumers, while France, in an effort to avoid more *gilets jaunes* protests, will spend €6m on giving its poorest households a €100 subsidy to help with energy bills.

Many countries have net zero emissions targets, but actual change is happening too slowly. Global emissions dipped during the Covid-induced lockdowns of 2020-21 but are now rising rapidly again, and fossil fuels still account for more than 80 per cent of global energy production. Changing this requires a convincing vision that shows the transformation necessary to stop dangerous global heating. Politicians need to explain who will pay for it.

It is, indeed, time to grow up. Nevertheless, understanding what we mean by “growing up” has implications for climate action. Susan Neiman, an American moral philosopher and author of the 2014 book *Why Grow Up? Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age*, argues that rather than seeing the journey from childhood to adulthood as a process of continual loss, “growing up can mean acquiring freedom and power along with responsibility, achieving the

“Growing up can mean acquiring freedom and power along with responsibility”

means to push the world towards the way it ought to be”.

Such an approach means shifting the onus from individual to systemic action. Governments must appreciate the new energy reality. Julian Popov, a former Bulgarian environment minister and clean energy expert, describes a “somersault of economic fundamentals: what was expensive is now cheap, what was cheap has become expensive, what was centralised is becoming decentralised, and what was decentralised is becoming integrated”. We no longer live in a binary world of energy suppliers and users: electric cars, smart meters and rooftop solar panels make us all part of a connected, digitalised system, where everyone can produce and consume energy.

Politicians remain hyper-focused on gas diversification as a panacea for energy security, concentrating discussions on pipelines and shipments of liquid natural gas. The broader geopolitics of clean energy – such as the ownership of the minerals needed to build renewables and the vast amounts of data being generated – must not be ignored. “What happens if we have an Amazon of renewable power?” asks Angela Wilkinson, the head of the World Energy Council.

It is unsurprising that the conversation is polarised. The lobbying power of the fossil fuel giants is huge, and even if European companies, such as Shell and BP, are starting to accept the need for change, this is not the case for US oil and gas firms. And governments everywhere continue to prop up the industry. In 2019, the European Commission released a report that put the UK first in the EU for subsidising fossil fuels, on which it spent more than €12bn a year, compared to €8.3bn on renewable energy.

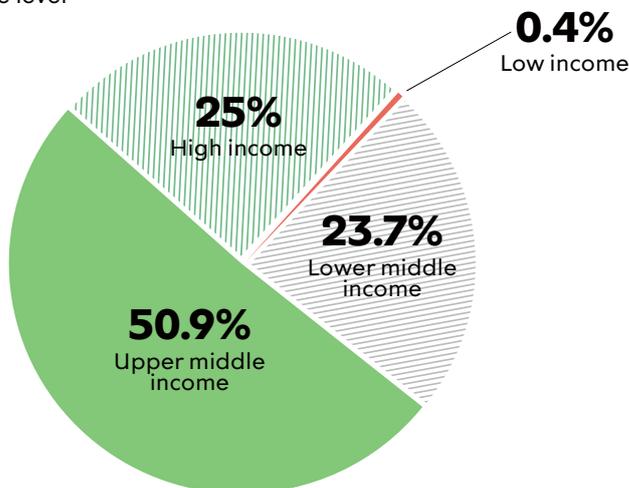
What the UK does next is very important. In November, it will host the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow. The UK is a climate leader, thanks to its move away from coal, impressive increase in offshore wind, and success in growing the economy while cutting emissions. But in addition to serious domestic policy glitches such as those on energy efficiency, the country has caused consternation internationally by slashing overseas aid. This decision looks hypocritical given Boris Johnson’s calls for the world to both “grow up” and to cough up more cash to raise the annual \$100bn that, back in 2009, developed countries pledged to spend on climate action in poorer regions.

The first step towards maturity would be for leaders to “become more energy-literate, stop finger-pointing and lose the hubris implicit in the idea that we are waging a war on climate change”, says Wilkinson. She believes the debate on energy and climate is too polarised, and that we need a more “human-centric” approach that puts affordability, social justice and different economic models at the heart of the energy transition. “I am hearing a conversation about fixing the energy machine, rather than changing human behaviour.” ●

Chart of the Week

Less than 0.5 per cent of vaccines given worldwide have been administered in the poorest countries

Share of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered by country income level



SOURCE: OUR WORLD IN DATA/WORLD BANK

Diary

Where the West went wrong in Afghanistan, the ruins of Helmand, and my sharp new attire

By Jeremy Bowen

A thought hit me halfway between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province, on a road studded with roughly filled-in bomb craters. What were our politicians thinking when they sent British troops to this place? The reasons Afghanistan was invaded after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were legitimate: to destroy al-Qaeda, find Osama bin Laden and punish the Taliban for harbouring them. What happened next is where it went wrong.

The Taliban was, and is, an organisation that kills and maims without hesitation, but it was ready to talk in the years after its defeat in 2001. Instead the Americans, the British and their allies dug themselves deeper into the war. Brave soldiers were told that they were fighting to make the people back home safer, and to create a better Afghanistan that could never again be a theme park for the likes of al-Qaeda. With hindsight, observation and containment of the Taliban would have been less destructive than direct action. Politicians and generals become committed and then calculate that it is too costly, or too late, to change course.

How it all ended

I have met some of the British soldiers who were badly wounded when serving in Afghanistan. Their courage is humbling. I can imagine how painful it must be for them, and for the families of the soldiers who were killed, to see how it all ended. I know many of them believe that the mission was worth it. The uncomfortable truth is that the Taliban won, and the real gains in education and equality, mostly in Kabul, were based on a corrupt state that collapsed when its foreign backers left.

I walked through the ruins of Marjah, a sprawling town in Helmand surrounded by fields of cotton and



When I first met the Taliban, I didn't think I would be dealing with the group again 27 years later

opium. One of the war's biggest battles happened there in 2010. A plan for a quick victory turned into a grind that the US commander Stanley McChrystal called a "bleeding ulcer". A man called Shamsullah showed me the ruins of his family's home; his four brothers, one a Taliban fighter, were killed in the war. They had been given the house by a project funded by foreign governments to win hearts and minds. The house was destroyed in a battle, just one example of the way that the war undercut attempts to make Afghanistan a better place. Shamsullah's mother dismissed my suggestion that women had benefited from the past two decades. How could we, she said, when the invaders killed our husbands and sons?

Meeting the Taliban

This was my first time in Afghanistan since 1994. Back then I drove out of Kabul towards Kandahar, down a road undulating in a series of long peaks and troughs. I was told that they were caused by the weight of Soviet military convoys driving on the road until Mikhail Gorbachev accepted inglorious defeat in the late 1980s.

We were looking for the nascent Taliban, then making a name for itself as an unusually violent new player in a terrible civil war. I didn't think I would be dealing with the group again 27 years later. Some of its fighters had set up a roadblock an hour outside Kabul. The Taliban members we met were polite; they gave us lunch and seemed serious about their intentions. Two years later, the group seized the country and used ruthless violence to impose its unforgiving ideology.

Animals of war

On the way to Helmand our drivers, and compulsory armed Talib bodyguard, stopped at dusk to pray at Maiwand. In 1880, during the Second Afghan War, it was the site of a famous defeat for the British empire. The past is inescapable here. In August, as Kabul fell to the Taliban, the former Royal Marine Pen Farthing conducted his controversial animal rescue. In 1880 there was a dog drama in Maiwand concerning Bobbie, a mongrel from Reading who was the faithful companion to a British soldier. Despite both being wounded, the pair made it home and were decorated by Queen Victoria. Bobbie was later killed by a Hansom cab. His stuffed body and his medal can still be seen in the Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Museum.

Fashion tips for the future

Sharp-eyed viewers of BBC News might have spotted me wearing shalwar kameez, the outfit worn by men in southern Afghanistan. Afghan colleagues recommended that it would be polite to respect the local dress code. A tailor in Kabul ran up what we needed at around £25 per set. That may have been the foreigners' price. It consists of a long tunic worn over generously cut trousers cinched in with a drawstring. It is loose and airy, superbly appropriate for the formidable heat of the south. Perhaps as the planet warms more of us should wear them in the UK. ●

Jeremy Bowen is the BBC's Middle East editor



Encounter

“Women are in a bigger fight than the suffragettes”

The author Helen Joyce on sex, gender and discrimination

By **Harry Lambert**

When the Labour government introduced the Gender Recognition Act in 2004, few involved in its implementation expected that 17 years later Britain's leading medical journal, the *Lancet*, would refer to women as “bodies with vaginas” in an effort to be gender inclusive.

That phrase is the latest in a string of new and unusual terms (“people who menstruate”, “birthing people”, “bleeders”) used to describe women. This change in language is the product of a rapid shift in Western culture towards the idea that biological reality is a social construct.

Helen Joyce, 53 – a long-time journalist at the *Economist* and the author of *Trans*, a *Sunday Times* bestseller that initially struggled to find a publisher – finds that idea inaccurate and dehumanising, as well as a threat to the rights of women. The editor of the *Lancet* has since conceded that the journal's language “dehumanised and marginalised women”. Joyce's book takes a contrasting view on a contentious topic to another recent bestseller written by Shon Faye.

Joyce, who has a PhD in mathematics and once ran the Royal Statistical Society's quarterly magazine, told me that she believes society has largely shed unwarranted social distinctions between men and women, but that some “irreducible distinctions to do

HANNA-KATRINA JEDROSZ. SAFFRON SWIRE (CARTOON)

with reproductive biology” remain. “If you ignore them, and if you do not allow women to have single-sex spaces in certain situations where they are vulnerable, women can’t take full part in public life.”

“In certain circumstances,” she added, “women need to be able to exclude all males. Those circumstances are when women are naked, or sleeping, or where women are unable to move away, as in prison. In sports, where the physical differences are just irreducible, female people need to be able to keep all male people out. They need not to be called bigots when they do that.”

Joyce argues her position is “exactly that of British law”. Under the 2010 Equality Act, exceptions are permitted to the principle of not discriminating on the basis of sex. It is, for instance, legal to require changing room attendants to be of a certain sex or to make communal accommodation single sex.

The act also makes exceptions for staff employed in rape crisis centres, Joyce points out. The act states: “A counsellor working with victims of rape might have to be a woman and not a transsexual person, even if she has a Gender Recognition Certificate [legal recognition of their acquired gender], in order to avoid causing [victims] further distress.”

The Equality Act does not give an exhaustive list of when exceptions are permissible. It relies on society to navigate these issues peaceably. But women who have stated and supported the principles established in the act have often been demonised for doing so.

The vilification of “gender-critical” women in the public eye, from the Labour MP Rosie Duffield to the author JK Rowling, appears to jar not just with the law at present but with public opinion at large. Polling by YouGov last June suggests the public is strongly supportive of existing law on changing one’s gender. To receive a Gender Recognition Certificate it is necessary to receive a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria (which 63 per cent of people support), and to have lived in one’s acquired gender for two years (which 61 per cent support); 16 per cent oppose both.

But society has shifted, with some schools, hospitals and prisons adopting a system of self-ID through which individuals can change their sex by declaration, dispensing with these requirements. Yet according to the data, those who support self-ID are social outliers.

“There’s no support for self-ID” to be introduced as policy, Joyce told me. But are the few who support it right? And why is the right to pick one’s own gender a threat to anyone else? For Joyce, the way these questions are phrased obscures the key issue. “If you say, ‘Do you think everyone should be recognised as the gender they say they are?’, people will say yes,” said Joyce, including herself among them. The problem, she believes, is when gender identity is used to eliminate the reality of sex, whether in rape cases or in sports.

The Equality Act is clear that sports can be restricted to those who are born women if it is necessary to ensure “fair competition” or “the safety of competitors”.

Joyce, who has five siblings who have played international cricket for Ireland, cites the example set by World Rugby, which has refused to allow those who

“Sometimes women – if they’re naked, or sleeping, or cannot move away – need to be able to exclude all males”

are born male into the women’s game. “World Rugby did its research and worked out it is going to get a woman’s neck broken, and it is going to be liable, unless [it keeps] all males out,” Joyce said. Other sporting bodies are taking a different approach, despite public support for single-sex competitions.

However, the issue that perhaps most concerns Joyce is the prescription of “puberty blockers” for children who express a wish to change gender. Joyce believes this to be “a massive medical scandal”. “That is going to become clear in the coming years,” she said. “Egas Moniz, who invented the lobotomy, got a Nobel Prize for it in 1949. We’re doing it again. We [humans] are not the sort of machine that you can just switch off and pick up again a couple of years later.

“The people who are asleep at the wheel here are doctors,” Joyce said. “In our legal system, the answer to this [negligence] is you’ll get sued if you get it wrong. But I don’t like that. That’s like saying we’ll solve the problem in rugby when some woman breaks her neck.”

Joyce thinks all children are being poorly educated about gender identity. “We are teaching children that what makes you a boy or a girl is your performance of stereotypes. I’m old enough to remember when people said a girl can do anything she likes. Now they say, ‘If you do those sorts of things that makes you a boy.’ It’s the most regressive thing I’ve seen in my lifetime.” For Joyce, schools are at risk of eliminating the one distinction that can matter – sex – while reintroducing archaic social differences that do not. We are “dissolving ‘male’ and ‘female’ and replacing them with ‘manly essence’ and ‘womanly essence’ for everybody”, she argues.

How can this divisive debate be resolved? By 46 per cent to 12 per cent, the public thinks a “climate of fear” is preventing productive discussion of this complex issue, according to recent polling by Redfield & Wilton. Joyce thinks “this is a bigger fight for women” than what the suffragettes faced. Does she fear she is on the wrong side of history? “So what if, in 30 or 40 years, everybody agrees it’s fine to put rapists who murder their wives in women’s prisons?” she told me trenchantly. “They’re still wrong.” ●







In the picture

Young Afghan girls step out of class at a school in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, on 26 September 2021. Some Afghan pupils have returned to primary schools since the Taliban seized control of the country – but only in gender-segregated classrooms.

Photograph by
Bulent Kilic / AFP

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Late one September evening, as she was preparing for bed, Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, received a phone call from Keir Starmer. After nearly ten minutes of pleasantries, Starmer reached his point: he wanted to rip up the party's rule book for electing future leaders. Rayner advised him to make sure that he had enough trade union support to be confident of passing the reforms before proceeding. He agreed, and the conversation ended.

The initiative is of deep importance to Rayner, who harbours her own leadership ambitions, as well as to Starmer, who wants to put the party's structures on a more solid footing. Yet despite their shared interest in the reforms, Labour's two most powerful politicians have a dynamic defined by mutual suspicion. For those who want Labour to mount a serious challenge to Boris Johnson's government, the question is whether the official opposition can make any headway while its leader and his deputy remain at odds.

In order to get his rule changes approved by delegates at the party's conference in Brighton, Starmer needed Rayner's help. Working together, they succeeded in winning support for the core of the package: measures to make it harder for Labour members to deselect sitting MPs, and to increase the amount of parliamentary support needed for a candidate to make the leadership ballot.

The process was painful and involved a great deal of arm-twisting and private pleading. While Starmer was credited with winning the battle, it was Rayner's work behind the scenes that secured the support of Unison's trade union delegation, a vital step in getting the measures passed.

Seen from the viewpoint of Rayner's allies, this is a story of a Labour leader who is bad at consulting colleagues, and a deputy who is taking political risks to support her boss.

Starmer's operation is still poor at explaining its actions and bringing allies along with it. Anas Sarwar, the leader of Scottish Labour and a politician firmly on the Labour right, learned of the rule-book plans about five minutes before the media did. While the strict secrecy paid off, the Labour leadership took a gamble in launching the enterprise while still in dispute with Unison over its social care proposals and with the GMB union over energy policy. Without Rayner's work, the result could have been different.

But despite her role in securing union backing for Starmer's priorities, the view

STEPHEN BUSH



Westminster

Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner both have a big problem: each other

from the Labour leader's close allies is that his deputy has her own agenda.

They blame Rayner's team for the painful row over the shadow cabinet reshuffle of 9 May, which was dominated by a public argument about Rayner's role. Some feel that her growing profile constitutes a barely concealed pitch for the party leadership. Her refusal to back down despite criticism over her description of Conservatives as "scum" was a further distraction at a party conference that should have been a chance for Labour to show off some new policies.

Who is right? Rayner and Starmer are both politicians drawn from the middle of the party, but they have their own priorities and styles. Rayner is nearly 18 years Starmer's junior. It is only natural that she should put serious thought into what the post-Starmer future might look like. She has not been shy of using her power base to influence events, such as reportedly asserting herself to save Andy McDonald's shadow cabinet job and working closely with him on a package of workplace and employment rights. That effort went unrewarded by McDonald, who quit the shadow cabinet on 27 September citing disagreements over policy – an outcome that allies of Rayner saw as a betrayal.

Rayner has also been willing to suffer considerable political damage to deliver Starmer's agenda, including backing his preferred candidate, David Evans – who is public enemy number one among much of the left – to be Labour's general secretary, an appointment that was confirmed on 25 September. Those efforts have not gone unnoticed among the party's left, who distrust Rayner almost as much as they do Starmer. In the service of her leader, Rayner has risked alienating a section of Labour MPs who would be her natural supporters when the next leadership contest comes.

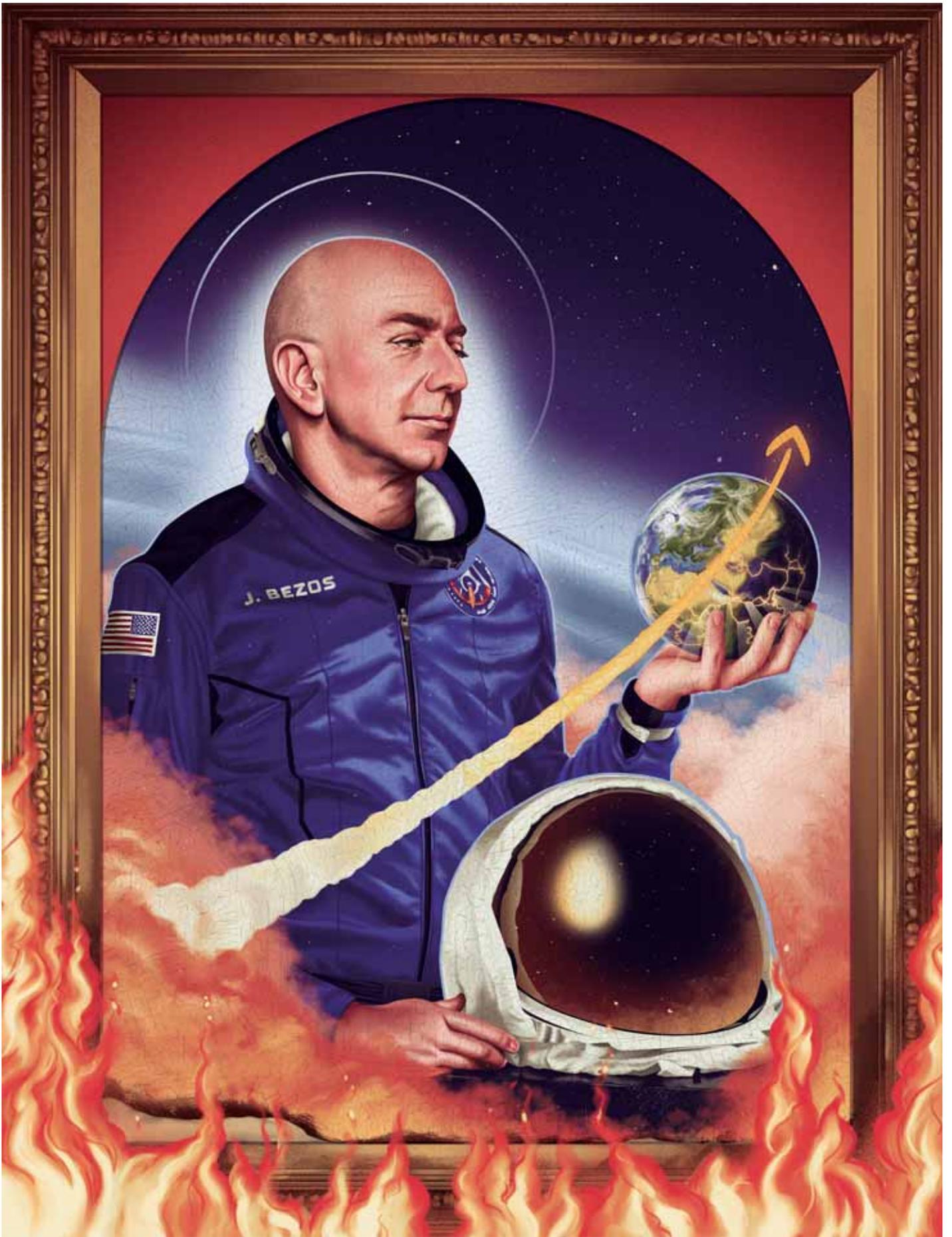
Part of the difficulty in their relationship is personal. While Starmer told the *New Statesman* recently that relations between him and "Ange" are "very good", the two rarely appear in public together, and so their levels of communication – and therefore trust – are lower than they could be. Added to that, Rayner's "elevator pitch" for the next leadership contest is implicitly critical of Starmer's personality, focusing, as it does, on her warmth, authenticity and natural ability to make deals and win friends. Equally, the arguments in favour of Starmer – his grip on detail, his polish and relative caution – are often viewed as criticisms of Rayner.

The difficulty for both, as one MP pointed out to me, is that between them they hold all the qualities of an unbeatable election-winning politician, and yet they remain stuck in a forced political alliance. The reality is that neither's ambitions are ultimately served by the other's failure. If they want the next Labour conference to be more of a success than this year's, they will have to learn to trust and even like each other again. ●

Rayner has been willing to suffer considerable political damage for Starmer

The spirit of the age Jeff Bezos and the tech billionaires who dream of leaving humanity behind

By Bruno Maçães



JACK HUGHES

Cover Story

The American novelist F Scott Fitzgerald once wrote: “Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me.” To which Ernest Hemingway provided a rejoinder in his short story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”: “Yes, they have more money.”

Hemingway was right, but Fitzgerald saw farther. There was a time when money could buy pleasure and comfort, even though comfort was a poisoned gift, removing one from the tussle of life as well as taking away the risks and glories that make life worth living. Today, however, money might take you to a higher form of existence. Those of us who are not billionaires have woken up to this reality too late.

Technologists such as the American inventor Ray Kurzweil say that the important thing is to live long enough to live forever. We are on the cusp of revolutionary technologies that could enable us to evade mortality – what a pity it would be to die just at the moment of salvation.

But Kurzweil’s point is not the whole truth. The technology putting an end to ageing is unlikely to be cheap. The important thing is to accumulate enough money to live forever. And not just to live forever: to enhance our intellectual capacities, to travel to Mars and to create human societies fit for the digital and interstellar age. In this particularly jarring scenario, Elon Musk would be able to use radically new technologies to extend his life-span by centuries. We would hear about him a hundred years from now settling on Mars and, somewhat later, recording a podcast with an extraterrestrial interlocutor. The rest of us? Well, tough luck. Money is the portal taking the happy few across to the technological self.

By combining the possibilities of money and technology, tech billionaires may claim to represent the highest human type today. Different epochs produce different forms of social organisation, different artistic styles, different technologies. Do they also create different human types? How would you describe our historical period? The age of the smartphone? The age of the internet? Or the age of the billionaire?

This technological way of talking, of transposing people into the realm of manufactured products and describing them as human types, is hardly new. In the 19th and

20th centuries, Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler took this line of thought to its logical conclusion and taught us to regard human types as distinctive products of each historical period. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche assumed politics created the conditions for the growth of the “plant man” and its highest exemplars, describing philosophers as “rare plants”.

The human type is a seductive, almost inescapable concept. What could be more important than defining and understanding the kinds of human being we hold as models? Did people in the Middle Ages become saints because they lived in the age of cathedrals, or were the cathedrals built because people lived in an age when sainthood provided the ideal for human existence? Did the navigators and explorers of early modern Europe – Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan – simply find their caravels and galleons ready to use, or did they build them so they could pursue their historical mission? These figures seemed to organise themselves into distinct types, even competing among themselves to see who better exemplified them. And then the type as a whole would disappear, to be replaced by a successor myth. Did its representatives learn from previous examples? Did Captain Cook want to be like Columbus? When did young boys stop wanting to be like Captain Cook and start dreaming of becoming a revolutionary, such as the 18th-century Frenchman Jean-Paul Marat or the 19th-century Italian Giuseppe Garibaldi? Today they want to be the new Musk.

The ruling human type in each historical period has taken over from the previous one the task of moving history forward. The saint; the explorer; the lonely scientist; the revolutionary. They seem to be on the right side of history, existing in areas where action is both possible and productive. It is difficult to speak of revolutionaries in ancient Greece, and it might be just as difficult to find a genuine exemplar of the revolutionary alive today, at least outside China, and perhaps Russia (the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has something of Lenin in him). But in 19th-century Europe the revolutionary type thrived. Where there is a ruling human type there is history to be made, but each type belongs to

Tech billionaires could accumulate the power to create a radically unequal and unfree society

their historical period and cannot survive for long once history has moved on.

If we ask about the distinctive human type today, the main candidate is the tech billionaire. The billionaire is not the same as the tycoon. As a type, it expresses a form of radical individualism that would shock the old captains of industry. One wants the billionaire to have whims and personal dreams. When Musk smoked marijuana as a guest on Joe Rogan’s podcast in 2018, it was an act of liberation – but also an educational moment. The billionaire seems to have been granted a particular licence to be himself or herself, to express themselves fully. That cannot be on account of their billions. Andrew Carnegie or John D Rockefeller had a net worth equivalent to many hundreds of billions today, but they were serious and sober. They did not speak for technology, and much less for history. The contemporary billionaire, by contrast, has projects or missions and seems connected to the higher aspirations of mankind: space exploration for Musk, space and eternal life for Jeff Bezos, universal democracy for Mark Zuckerberg or Twitter’s Jack Dorsey.

The billionaire as an ideal type is also a founder. In the mythology created around people such as Zuckerberg or Bezos, they received a mandate from Heaven, unequivocally expressed in an original intimation about the future. And they went through a series of trials meant to test that intimation, almost like chivalric knights in the old Arthurian novels. In one popular account, Zuckerberg was tempted to sell Facebook to Yahoo in 2006 for the incredible sum of \$1bn. He was 22 at the time and stood to gain \$300m personally. As a former Facebook employee put it recently, how could he say no? But according to the myth, Zuckerberg knew something others did not: he had seen the future. By 2006 he knew exactly where Facebook would be ten years later.

The figure of the billionaire is specifically American, because it is in the United States that they find no political rival. We have even seen how the Chinese Communist Party has told Chinese billionaires such as Jack Ma that they should not aspire to become “billionaires” – they should think of the collective rather than themselves. In China the ruling type is still the revolutionary, represented by Xi Jinping, a prodigal son of the Cultural Revolution – so the new cold war is also a clash of types. Can China win its great power competition with the US without tech billionaires? That is the defining geopolitical question of our time.

The billionaire seems best defined as a person with enough money to change the world – the only human being able to rise above the logic of capitalist circulation and



Onward: in 19th-century Europe revolutionary figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte, portrayed here by Jacques-Louis David, changed the course of human history

become the heir to the revolutionary. But because every human type is by definition an ideal, existing billionaires are permanently under the threat of failing to live up to their own status.

Some embrace the failure. Listening to Warren Buffett and the investor Charlie Munger attack Bitcoin at a recent public session, I could not repress the thought: so many billions and so little interest in acting in history. Just the little game of capital accumulation, money creating more money, the product of a mere thing. At the opposite end stands Satoshi Nakamoto, the creator of Bitcoin, whose net worth is forever frozen in the blockchain, not to be used except as pure symbol, a rallying cry for historical change.

No wonder Munger called Bitcoin “disgusting and contrary to the interests of civilisation”.

In the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna takes his pupil through a painful learning process with two main discoveries. First, that human action for the sake of individual goals such as pleasure or money is ultimately void of value. Second, that overcoming these personal goals does not mean replacing them with quiet contemplation or mystical experience. They should be replaced with historical action: effort by the individual to become the carrier of large historical forces in his or her actions. This is the question the figure of the tech billionaire poses: does any other actor have the same

ability to act in history? And is anyone else at greater risk of wasting that ability?

Much has been written about the growth of a new “tech oligarchy” in the US. To use the term “oligarchy” may seem surprising, as the tech giants do not seem to need to exploit political connections for favours or contracts in order to thrive. Yet these oligarchs are also billionaires. They represent a human type. The Faustian bargain they tempt us with goes something like this: leave us alone, allow us to keep our mammoth fortunes – the 20 richest tech titans are worth a combined \$1.2trn – and you may see the future. Bring us down and all you have left is an eternal present.

Facebook, Tesla, SpaceX and Amazon want to change the world, creating new experiences that were once the preserve of science fiction: a privatised global financial system; the colonisation of space; advanced artificial intelligence; autonomous cars that can be summoned across the country using a mobile phone; swarms of delivery drones; and an interface linking the human brain to the internet through a surgical procedure (as Musk described his Neuralink project: “We will painlessly laser-drill the holes into the skull, place the threads, plug the hole with the sensor, and then you go home”).

Bezos, in addition to chairing the Amazon board, runs a spaceflight company called Blue Origin. Among the ideas Blue Origin has considered is the settlement of artificial habitats in orbit around the Earth, each of them with a potential population of one million. Some of these manufactured worlds would be large cities, others natural parks, while others could be uninhabited and contain the most heavily polluting industry. Since the colonies would allow the human population to grow without earthly constraints, the species would realise its potential as never before: “We can have a trillion humans in the solar system, which means we would have a thousand Mozarts and a thousand Einsteins. This would be an incredible civilisation,” Bezos said.

Bezos is also rumoured to be a prominent investor in Altos Labs, a new company pursuing biological reprogramming technology aimed at prolonging human life. In his final letter as CEO to Amazon shareholders this April, Bezos included a quote by the biologist Richard Dawkins: “Staving off death is a thing that you have to work at. Left to itself – and that is what it is when it dies – the body tends to revert to a state of equilibrium with its environment.”

So the question arises: should a modern society use its powers against those whom we expect to bring about the greatest historical transformations? Should it strive to keep things as they are? Or should it give those people free ▶

Cover Story

◀ rein, with all the dangers that could carry for democratic and social values?

It is different in Europe. A European entrepreneur such as those responsible for dozens of unicorns (start-ups valued at more than \$1bn) in fintech or retail is much more likely to cash in their big idea quickly so they can spend their time travelling around the world, having romantic affairs and meeting interesting people. In Silicon Valley they would be mocked as being in the “lifestyle business”. Interestingly, the idea has a certain correlate in capital markets. Maybe finance has become dominant in our societies because we no longer want money to be spent on dangerous historical transformations. As the venture capitalist Peter Thiel points out, finance plays a much more important role if the future is indefinite. In a definite future, money is a means to a specific end such as eternal life or space exploration or intelligent machines. In an indefinite future money is pure choice, never realised in the world. In a world where specific purposes seem too dangerous for social order, finance may become the only game in town. It can be really strange. Someone builds a successful company and sells it. Not knowing what to do with the money, he gives it to a bank. The bank does not know what to do with the money and gives it to a portfolio of institutional investors. Investors give it back to the original investor, and so on – an eternal recurrence (Nietzsche again).

Billionaires are supposed to break that cycle. They have as much money as an investment fund or a portfolio of investors, but they are human beings with passions and dreams and images of the future they want for themselves and others.

The point is that our societies are afraid of the future and trying to find ways to stop the historical clock. That may seem counter-intuitive, but the paradox dissolves once we realise that historical change looks less attractive for those who believe that we already live in a fundamentally just and nearly perfect society. If our societies exist at the end of history and our values express the final development of human reason, the promise of technology to take us to unimaginable futures acquires almost criminal tones. The power and resources needed to satisfy the wildest dreams of the tech oligarchy would usher in a society where an increasingly greater share of economic wealth would be

generated by a smaller group of highly creative people, while everyone else would increasingly subsist on welfare and precarious gig work. To the monopolisation of existing and future industries the tech oligarchs add the control and manipulation of our main sources of information. Unless checked, they could accumulate the power to create a radically unequal and unfree society.

Every ruling type is a bridge between two historical epochs. The saint was a bridge between the classical and medieval worlds. Navigators and explorers such as Columbus were bridges between the medieval and modern worlds. The revolutionary was a bridge between the modern and the contemporary worlds. As for the tech billionaire, he or she stands on the threshold of a future technological world, holding the promise – or the threat – to take us across. But the path is narrow.

Is it too late to dream of a modern society that has all kinds of wondrous technologies at its disposal and never ceases to invent new ones, that also remains committed to the question of what human life is for and how human beings should live, without allowing the answer to be technology?

At one extreme, technology is imposed from above. Society is ruled according to a single, dominant vision of the future and moves in a predetermined direction. Liberal political societies are fragmented and diverse, with social forces moving in different directions, often resulting in a noisy and agitated state of paralysis. But authoritarian societies can move in unison. In this case the transition to a technological world leads to the disappearance of human autonomy and freedom.

At the other extreme, technology becomes the object of social and political resistance, even widespread suspicion. Tech

entrepreneurs are forced to cede control of their core activities to society. This would mean that the full ambition of their projects is sacrificed. Technology is placed in the service of already existing social relations and structures rather than the transformation of social life in its present form.

The middle path is the path of the billionaire, but when Bezos announced he would be flying to space on the first crewed flight of the rocket ship made by Blue Origin, one felt he had decided to evade or postpone the question of historical transformation, making it disappear into mere entertainment. It was like Arjuna telling Krishna that action for the sake of purely personal goals suits him fine after all. Or Prince Henry the Navigator – the 15th-century Portuguese visionary who initiated the so-called Age of Discovery – telling the shipbuilders he had assembled in Lagos in 1420 that the caravels would be used for his personal recreation.

Many were rightfully shocked by the many billions Bezos spent to fly in space, or something close to space, for just four minutes. Why not build a city on Earth, or save thousands of lives by investing in healthcare, or try to bring peace to a troubled area of our own planet? In fairness to him, a certain amount of frivolity was to be expected. If Bezos faced so much difficulty attempting to build a new headquarters for Amazon in New York, how would these larger missions hop over all the regulatory and political barriers in their way? The misalignment of private fortune and larger social purpose is close to complete.

I have met or corresponded with famous tech billionaires such as Peter Thiel or Marc Andreessen several times. More than with great statesmen or artists, there is a somewhat strange expectation that they should be closer to the truth and have an inkling of what the truth is. As Hegel noted after watching Napoleon ride past at Jena in 1806, “I saw the Emperor – this world spirit – go out from the city to survey his realm.” Something like that. The reason, I think, is that a billionaire no longer needs fellow human beings for anything. He has left humanity behind. To go towards something else, one imagines.

So on these occasions I stood there, appropriately silent, waiting that the word be spoken. Which word? I have no idea. I am not a billionaire. The word only they could know. In the end, of course, we know that the billionaire is mute, because history speaks through them, but not in their voice. ●

Bruno Maçães was the Portuguese Europe minister from 2013-15 and is the author of “Geopolitics for the End Time: From the Pandemic to the Climate Crisis” (C Hurst & Co)

KNIGHTS OF THE COFFEE TABLE



“Who among you shall help me vanquish this muffin?”

JEREMY CLIFFE



World View

How a left-liberal German coalition could become a Petri dish for progressivism

In March, I wrote in these pages that “the spectre of a left-led ‘traffic-light’ government is rising in Germany”. The term refers to a coalition of the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the conservative-liberal Free Democrats (FDP), so-called as the parties’ colours are red-green-yellow. I cited the success of one such coalition that had recently won a resounding re-election in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, a wine-growing corner of western Germany on the French border. This unusual marriage of three distinct political-philosophical traditions, I argued, might come to constitute Germany’s next federal government.

It was a fairly outlandish claim at the time. Polling put the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), Angela Merkel’s centre-right political alliance, on 32 per cent, the SPD on 16 per cent and the three prospective parties of a traffic-light government short of a majority. Yet half a year later, in the aftermath of the federal election on 26 September at which the SPD, Greens and FDP all made gains and the SPD narrowly came first, a traffic-light government is the most likely outcome. That would make Olaf Scholz, finance minister and formerly mayor of Hamburg, Merkel’s successor as chancellor.

Two other coalitions are also possible. One is a “Jamaica” coalition of the CDU/CSU, FDP and Greens (so-called as the parties’ colours match the country’s flag). The other is a “grand coalition” of the SPD and CDU/CSU. The parties are discussing their options ahead of potentially months of coalition negotiations. Cannily, the smaller two parties have agreed to talk

together before approaching either of the larger two. If the Greens and FDP can form a common front it will turn the talks into an auction between the SPD, seeking to bring them into a traffic-light coalition, and the CDU/CSU, seeking a Jamaica one.

Building a traffic-light government would not be easy. The SPD and Greens, both under moderate leaderships, have plenty of common ground. But the FDP sits on the right of the European liberal family, more George Osborne than Paddy Ashdown. It is aligned with the centre left on some social policy (legalising cannabis and naturalising migrants, for example) but is far apart on fiscal policy (it wants tax cuts and steely fiscal rectitude, they want more progressive taxation and investment).

Yet a traffic-light coalition is the likeliest outcome. Coming first in a German election does not guarantee the chancellorship, but it helps. It also helps that Scholz is far more popular than the gaffe-prone CDU leader Armin Laschet, and that unlike Laschet he has a relatively united party behind him. If anyone in the SPD can lure the FDP into a centre-left coalition, then it is Scholz.

Moreover, there may be under-appreciated common ground. On election night I spoke at an event hosted by the traffic-light state government of Rhineland-Palatinate and by the liberal-left think tank

Coming first in a German election does not guarantee the chancellorship

Das Progressive Zentrum. Figures close to and within all three of the SPD, Greens and FDP were present and upbeat about the possibility of a deal: “For progressives one question is now important: who won the election?” asserted Hubertus Heil, a bastion of the SPD’s own liberal wing: “The SPD won, the Greens won, and the FDP got a solid result too.”

The outlines of a traffic-light coalition are emerging. The economist Jens Suedekum argues that a sovereign wealth fund could boost investment in green infrastructure within the constraints of Germany’s constitutional “debt brake”, which is designed to limit the federal government’s structural borrowing (and is sacred to the FDP). He suggests that the left might drop its demand for a wealth tax in exchange for a more progressive inheritance tax. The liberals might curb their demand for tax cuts in return for generous allowances for companies investing in digital and green industries. Insiders envisage a Scholz cabinet in which the FDP would hold the finance ministry and the Greens would secure the foreign ministry and a powerful new economy-environment ministry leading the green investment push.

Combine such compromises with common priorities, such as greater investment in the digital state and liberalising social reforms, and it is not too hard to imagine a traffic-light coalition delivering the modernising government that Germany so urgently needs. While certain German red lines on the EU would persist, such as opposition to the necessary integration of the eurozone, such a government could be good for France and the wider union too.

On 27 September, Scholz announced his intention to form a traffic-light government that he said would be “social, ecological, liberal”. In doing so he pointed to the central challenge: to bring those three political traditions together.

But he also captured what would make such a project an exciting prospect. The societal, demographic, environmental and geopolitical crises facing advanced democracies demand elements of all three: a social democratic commitment to cohesion and resilience, a green transformation to contain the climate emergency and a liberal spirit of reform and innovation. If Scholz is able to draw these together into an alliance, that traffic-light coalition could do more than just move Germany forward. It could become a Petri dish for the kind of pluralistic, progressive governments that are needed across the West. ●

The decadent society Why Éric Zemmour, the so-called TV-friendly fascist, believes he can be president of France

By Andrew Hussey

In 2011 Éric Zemmour, the author, broadcaster and provocateur, was found guilty of inciting racial hatred, and in 2018 guilty of inciting hate against Muslims. Another court case is pending over his television statement in 2020 that young lone migrants had no right to be in France, that they were “robbers, murderers and rapists”.

Zemmour, 63, is notorious in France but undoubtedly popular. His books are best-sellers. The most well known, *The French Suicide* (2014), sold 5,000 copies a day in the two weeks after its publication and has since sold more than half a million copies. The book’s central argument is that France has been in decline since the 1970s. The primary cause of this, Zemmour believes, is the influence of the May 68 generation and their descendants, whose progressive ideas on morality, immigration and sexual freedom have destroyed traditional French values. This has

led to the rise of identity politics, which Zemmour sees as a corrosive Anglo-American import into France.

The argument is similar to the one made by the geographer Christophe Guilluy. The difference is that Guilluy writes from the left on the negative impact identity politics is having on working-class communities. Zemmour, on the other hand, is a supporter of the far right, defining traditional French values as belonging to the “bourgeoisie” – the comfortable middle classes who are under threat from non-French cultures.

Zemmour claims that leftist politicians and journalists are now contaminated by the sanctimonious self-hatred of political correctness. The result has been a deference to Islam at the cost of French cultural integrity. Unsurprisingly, Zemmour’s heroes are the “great men” of history whose destiny was to save “the Great Nation”; above

all, he reveres Napoleon Bonaparte and Charles de Gaulle.

Zemmour’s fame is a strange 21st-century phenomenon: he is a media figure rather than the product of the traditional political tribes that dominated French political life until Emmanuel Macron came to power in 2017. Although he is an author (his new book published this month is titled *France Has Not Yet Said its Last Word*) and was until recently a columnist (he left *Le Figaro* on 1 September), he is best known as a presenter on the commentary programme *Facing the News* on CNews, which is described as the Fox News of France.

Zemmour is noted for his sarcasm, unpredictability, finger-jabbing and apparent fearlessness in the face of “the woke left”. According to the journalist Daniel Schneidermann, writing in *Libération*, these qualities have made Zemmour France’s most “TV-friendly fascist”. A poll published in May 2021 reported that Zemmour had taken CNews to a peak of more than a million viewers, surpassing the more mainstream BFMTV channel.

Zemmour is a proficient user of social media, but it is from his TV appearances that he has attracted a cult following among a generation of young right-wingers known as “GZ” or “Génération Z” (the “Z” is for Zemmour). His fans have entertained themselves during pandemic lockdowns by meeting to watch Zemmour on CNews with an early evening apéritif (usually crisps and beer). Génération Z call this “Le ZApéro”, and a website provides a guide to Zemmour’s thoughts on immigration, politics, international affairs and education.

At the time of writing Zemmour has still not announced his bid for the presidency. Rumours that he might run began on 28 June, the day after the second round of the French regional elections. These were characterised by a historic abstention rate (66 per cent) and disappointing results for the leading contenders, Emmanuel Macron, leader of La République En Marche! (LREM), and Marine Le Pen, leader of the Rassemblement National (RN).

As the election results came in overnight, as many as 10,000 posters suddenly appeared across France on the hoardings reserved for political parties during elections, with the slogan “Zemmour Président”. The posters showed a photograph of Zemmour, soberly dressed in statesman-like fashion, and the address of a website calling for him to run for office. Responsibility for the posters was claimed by a group of his supporters, “The Friends of Éric Zemmour”, and celebrated by the militants of Génération Z. Momentum for Zemmour to enter politics has been growing: it now looks as if the well-organised (and mysteriously well-funded) publicity stunt may ▶



ANTHONY GERACE

Right up there: together Éric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen, leader of the Rassemblement National, could be a significant electoral force

Letter from Paris

◀ become a reality. The rumours intensified after Zemmour recently announced that he was leaving *Le Figaro*, as well as his show on CNews.

Zemmour was born in Paris in 1958 to a Jewish Algerian family who arrived in France at the height of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62). He is married to a distinguished lawyer, Mylène Chichportich, who is 62 and was also born in Paris, to a family of Tunisian Jews. Both of them grew up in a France that was seen by North African Jews as a safe haven. This explains much of Zemmour's love of the grandeur of the French past. Chichportich is deliberately discreet when it comes to her husband's public activities and distances herself from his work so that she can maintain her own professional identity. They have three children who are also shielded from their father's work.

Zemmour does not make much of his Jewishness. He has described himself as “a Frenchman of Berber extraction”, and is disliked by many in the French Jewish community. In 2019, in an interview with the writer and showman Bernard-Henri Lévy, Zemmour defended the collaborationist government of Marshal Pétain during the Second World War, claiming that the Pétain regime saved many French Jews. This was met with outrage by historians and Jewish organisations and ended in a court case. Zemmour was acquitted on account of the ambiguity and the context of his wording, fuelling further anger among Jews. Sabrina Goldman, a lawyer for the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism, has alleged that Zemmour is “effectively a Holocaust denier”.

On 26 August Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator for Brexit, announced that he was running as a presidential candidate for the right-wing Les Républicains (LR). Barnier is perhaps less known in France than he is in Britain, and has haughtily dismissed Zemmour as a mere “journalist” and “a hypothetical candidate”. In a recent interview with the *New Statesman*, Barnier said that “I have nothing to do with Zemmour. We do not have the same feelings, convictions or history.” When asked if Zemmour should be permitted to run for the LR nomination, Barnier said: “No way.”

Zemmour's publisher, Albin Michel, dropped him in June, stating that Zemmour

was “changing status” to become a politician rather than a writer. Zemmour has gathered support from intellectuals, in particular the group close to the magazine *Valeurs Actuelles*. Zemmour's most influential supporter is the novelist Michel Houellebecq, who has been photographed with Zemmour at events hosted by *Valeurs Actuelles*; in 2020 he praised Zemmour as the “most interesting avatar” (meaning a symbol of hope) for “Catholics and non-Christians alike”.

Zemmour has spoken out in defence of the theory of “*le grand remplacement*” (“the great replacement”), as popularised by the white supremacist author Renaud Camus. This is a widespread conspiracy theory on the far right that argues that, within a few generations, the white, Judeo-Christian civilisation of Europe will be replaced by “another civilisation”: that French universalism will be replaced by the universalism of Islam (this is the plot of Houellebecq's 2015 novel *Soumission*). In the August edition of *Paris Match*, Zemmour predicted that by 2100, France “will be an Islamic Republic” if the influence of Islam in the country is not halted.

Although it has been the subject of renewed interest among the far right, the theory of “*le grand remplacement*” is one of the defining tenets in the history of French fascism. Its intellectual origins can be traced back to the Catholic journalist Édouard Drumont, who in 1886 wrote a bestseller called *La France Juive* (“Jewish France” – *The French Suicide* of its day), which predicted the destruction of the nation by Jewish people. The idea was also linked to the writings of Maurice Barrès, an extreme nationalist who, a few years after Drumont's book, argued that France would be overwhelmed by the “barbarian” sons and daughters of immigrants.

Zemmour is a provocateur who delights in

outrage, but he is not stupid. He understands history and how to disseminate these old ideas in a contemporary, less toxic way, exploiting the fears and fault lines in modern France over immigration, race and poverty. He has rich if mysterious financial backers (one of these, according to *Libération*, is Charles Gave, a businessman and a firm believer in “*le grand remplacement*”). According to recent polls, Zemmour's standing as a politician is at 11 per cent, equal with the left-wing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. These numbers may change if Zemmour declares his candidacy for president.

The politician who has most to fear from Éric Zemmour is Marine Le Pen. Le Pen has made a strategic decision to “detoxify” the RN and rebrand the party to make it more palatable to centre-right, as well as working-class voters. This has led to the formation of break-away groups from the RN, such as Les Patriotes (The Patriots), led by Florian Philippot, Le Pen's former director of strategy. From the point of view of these hardliners, her strategy is failing.

Zemmour hopes to exploit this fracture in the RN. Perhaps seeking to make a political deal, Robert Ménard, the independent mayor of Béziers, in southern France, invited Le Pen and Zemmour to a dinner in the town on 3 September. Zemmour declined, calling instead for “a public debate”. If a deal between Le Pen and Zemmour can be struck, together they would be an electoral force.

In private, friends close to Éric Zemmour report that he is urbane and witty, with a deep knowledge of French history. His flaw is his craving for public attention. If Zemmour's ego gets the better of him, and he decides to go it alone, he may well be seen as a wrecker rather than the saviour of the French far right. ●



Provocateur: Éric Zemmour arrives at the launch event for his new book in September 2021

PHILIP COLLINS



The Public Square The Conservative coalition is fragile but the party will adapt to hold on to power

The great liberal city of Manchester, one of the last redoubts of the Labour Party, plays host to the Conservatives on 3-6 October. Where better than Albert Square, in the company of a statue of the Victorian free-trade reformer John Bright, for a gathering of a party in the throes of an identity crisis? Some of the attendant Tories still regard themselves as market liberals; others want to conserve the way things are.

The predicament of the Labour Party, caught between its former strongholds in the industrial north of England and its new urban, bourgeois vote, has received a lot of attention since Boris Johnson's Tories won the 2019 election. Sebastian Payne's book *Broken Heartlands* is the latest in what is becoming a small cottage industry on the subject. But less has been said about the identity crisis gripping the Conservatives, which, as household incomes are depleted, might become the story of an autumn of discontent.

The Conservative Party has long had a deep fault line. The Manchester conference centre in which it will meet is near the site where in 1853 Bright's fellow anti-Corn Law campaigner Richard Cobden built the Free Trade Hall as a monument to their great victory for market liberalism. The repeal of the Corn Laws split the Tory party into two factions: the liberals under Peel and the protectionist voices of the merchants. The division is still there now. The row will be heard loudest in conference fringe meetings on planning reform. The market Tory wants more development; the protectionist Tory wants to conserve the landscape.

This division has taken a new form in recent years. In 2019, for the first time in British politics, class was no longer any use in predicting affiliation. The Conservative Party performed better among working-class C2DE voters (48 per cent) than it did among middle-class ABC1 voters (43 per cent), and Labour won 33 per cent in both categories. The new Tory vote is older than it used to be and relatively poorly educated. Labour beat the Tories among those who have a degree by 43 per cent to 29 per cent. Among those voters whose highest level of education is GCSE or lower, the Conservatives beat Labour by more than two to one.

The coalition of Conservative supporters is based on security and protection, bound together by age, education and attitude, and it is about to undergo a severe test. The shortage of HGV drivers, the spike in energy prices, the end of furlough, rent increases, and a significant rise in food prices as the supermarket shelves empty all threaten to cause a serious crisis in the cost of living. A depletion in household income will hurt in Tory-voting places that are far from wealthy.

The crisis runs along the Tory fault line. The protectionist Tory argued forcefully during the long Brexit dispute for policing the border more tightly and reducing immigration. The free-trade Tory retorted that depleting the supply of labour will, in the end, reduce living standards. The dilemma has been posed in the unexpected form of a shortage of lorry drivers. The protectionist Tory is being taught a lesson in supply and demand. Make your country

less attractive to foreign goods drivers and, before long, petrol doesn't get delivered to filling stations and supermarkets run low on food.

This looks like the recipe for a conventional political disaster. The rules of politics really will have been repealed if a loss of household income has no consequences. Yet defying convention is exactly what Johnson offers his party. This is the Prime Minister's great skill: he can talk himself out of contradictions.

It is possible that the Tories' new voters will prove to be resilient. To be a pensioner is no longer a proxy for being poor. In his study of the 2019 election Michael Ashcroft found that among the over-65s the cost of living ranked as the issue of lowest importance. Among their biggest concerns was immigration. It may be that they are able to live with what they wished for.

The prospect that scares the sophisticated Tory strategists, though, is that, even when the fuel scare is over, their vote will simply fade. The Chesham and Amersham by-election gave the party a fright. In July the Conservatives dropped 8 percentage points in seats they held in the south and east of England, according to polling from YouGov. These were all seats that voted Remain in 2016 and have a higher-than-average concentration of university degree holders. Anxious Tories worry that these seats point the way to where Britain is going. The large baby-boomer generation will not be with us long and Britain is becoming a better educated country, which brings with it a greater liberal sensibility. It seems that the old Tory dilemma will slowly be resolved on the liberal side.

The question for the Conservative Party, then, is not whether it can keep its coalition together. The question is whether, when the time comes, the Tories can adapt to a new electorate again. From David Cameron to Theresa May to Boris Johnson, the Conservative Party has shifted in both tone and character. Its flexibility is its elixir.

This is also the trait that most annoys opponents of the Conservatives. For people on the left, to whom principles come naturally, being flexible sounds like an absence of guiding beliefs. To the Tories, who believe in both market liberalism and protectionism, it seems like the necessary pragmatism that makes for political success.

The Conservative coalition is fragile. The cost-of-living crisis is real. But never underestimate the Tories' capacity to reinvent themselves when their grip on power is at stake. ●

Succession and the dark art of satire How Jesse Armstrong created the defining show on American politics and power

By Anna Leszkiewicz

Few people would instinctively describe a 279-foot luxury mega-yacht as a “hell hole”, but Jesse Armstrong is such a person. The second series of his HBO show *Succession* staged its climactic finale on one of the largest you can charter. After two seasons of vicious, whiplash-inducing bids for power, members of the Roy family, an enormously wealthy and influential media dynasty, have been summoned to the ship by their patriarch: the ferocious billionaire Logan Roy, head of “Waystar Royco” (part Disney, part Fox News). The whole gang – “close family, and inflatables, and mimosas, and the CFO, and the general counsel,” quips one passenger – has been assembled in the Mediterranean in order to help Logan decide who will take the blame for a series of historical sexual assaults that occurred on the company’s cruise ships, about which the press has recently learned. It’s less of a family holiday and more, in Armstrong’s words, “a balloon debate”: if a hot air balloon is sinking under too great a weight, who is thrown off the side to allow the rest to survive?

On screen, the Roys are restless; they have to take off their shoes, the champagne is not their favourite, the phone reception is patchy. One character, failing to feign enthusiasm at the prospect of the on-board threesome his wife has organised, says, “There is kind of... death-sentence vibes?” On set, Armstrong was similarly unimpressed by his surroundings. His abiding memory is of sitting in the space they used as a screening room “in the belly of the beast”, rocking from side to side, the air thick with the stench of diesel.

This may not surprise viewers of the series. As the writer and creator (or, to use an American term, the showrunner) of *Succession*, Armstrong is hyper-alert to the most nauseating details of great wealth and power. His characters live in unimaginable comfort, but are never at ease. The threat of Logan’s displeasure stalks them at every turn. Every black-tie dinner, every flight on a private jet, every cocaine-fuelled sex party, every remote corporate retreat is infused with “death-sentence vibes”. Their lives are claustrophobic, not enviable. They are selfish and cowardly; hostile to each other and utterly disdainful of everyone else. *Succession* is not moralistic: known for its brutally comic dialogue, it finds a sick pleasure in barbed insults and flippant cruelty. It refuses to incite our pity or outrage.

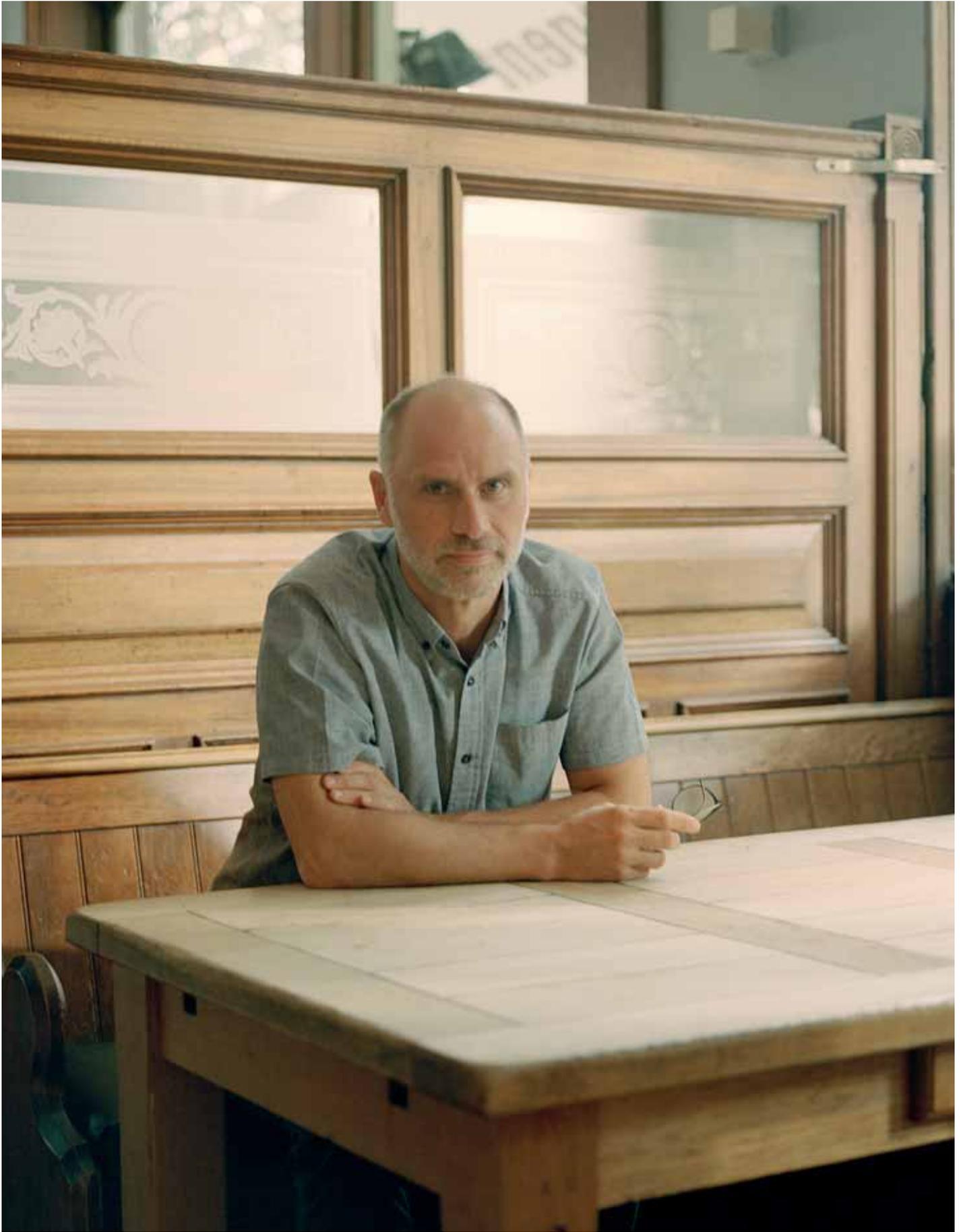
The show’s central question is who the 80-year-old, Lear-like Logan (Brian Cox) will appoint as successor. The most obvious candidates are his three youngest children. Kendall (Jeremy Strong) is a man who, despite his vast fortune and constant efforts, cannot convincingly project authority. Roman (Kieran Culkin) wouldn’t humiliate himself by

trying – provocative and attention-seeking, he instead undermines everyone else. (“What I think [Dad] meant to say was that he wished that Mom gave birth to a can-opener, because at least then it would be useful,” he says to Kendall, whom he also refers to as “a pathetic beta-cuck”.) Logan’s only daughter, Shiv (Sarah Snook), is sarcastic and quietly ruthless. She is married to the much-maligned Tom (Matthew Macfadyen), who, in turn, enjoys torturing Greg (Nicholas Braun), Logan’s great-nephew, who begins the series a gawky outsider. In an early scene, Tom takes Greg aside, whispering, “You need any help – seriously, any help, any advice – just, y’know... don’t fucking bother, OK?”

It’s hard to overstate the extent to which *Succession* has been critically praised. It was labelled “the best show about power in the Trump era” – no small feat for an English writer. Armstrong isn’t exactly famous in the UK, but his name is attached to many of the defining British comedies of the past two decades: *Peep Show*, which he conceived of and wrote with Sam Bain, *The Thick of It*, *Four Lions*, *In the Loop*. When *Peep Show* ended in 2015, Armstrong wanted to do something different. An idea about a media dynasty had been brewing in his mind – his most obvious reference point was the Murdochs, but he was also researching Sumner Redstone, Robert Maxwell, the Rothermeres, Disney infighting and the Mercers.

“I didn’t feel like I was voraciously ambitious to, you know, ‘crack America’ – but I did think it felt like an American show, and scale would be important,” he says. He pitched the idea to HBO, with Adam McKay (*The Big Short*, *Vice*) on board to direct. The network commissioned it without hesitation, and even agreed to let Armstrong run his writer’s room from London. The writing team (half Americans, half Brits) gather to write *Succession* in an office opposite Brixton Tube, near Armstrong’s home.

We meet in early September, in an old-fashioned Victorian pub opposite the rapidly cooling water of Brockwell Lido, where Armstrong often swam, before the pandemic. In a grey button-up and glasses, he is thoughtful, if not totally comfortable with being interviewed and photographed. (“Please be gentle with me if you put any of that in,” he says at one point.) He is still working on the final details of season three, which picks up where the second series left off; reviewing the edits, “watching every cut”. As *Succession*’s showrunner, Armstrong is involved with the series at every stage, “from casting to doing the music”. “You have a lot of responsibility and a lot of power, and if it doesn’t go well, it’s down to you.” His favourite part is the writing: he speaks affectionately about the writers’ ▶



Jesse Armstrong, photographed in London for the *New Statesman* by Hanna-Katrina Jedrosz

The NS Interview

◀ room, which includes British playwright Lucy Prebble (*Enron, A Very Expensive Poison*), Tony Roche (*The Thick of It*), the Hawaiian playwright Susan Soon He Stanton, and Will Tracy, the former editor of satirical news site the *Onion*. “I like it a lot, the atmosphere. Hanging around a lot of really intelligent people for months on end, talking about whatever’s in the news, is fun to me.”

He is also very protective of what happens there. He would never open it up to a documentary crew. “It would totally destroy what’s good about it for me, which is the sealed area of trust.” Inside the room, he loves to analyse his characters and their motivations in detail. Nothing is ever “ambiguous”, even if it ends up being so to the viewer. “I think you’re basically in the bullshit business if you’re like, ‘Let’s do an ambiguous shot.’ There needs to be an answer. The show has a view of how the world works and how peo-

ple work, and that should be expressed in every single line and frame of the show, but it should never be explicitly stated, otherwise it would be turgid propaganda.”

Outside the room, he is reluctant to pick the programme apart. In fact, he can’t bear to. “I hate it, I hate talking about the show or saying what things mean, because I have a sort of 1980s *NME*-reader view that I don’t want to impose it on you, *man*, that you should take what you want from it. In my own experience with films, books, plays, TV, I don’t want somebody telling me what it means, because I think I know, and I want my interpretation to be valid, because it is valid.” He quotes Robert Frost: the show must “ride on its own melting”. He believes in that “mythical thing of trust the tale, not the teller. It’s possible we don’t know what we’re doing!”

Armstrong grew up on anarchic British comedies: *The Young Ones*, *Not the Nine O’Clock News*, *The Day Today* and *I’m Alan Partridge*. Born in 1970, he spent his childhood in Oswestry in Shropshire, a market town near the Welsh border. His father was a teacher at a local further education college, and became a crime novelist in the 1990s; his mother worked in nursery schools. In his childhood home, there was “a lot of respect for the written word”; around the dinner table, the family would debate the merits of different TV shows.

After finishing school, Armstrong went to Manchester University, where he took a degree in American Studies: he liked the idea of spending a year abroad in the US (he spent his in Massachusetts), and the possibility of studying a combination of literature, politics and history. It was at Manchester that Armstrong met his wife, who works for the NHS, and his writing partner Sam Bain. Armstrong and Bain moved in together in their final year at university – an experience they would later use in their sitcom about Manchester University students in a houseshare, *Fresh Meat* – but didn’t start working on scripts together until after university, when they were both living in London.

Armstrong had a handful of jobs in the city – as a washer-upper, and on the checkout in Oddbins. (He remembers an incident when the store was robbed: instead of helping his manager, “I revolved 180 degrees and pretended to be a customer until the incident was over”. (It’s the kind of excruciating experience that would later characterise *Peep Show*.) “I wasn’t about to put my body on the line for the Oddbins corporation.”

In 1995 he started working in Westminster, initially for free, as a researcher for the Labour MP Doug Henderson. It was an exciting time for Labour, but Armstrong was an outsider. “I always felt out of place,” he says. “I

was the guy walking around the edge of the party, sometimes literally, not having anyone to talk to because I didn’t know all the gossip they knew or didn’t know the nasty jokes they were telling each other.” The experience has clearly influenced his writing. “I’m relatively sensitive to the atmosphere of what places are like, what relationships are like, and the feeling of power in rooms,” he says. “Political parties can be pretty interecine, and pretty savage.” One thing he was struck by is how people “become their role: I’m Doug’s guy, and I take on Doug’s views”, he says. “Whose bag you’re carrying becomes who you are.”

While in Westminster, Armstrong was also doing some consultant work for Rory Bremner’s production company, offering the writers insights into the inner workings of government. “They were kind about the fact I seemed to have strikingly similar inside information to the *New Statesman* diary,” he wrote later. While out canvassing in Newcastle North, Armstrong received a call from Bain to say they’d been invited to meet a TV agent – the first step into paid writing work.

At the tail-end of the 1990s, Armstrong was painting and decorating while writing with Bain. In the early Noughties, they got their first jobs on kids’ TV (*My Parents Are Aliens*, *The Queen’s Nose*, *The Story of Tracy Beaker*). Their big break was the cringe-inducing *Peep Show*, starring David Mitchell and Robert Webb as odd-couple flatmates in Croydon. The show gets straight into their heads with point-of-view camerawork and by voicing their internal monologues. “We felt like we *really* better not fuck this up – because not only is this big, but this is basically what makes us laugh, and if it doesn’t make other people laugh, maybe we won’t be able to do this,” Armstrong says of *Peep Show* now. He winces at the memory of the producer Philip Clarke giving them the note: “Could this be funnier?” “Well, we checked, Phil, and no, it couldn’t – that is the funniest.” Many viewers and critics agreed: in 2007 the *Guardian* declared it the best comedy of the decade, and it went on to become Channel 4’s longest-running sitcom. There are few similarities between *Peep Show* and *Succession*, but the “extra shot of veracity” leant by the camerawork of *Peep Show* led Armstrong to the documentary-derived handheld camerawork of *Succession*.

Peep Show had been on TV for a couple of years, and Armstrong was researching a film at a magicians’ conference in Eastbourne, when he received a call from Armando Iannucci, who was working on a political sitcom. Armstrong joined the writing team on Iannucci’s *The Thick of It*, which shares *Succession*’s affinity for creative insults. Iannucci “had an instinctive sense of how much of the





Heir raising: Logan (Brian Cox) and Shiv Roy (Sarah Snook) in *Succession*

real political climate we could include and what was over the edge”, Armstrong says. “I learned a lot from him about how to build semi-permeable walls between the culture and your show.”

Both these programmes are hailed as classic examples of “British humour”, but Armstrong is sceptical about the idea that Americans and Brits have radically different approaches to comedy. “It’s bullshit,” he says. “My favourite dramas, *Six Feet Under* and *The Sopranos*, are shot through with what I would call social satire... *The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld* – who are we kidding? Have we got some secret sauce? No, I don’t buy that.”

Armstrong follows politics on both sides of the Atlantic closely. In the mid-Noughties, he was a *New Statesman* contributing editor, and wrote a satirical column on the week in politics. He notes key differences between our media landscapes. “The UK has some institutional factors, the BBC and Channel 4 among them, which gives you a sense of cultural referees and centre-ground. That makes it feel different from the US, which feels more worrying.” He is anxious about government plans to privatise Channel 4. “I think they should worry Tories as well,” he says. “Competition is a healthy force in lots of areas of life, and broadcasting’s one of them. If Channel 4 becomes another Channel 5 with a couple of extra restrictions on how much news they can show, it won’t be good for the BBC, it won’t be good for the landscape of British broadcasting. It’s another

violent, aggressive act that I think they will regret even under their own terms.”

Armstrong is deeply concerned by the current British government. “The question is, is it quite a bad government or is it terrifying? Boris Johnson seems to have a disregard for things that happen in the real world. Sometimes, that feels like a public school insouciant disregard that we’ve seen before. Sometimes it seems more like a Trumpian disregard for the nature of reality, and a willingness to do violence to historical precedent and the political culture.”

It’s a callousness we see in so many of *Succession*’s characters. They frequently describe their experiences of being humiliated in business as being “fucked”, “killed”, or “raped”. But the real sexual or violent crimes of senior Waystar Royco employees are justified with

“In a private jet, it’s difficult to believe in the experiences of other people. That’s a terrible consequence of great wealth”

a haunting acronym “NRPI” – “No Real Person Involved”. If the victim wasn’t rich or famous, the crime doesn’t really count. “You only have to inhabit the 70th or 80th floors of those buildings to learn that people look small down below,” Armstrong says. “It’s just a thing that happens when you don’t walk on sidewalks and you’re in the private jet. It’s difficult to believe in the lived experiences of other people. That’s a terrible danger – more than danger, a consequence – of great wealth.”

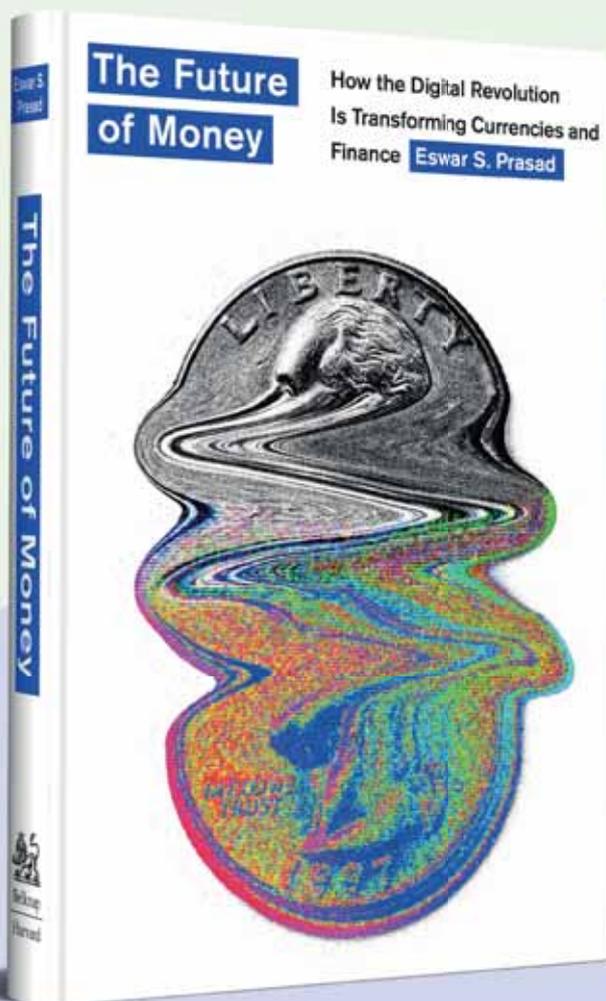
The last series of *Succession* ended with an act of retaliation so purely thrilling it made me shiver with pleasure. An unexpected betrayal, a raising of stakes, and a mic-drop of a closing speech made for one of television’s most perversely satisfying cliffhangers. So when you write a sequence like that, do you *know* how good it is? Armstrong squirms. He can’t remember. He’s very bad at remembering anything about his whole life. He seems keen to avoid seeming pretentious, but to me his hesitation confirms the answer. “Sometimes I have very strong emotions when writing,” he admits. “Sometimes you do, yeah. And it’s a nice feeling.” He turns away. “Anyway, it’s a bit disgusting to go on about that.”

The third season of *Succession* picks up as this rift splits the family, forcing everyone to take a side. The Roy siblings must decide whether to support their father or unite against him. Logan is scared, pacing like a wild animal: in his words, he chooses “full fucking beast”. But *Succession* inevitably risks outgrowing its premise. When a successor is named, the show will hit a wall; if the decision is forever postponed, it will run out of steam. “There’s going to be a very definite moment when that story is over,” Armstrong says, “and it can’t go on too long. I think there’ll be an end for me in this incarnation of the show in...” he pauses. “In a bit.”

The lives of Armstrong’s characters seem so stressful, you wonder why they don’t just quit the company. But the idea of Kendall, Roman or Shiv finding a normal job is, he says, “as plausible as you thinking, ‘Maybe I’ll retrain and become an astronaut.’ Maybe you could do it. It’s possible. But it’s not going to happen. Once you’re in that proximity to power and wealth... I mean, you can become a drug addict, you can fuck it up, you can try and escape – but they’re all just escapes from the thing, and the thing is so exciting, such a warm place round the fire. It not only gives you a sense of identity, it thrusts an identity on you that’s inescapable. So, if you relax, the knot tightens, and if you struggle, the knot tightens. You’re just bound to it.” ●

The third series of “Succession” begins in the UK on 18 October on Sky Atlantic and Now

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“The cry, ‘If I can’t, you mustn’t’, had some trace of justification, however sullen and unlovely the sound of it,” wrote the novelist Simon Raven in 1998. “Nowadays we hear instead an even less lovely cry, ‘If I don’t want to, you mustn’t’: ie, ‘It is just possible that I am, after all, missing out on something of value which you have been shrewd enough to detect and I haven’t, and that wouldn’t be fair and equal, now would it?’”

I wish I’d had this quote to hand the night a drunken fellow student urged me to “value” myself more than go home with a man I’d just met, insisting casual sex was immoral. In the decade since I ignored his advice I’ve often wondered why it is some people so desperately want to tell others what to do. If Raven was exasperated in 1998, I dread to think what he would have made of today’s keyboard warriors virtue-signalling on everything from Brexit to pronouns to proper grammar, or the way our identities have become cultural battlegrounds, or the newspaper headlines ranting about how Meghan Markle’s fondness for avocados is “fuelling human rights abuses, drought and murder”.

The censorious have always lived among us, from Cato decrying the spread of Hellenic culture throughout Rome to the Puritans closing down London’s playhouses. We might like to think our liberal, secular society is immune to such sanctimony. But once you start looking, you’ll find the anti-Ravenist moralisers everywhere. The pandemic has brought them out. Behaviour that has no impact on Covid transmission – sunbathing, taking children to a playground, declining to wear a mask outside – has been condemned as irresponsible and unethical. It is interesting that, during the first lockdown in 2020, resting on a park bench would attract a slew of judgemental glares and perhaps even a police warning; yet the entire country was urged to step outside every Thursday in close proximity with our neighbours in order to clap for the NHS.

Later that summer, mass demonstrations for the Black Lives Matter movement began in UK cities – with some of the staunchest social media admonishers breaking their own strict Covid code to join in. A worthy cause, I thought, but weren’t some of these activists berating teenagers for sitting in the park just a week earlier, on the grounds that they posed a risk to others? Had that risk evaporated now there was racial injustice to correct? Or is it possible it was never as risky as their scolding suggested?

RACHEL CUNLIFFE



Out of the Ordinary Encouraged by Covid, the morality police are out to tell us what we can and can’t do

I don’t blame the lockdown policers for their overzealousness. People were terrified, beset by a feeling of helplessness at a moment of national crisis. And for some, the way to alleviate helplessness is to exert whatever control they have: fiercely restricting their own actions and resorting to moral pressure to compel everyone else to do the same.

But something has gone wrong when we privilege that morally coded coercion, when we don’t question the harm-based claims reached for by those seeking to control our conduct. It hurts us and it holds us back. In terms of Covid, maybe it would be easier to have a sensible conversation about moderate measures such as vaccine passes if the alarmists didn’t call for a return to full lockdown every time someone caught a cough.

Or look at the UK’s misguided drugs policy. We ban individuals from making personal choices about substances that are less harmful than alcohol, nicotine or even caffeine, while handing power to criminal gangs and incarcerating non-violent drug users. The available evidence suggests the war on drugs causes far more harm than it allays, but we let the prohibitionists set the terms of the argument, causing untold misery.

Then there’s the campaign by Christian

lobbyists to prevent sex workers from making a living on the online platform OnlyFans (the campaign was briefly successful, before the company U-turned). Women apparently don’t deserve a safe space to achieve financial independence if people disapprove of the work they do. The lobbyists’ concerns over some OnlyFans workers being underage or victims of trafficking ring hollow; sexual exploitation increases when sex workers are driven underground. The safety of the women they wanted to force off the platform clearly mattered less to them than their aim of ending pornography. It’s “If I don’t want to, you mustn’t” all over again.

I can’t help but see the same idea at the radical fringes of the environmental movement – activists who ignore technological solutions such as carbon capture, nuclear power or lab-grown meat, but who champion “degrowth” no matter how many people would be pushed into poverty, or even “voluntary human extinction” (that we stop having children). Do they really believe the hair shirts they insist on wearing will better solve the climate crisis than the full force of human ingenuity?

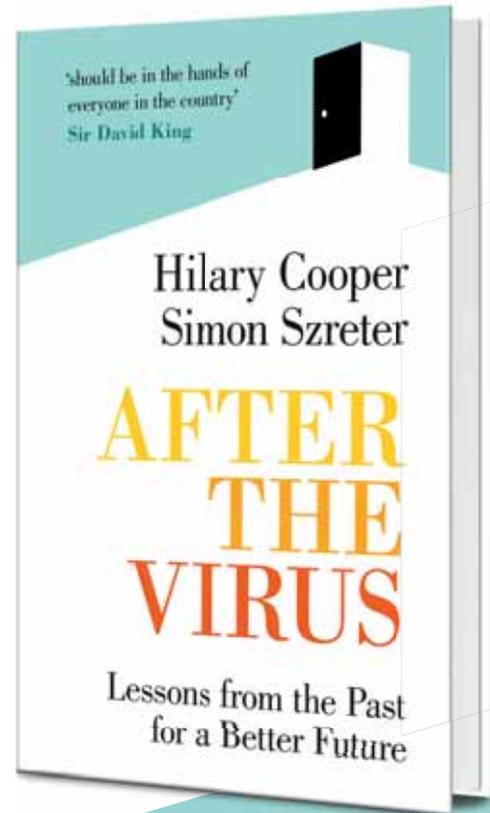
To those who don’t want to take drugs or watch porn or have casual sex, who will shun nightclubs and pubs long after the pandemic has ended, or who adopt a meatless, childless, pre-industrial standard of living, I have this to say: congratulations on your self-restraint. But the pleasures you reject don’t make you a better person, and nor does trying to deny them to others. And if I make different choices, it’s not my morals that are at issue: it’s your insecurity. ●

Denying others the pleasures you reject doesn’t make you a better person

AFTER THE VIRUS

Lessons from the Past
for a Better Future

Hilary Cooper and Simon Szreter



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Sir David King, former UK Chief Scientific Adviser and Climate Envoy, Chair of Independent SAGE

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THE CRITICS

Books Samuel Moyn on why Donald Trump still haunts American politics. 38

Books Emily Jones on the fight for the tradition of conservatism. 42

Critic at large Robert Colls on why boxing is more theatre than sport. 50

Film Ryan Gilbey on David Lowery's retelling of *Gawain and the Green Knight*. 53

Television Rachel Cooke on a frank look at Labour under Blair and Brown. 54

Radio Anna Leszkiewicz on a new series exploring our national housing crisis. 55

Shutting down the circus

In Michael Wolff's latest dispatch from Trumpworld, a fantasist president finds himself isolated. Will Donald Trump be back?

By Samuel Moyn

“He hasn't gone, has he?” asks Harry Potter, about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. “Call him Voldemort, Harry,” responds Dumbledore the magician. “Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.”

The US has had no problem naming Donald Trump for decades, conjuring the agent of its own degradation. But since Joe Biden's inauguration on 20 January this year (or even 8 January, when Twitter suspended its most notorious user), liberals have been in Harry Potter's situation: knowing Trump can come back, and fearful of what will happen if he does.

Michael Wolff has been the Trump-obsessive's chronicler since *Fire and Fury* became the bestselling record of a presidency in 2018. Unlike less flamboyant journalists of yesteryear, Wolff's hectic style is a match for Trump's carnivalesque mode of statesmanship. A joker with instincts for melodrama and the purplest of prose, Wolff has good sources inside government and stories you could not make up. *Landslide*, the follow-up to *Fire and Fury*, is an absorbing account of the “final days” of Trump's presidency – at least those of his first term – and exposes the risk that American liberals could get so lost in the subplot of Trump's election high jinks that they do not prepare for what is coming.

Amazingly, Trump continued talking to Wolff even after the journalist could no longer pretend to be the kind of courtier the president demanded his circle to be. Wolff confirms beyond doubt that Trump attempted what Latin Americans call a “self-coup” – a seemingly legal, indefinite extension of power by a sitting executive before their term is up – starting even before the November 2020 election. Trump cast about

in the hope someone would save him from his looming defeat. The failure of the self-coup, which was intended to take place through processes such as calling the legitimacy of the election into doubt and having friendly judges and lawmakers overturn the results, left nothing but the possibility of a real coup to save Trump.

Wolff adds that Trump's further descent into his characteristic foibles set up the denouement. In this critical period, as the election neared and then the aftermath played out, it was, he writes, a “White House of one”. Having banished any individual willing to interrupt his fantasies, with underlings scurrying around like George III's servants indulging his manias, the weakling president became even less powerful than he had been all along. All Trump had was his obscure connection to the core of followers he had accumulated through his anti-elitism, misogyny and racism. Alongside the performative antics, this allowed him to convert US politics more fully into entertainment.

The self-coup that Trump desperately wanted never congealed, according to Wolff's narrative, into a definite plan. Instead, there was an anarchy of “freelancers” undertaking crackpot schemes that regularly fizzled out. Part of the irritation (or pleasure) of *Landslide* is the parade of non-entities Wolff conducts through his narrative, a story of a jumbo planet and near-infinite minor satellites whizzing in its orbit.

Wolff observes that the “stop the steal” rhetoric – decrying the illegitimacy of the vote – itself emerged from a decision not to contest the election on policy grounds. Trump, says Wolff, hoped that the election was “not necessarily a win or lose proposition” but “a roadblock or technicality to get around”. The US is fortunate Trump lost the election because he didn't really try to win it. Fanatically devoted for months to the mystical notion that showing up in person at the polls is the only legitimate manner of voting, Trump probably struck the biggest blow against his campaign.

After narrating the agonies endured by Trump's staffers on election night, 3 November 2020, Wolff reveals the plan to snatch victory at the last was as much chosen as suffered. From the start, Trump had opposed mail-in voting, though these votes might have helped him win the election. After he lost, Trump nonetheless tried to cast aspersions on the practice, hoping that it might stir up enough scepticism about the result that the self-coup could work.

Three days after the election, both Trump's campaign director and his own son-in-law, Jared Kushner, told him there weren't going to be enough votes to “find” to change the results in states that mattered. Trump refused to concede. But the major national news networks, having been browbeaten into waiting to announce the result, finally called the election the next day. The loss was now irretrievable.

Rudy Giuliani, the grizzled former mayor of New York City – once popular for his charisma in the days after 9/11 (and known for his overzealous policing of African Americans) – took the lead as the public face of Trump's zany “plot”. “Rudy is Rudy, and Donald is Donald,” commented Roger Ailes, no less, the

Landslide: The Final Days of the Trump Presidency
Michael Wolff
Little, Brown,
336pp, £20



ALEX WILLIAMSON

◀ sulphurous founder of Fox News, in 2016. “Together that’s an equation which adds up to a loss of contact with most other rational people, if not reality itself.”

The rest of “Trumpworld” hated Giuliani and struggled unsuccessfully to keep the two men from spinning the fantasy of a *folie à deux*. The participation of liberals and the media in the alternative reality the two built over the next month was necessary and understandable, since ultimate power was at stake. But it also gave their tomfoolery more credibility. Even so, Trump’s attorney general William Barr, who’d tolerated the president’s idiosyncrasies in his quest to protect the executive power of the leader’s office, “formally checked out of the Trump circle”, Wolff writes, announcing on 1 December that there was no electoral fraud.

There may never have been a genuine chance of Trump’s addled dreams of a self-coup coming true. A dispassionate look at the evidence shows Trump didn’t even come close – blocked principally by his own factotums and Republican Party officials across the land, including the right-leaning judges he appointed.

Nor was the storming of the Capitol on 6 January symbolic of a kind of victory for Trump. The mob that entered the Capitol building consisted of the “radically faithful”, a ragtag band made up of the laughable and the scary alike. Unlike the tens of thousands involved in the most famous communist and fascist coups of the past – the October Revolution of 1917 or the March on Rome five years later – Trump’s endgame was marred by military opposition to his plans, which were foiled by his powerful partisan allies in the executive and the legislature; not just Barr, but also the then vice-president Mike Pence and the Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell.

McConnell had coyly waited to interfere with Trump’s reveries, which led to disaster planning for a scenario in which Congress – with no evidence whatsoever – might act to invalidate the election when it met on 6 January to certify the Electoral College results. This was not because he liked Trump. Wolff writes that “it was impossible to overstate the hatred” McConnell had for him – this tension being “a central, if unseen drama of the Trump years”. On 15 December McConnell congratulated Biden as the next president. The following month, both he and Pence refused Trump’s blandishments and ultimately certified Biden’s victory. McConnell emerges as the institutional victor of the presidency, fighting Trump’s attempt to alter America’s military posture by withdrawing troops while achieving both the tax cuts and reactionary judiciary that mattered most to the senator, before helping deliver the *coup de grâce* to the self-coup. We now know that a conservative operative devised a plan for Pence, in his role as president of the Senate, to prevent the election certification from occurring. Pence chose not to do so, though the price was the end of his political career.

“Politics could not be pure caprice or farce, could it?” Wolff wonders in an earnest moment, as if his own style of journalism had not done a great deal to focus attention on precisely those dimensions of Trump’s

The NS Poem

Against Resting in Peace Gboyega Odubanjo

there you go telling me what to do still like i
ain’t been here listening i washed my ass took
my vitamin d i voted phoned my mum twice a
week bought my man outside the station hot
drinks i deleted social media turned off the tv
i didn’t just read the headline i didn’t say
anything i knew it would harm my defence i
didn’t go to bed upset i signed the petitions
i didn’t cross the picket line didn’t walk
under ladders i texted you when i got home
i kept my hands where you could see them i
supported independent bookshops dealers
the youth i drank fourteen units of alcohol a
week eight glasses of water a day one glass of
warm milk before bed i fucking i didn’t expect
you to say it back i just said it because i meant
it at the time honestly i’m okay now i’m six feet
one point eight two metres two yards deep
and you still want me to listen peace you say

Gboyega Odubanjo is a British-Nigerian poet born and raised in east London. His latest pamphlet is “Aunty Uncle Poems” (The Poetry Business)

reign. Even so, Wolff is right that Trump is not gone. He will run for president again, the myth of the “steal” having survived its easy shattering the first time around.

Yet, in the time since Biden took office, Democrats have mainly transcended any obsessive fascination with the scene Wolff summons. In a divided country, Trump could come close enough in 2024 to the presidency – or win it. If so, the key is to take the sources of his appeal seriously. The question is whether Democrats will go far enough, as their own coalition fails to take radical action to rethink the social contract. De-platforming Trump helped the Democrats, but not so much that it has given them an unassailable electoral majority.

Generations of misbegotten policies stoking civic division, leading to endless war and inequality, are the Horcruxes – the magical objects – that power and protect Trump. The imperative is to destroy them before it is too late, and before Trump’s return concludes very differently than Harry’s vanquishing of Voldemort did. ●

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Inventing the Tories

The history of conservatism is one of adaptation – but its present is defined by an intellectual void

By Emily Jones



Not for turning: One Nation conservatism proved a useful foil for Thatcher

In 1955, TS Eliot posed a question to the London Conservative Union: “what is the literature of conservatism?” Eliot was asking which writings established “what conservatism is”. He recognised that the task at hand was one of construction. Eliot argued that while some political traditions are built around a central text or canon, others find themselves in the reverse situation – of having had a history before their tenets were fully clarified. So it was with conservatism. Eliot tasked each generation with the job of identifying and promoting – and where necessary modifying, even adulterating – conservative principles.

Eliot developed his own curriculum. He lifted his principal figures from those cited in the “admirable little book”, *Conservatism*, published in 1912 by Lord Hugh Cecil, the youngest son of the former prime minister Lord Salisbury. These were Henry, Viscount Bolingbroke; Edmund Burke; Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Benjamin Disraeli – three Tories and a Whig (Burke). The survival of conservatism, Eliot insisted, depended on its contemporary interpreters.

Edmund Fawcett’s *Conservatism: The Fight for Tradition* is similarly concerned with the question of what conservatism was and is, and assembles its own cast. An *Economist* journalist and self-described “left-wing liberal” – and uncle to Boris Johnson – Fawcett is also interested in tracing how conservatism has developed alongside democracy and liberalism (the subject of Fawcett’s 2014 history, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea*).

In Fawcett’s analysis, the French Revolution in 1789 was both a founding moment and a false start. Fawcett rightly observes that conservatism was not “founded” with the publication of Burke’s critique of the Revolution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): it wasn’t until the 1830s that the term gained currency as a political label. The principles of the Burkean tradition – a belief in the organic nature of society and politics (hence a dislike of abstract theory); reverence for history and tradition; respect for religion, property and order – were collated at the turn of the 20th century.

Fawcett covers the last two centuries, spanning four countries. In Britain we encounter Conservative premiers from Robert Peel to Boris Johnson, as well as intellectual misfits, such as Coleridge and Roger Scruton. In France, we meet royalists, revanchists and anti-Dreyfusards; in Germany, the early translator of Burke, Friedrich Gentz, and members of *Alternative für Deutschland*. In the US, the Southern Agrarians of the 1930s join Goldwater Republicans and anti-intellectual paleoconservatives.

For Fawcett, liberalism stands for progress, individualism, democracy, while conservatives, viewing society as an organism, express concerns for its moral and cultural decay. They adapt well to democracy, but they don’t really like it. The book concludes with a discussion of the rise of the radical right; Fawcett eschews the term “far right” in favour of “hard right”, given that these views no longer occupy the fringes.

For Fawcett, liberals move first and conservatives respond. The notion of progress and reaction is appealingly simple. But it’s not entirely clear how this

BETTMANN

helps us to understand British Toryism, for instance, whose roots lie in the 17th century, nor the relationship between conservatism and socialism. The push-pull dynamic also omits contradictions within traditions: “progressive” 19th-century liberals advocating reform in their own countries were much less democratically minded when it came to colonial subjects.

The focus on high politics and a certain type of intellectual also produces a very male canon – save for figures such as Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Rally in France, and Margaret Thatcher. In Britain, until relatively recently, it was widely assumed that most women were predisposed to conservatism – more homely, devout, and attached to the status quo than worldly, rational liberal men. Female writers circulated conservative ideas, as with the popular religious writer Hannah More’s anti-revolutionary *Village Politics* (1792), and women were often the target of 20th-century Conservative political literature.

Conservatism, like most political ideologies, often acquired coherence only in retrospect. Burke, who died in 1797, was not anointed as the “founder of conservatism” until the end of the 19th century. The terms “left” and “right” gained currency, in an anglophone context, in the years that followed the 1917 Russian Revolution. They were attractive not only for their flexibility and reach – their ability to link Tories with Republicans against socialists and communists – but for the glut of visual metaphors and wordplay they provided for mass audiences who enjoyed a pun. The left, the Conservative politician Quintin Hogg informed his readers in 1945, was never right. It was Stanley Baldwin, the interwar Conservative prime minister, who invented the phrase “One Nation”, not Disraeli, with whom the term is widely associated.

The trajectory of One Nation conservatism demonstrates how political traditions create myths that can be useful to both adherents and opponents. The legacy of Disraeli, whose paternalistic Toryism was rooted in national institutions such as the monarchy and the Anglican church, was transformed in the decades following his death in 1881 by conservatives seeking an alternative tradition to an anti-revolutionary Burkean conservatism. One Nation conservatism was, and remains, attractive for its capacity to show concern for the welfare of ordinary people, seek to alleviate social problems and defuse social tensions in order to preserve existing institutions and systems of power. But “One Nation” also served as a useful foil for dissident voices within the party, such as Thatcher, who defined her beliefs – in private enterprise, monetarism and her own “Victorian values” of self-help and hard work – against the policies of the “wets”, who compromised with the unions.

Every decade or so conservatism enters into crisis. Since the end of the Cold War and, in Britain, the collapse of Thatcherism, conservatives have been seeking a new lodestar. Anti-Europeanism has helped to plug the gap in recent years, though disputes over trade deals, tariffs and food prices have a long history of disrupting British conservatism, as in Peel’s decision

to repeal the Corn Laws in 1846 and the formation of the protectionist Tariff Reform League in 1903.

In the run-up to the Conservative leadership contest in July 2019, ConservativeHome asked each candidate to complete the following sentence: “Conservatism is...”. For the majority of respondents – which included Michael Gove, Sajid Javid, Johnson, Dominic Raab and Matt Hancock – equality of opportunity and individual choice were the runaway winners. Only Rory Stewart produced something recognisable as a six-point philosophy of conservatism in the mould of Cecil: “limited constitutional government, individual rights, trust in tradition, love of country, prudence in foreign policy, and restraint at home”. Yet, Stewart concluded, this could now be summed up in just one word: “love”.

Like Eliot, Fawcett’s aim is to stress the importance of thought and action by successive generations to ensure the survival of political traditions. The tradition which most concerns Fawcett is liberal democracy, and the threat to it posed by the hard right. Liberal democracy, he argues, can’t be taken for granted and will only endure through eternal vigilance. It is essential, Fawcett insists, to provoke “moderate conservatives” into a more energetic attitude to their inheritance. The “fight for a tradition” is, Fawcett believes, two-sided: conservatives must protect values and institutions from their opponents, but there is also an internal struggle for “ownership of their own political tradition”.

Fawcett accuses both Johnson and Theresa May of behaving “like populists” in favouring cronies, bullying critics and attacking judges whose rulings they dislike. Indeed, Johnson claims to be a One Nation Conservative. But in the context of a decade of slashed funding for public services, revelations surrounding PPE contracts, and legislation, such as the Health and Social Care Levy, that still leaves social care in crisis, what has Johnson’s rhetoric amounted to? Long-standing inequalities and the social devastation caused by the pandemic are unlikely to be addressed through “levelling up” – even with a task force devoted to it – or the artificial fashioning of a “culture war”.

Fawcett maintains that there is “nothing eternal” about liberal democracy. I would add that there is nothing eternal about conservatism either. The dearth of serious ideas to match the challenges of the present is reflected in the personalised singularity of modern “isms” common in political writing: “Johnsonism”, “Starmerism”, “Trumpism”.

The task at hand remains one of reconstruction and invention. This means asking, 30 years on from the end of the Cold War and with the anti-European itch apparently relieved, what conservatism – as both a body of thought and a working political tradition – offers to our national politics and intellectual life today. ●

Emily Jones is a historian of modern Britain and the author of “Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism” (Oxford University Press)

**Conservatism:
The Fight for a
Tradition**
Edmund Fawcett
Princeton
University Press,
544pp, £30

Since the end of the Cold War and Thatcherism, the Tories have been seeking a new lodestar



Globalisation and its discontents

An interconnected world promises innumerable benefits, but brings dangers too

By Freddie Hayward

It was once thought the internet would democratise information, communication and, in turn, politics. The prediction held true for a while, but as the Noughties progressed, the internet was repurposed. It became an exploitative form of hyper-capitalism in America, a tool of state surveillance in China, and a weapon to subvert other states in Russia.

The misplaced faith in the benign effects of the internet was mirrored in the broader story of globalisation. The belief that a single liberal world order would corral belligerent states into a democratic peace was widespread. Likewise, international trade was championed as a guarantor of interdependence and thus an antidote to war.

One of the strengths of Mark Leonard's *The Age of Unpeace* is a willingness to upend this faith in the infallibility of globalisation. Leonard, the director and co-founder of the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, argues that the surge in connectivity over the past few decades (international trade and travel, the internet, mass migration, intergovernmental institutions) is causing conflict rather than preventing it. These ever-growing connections have been weaponised by states looking to inflict harm while avoiding the carnage of traditional warfare.

The Age of Unpeace
Mark Leonard
Bantam Press,
240pp, £18.99

Above: Xi Jinping in 2019. The US is pursuing a policy of "decoupling" from China

The internet, for instance, is used for cyber attacks as well as a tool to subvert democratic systems. (From autumn 2016 until spring 2019 there were attempts to interfere with national elections in 20 democracies representing 1.2 billion people.)

Elsewhere, Turkey has used the threat of sending millions of refugees and migrants into the EU to extract billions of euros in aid. The US uses the supremacy of the dollar to harm its adversaries through the global financial system. Iran is avoiding conventional war with Saudi Arabia and instead using regional proxies, cyber attacks and drones directed at oil facilities. Borrowing from academics such as Oxford University's Lucas Kello, Leonard describes the present as the "age of unpeace" – an apt phrase for an era in which wars between states are uncommon but conflict is endemic.

Leonard adroitly captures the evolving trends in geopolitics over the past decade. He argues that the three main powers – the US, China and Europe – are all reacting to the dangers that connectivity poses. The US is pursuing "decoupling" from China, which in turn is trying to insulate itself through a "dual circulation" economy (expanding domestic demand while remaining open to the outside world), while the EU searches for "strategic autonomy". The best strategy to prevent a descent into perpetual conflict, Leonard contends, is by "disarming connectivity" through, among other things, establishing new international rules on potential areas of conflict, such as technology, and seeking greater democratic consent.

Leonard does not blame globalisation only for conflict between states; he believes it is behind the growing division within our societies too. "Happily ensconced within my own bubble," the veteran internationalist writes, "I was not confronted with the growing inequality, envy and sense of loss of control that connectivity was fuelling in parallel bubbles." In one intriguing chapter, he explores the paradox that connectivity both brings us together and drives us apart. While social media, for instance, can enable empathy, it can also atomise users into ever-smaller communities.

Leonard's argument is all the more compelling because of the way his own beliefs have evolved. Brought up in Brussels with a strong sense of his European identity, Leonard intended to write a "defence of the open world" but instead wrote about globalisation's betrayal of its original promise. "The more I've tried to understand our politics," he writes, "the more I've become uneasy with the idea that we can ever resume progress towards 'one world'."

Although the transition from memoir to geopolitical analysis can at times feel jarring, Leonard's anecdotes – from conversations with Turkey's President Erdogan to visiting Facebook's headquarters – add an immediacy to his theory that is sometimes absent from the academic sources Leonard channels so well. *The Age of Unpeace* is valuable in its analysis of the reality of international politics, but also as an example of the changing mindset of those whose faith in globalisation is beginning to weaken. ●

Reviewed in short

Conclave 1559: The Story of a Papal Election

by Mary Hollingsworth

Head of Zeus, 320pp, £25

When the unloved Pope Paul IV died in August 1559, the conclave of cardinals that met to choose his successor was short on holiness. Each of the 47 clerics present swore an oath calling on Christ to witness “that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected”. The leeway in the wording was abused in the name of three competing factions – Spanish, French and Italian – and proceedings came to a standstill. The conclave lasted 16 weeks before Giovanni Angelo Medici was elected as Pius IV, by which time one cardinal had died, the rule that the cardinals should have no communication with outsiders was in tatters, and the Holy Spirit had gone missing.

One cardinal, Ippolito d’Este, left a detailed account of proceedings and the Renaissance scholar Mary Hollingsworth uses it as the basis for her rich, full history of the politicking and personalities of the conclave. She weaves into her telling everything from the opposing factions and bargaining to the food eaten and the furniture brought into the Sistine Chapel for the duration. It makes for a fascinating narrative of the intermingling of secular and religious power.

By Michael Prodder

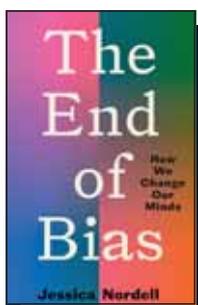
Misfits: A Personal Manifesto by Michaela Coel

Ebury Press, 128pp, £9.99

The work of the writer and actor Michaela Coel is not the kind you linger over, but the kind you swallow in a single gulp. So it feels fitting that her first book, *Misfits*, is a short but impactful, director’s-cut version of her James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture (an hour-long speech given annually at the Edinburgh International Television Festival), adding detail about how she formulated it and her reflections three years on.

When Coel delivered the lecture in 2018, it went viral for its transparency about her experience of racism, classism and misogyny working in the UK media, as well as growing up on a council estate in London’s Square Mile. In it, she disclosed that she was sexually assaulted while writing an episode for her Channel 4 cult comedy, *Chewing Gum* – an experience that informed the storyline of her Emmy-winning drama series *I May Destroy You* (Coel starred in both shows). In *Misfits* this narrative is given the rhythm and flow of speech; reading, you feel as though you were hearing it live. The book is slim and largely a transcript of the original lecture, but the prologue and epilogue give valuable context, breathing new life into a piece of writing that remains as relevant as it is powerful.

By Sarah Manavis



The End of Bias: How We Change Our Minds

by Jessica Nordell

Granta, 368pp, £20

Despite what readers might infer from its title, *The End of Bias*, the first book by the American science and culture journalist Jessica Nordell, does not provide a detailed blueprint for how society should end systemic prejudice. Instead, it challenges readers to work to eliminate their individual biases, inviting them to embrace compassion and empathy. Nordell uses case studies and academic research to outline the positive effects such practices have had in controlled laboratory environments and in the real world, while also casting a critical eye over the effectiveness of the multibillion-dollar unconscious bias training industry.

The book is forthright in exposing the ways our preconceived biases, fuelled by historical inequalities and contemporary trends, infiltrate both personal interactions and key parts of our society such as educational institutions, healthcare services, policing and business corporations. She may not offer a clear solution, but Nordell expertly lays out the problems with the status quo – a crucial step in working towards change.

By Harry Clarke-Ezzidio

Souvenir by Michael Bracewell

White Rabbit, 128pp, £14.99

Michael Bracewell’s latest book is an elating elegy, a portrait of the years 1979-86 in the form of glimpses, or near-vignettes, half-remembered, half-imagined, and heaving with imagery and semi-colons. There are 26 in all, starting with the emergence of colour and fantasy in the “pop-style zeitgeist” and ending with Richard Rogers’s audacious Lloyd’s of London building. New Oxford Street dominates, especially the Virgin Megastore at Tottenham Court Road, where an image of Marc Almond adorned a video wall. Bracewell notes a tendency towards nostalgia and prophecy in the music of the time. In a four-page riff on Prefab Sprout’s song “Lions in My Own Garden (Exit Someone)”, he compares the acrostic title – it spells Limoges, where the singer Paddy McAloon’s girlfriend was staying – to the kind of narrative game enjoyed by Umberto Eco.

Souvenir also marks the completion of a project that carries traces of propaganda, filling in the glorious years that came between glam (the subject of *Re-Make/Re-Model*, Bracewell’s book on Roxy Music) and the best parts of the 1990s (as treated in *The Nineties*) while pointedly neglecting the killjoy period – “1976 and all that” – whose end he is so eager to toast.

By Leo Robson

The future of lockdown

From the Black Death to space travel, how quarantine pitches individual freedom against collective safety

By Erin Maglaque

Before they are shot into space, astronauts have to quarantine. This is in order to protect other planets from earthly contamination, and to make sure that the astronauts stay healthy (imagine re-entering the atmosphere with a sinus infection). But the suspended life of quarantine also allows for a transition between the jumble of Earth and the loneliness of space. The Italian astronaut Paolo Nespoli saw parallels between the isolation of the spaceship and of quarantine during the Covid-19 pandemic: space travel, he reflected, is “like lockdown in a certain way: you are quarantined, but you feel kind of free, because you are safe”. Safety guarantees freedom,

Until Proven Safe: The History and Future of Quarantine
Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley
Picador, 416pp, £25

and the freedom given to Nespoli was of the most outrageous kind, floating through the endless void of space, the moon whirling by the window. But what kind of freedom did our own isolation secure? In 2020, adults in the UK spent nearly a third of their waking hours watching TV and online video content.

In *Until Proven Safe*, Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley provide a timely intellectual history of quarantine, from the 14th-century Black Death to the interplanetary quarantines overseen by Nasa’s planetary protection officer. The authors take us on a romp around the quarantine islands of the early modern Mediterranean, the International Cocoa Quarantine Centre outside Reading in the UK (cacao is especially vulnerable to disease), and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in the New Mexico desert, where radioactive waste is buried – quarantined, in a sense – more than 2,000ft underground, for the next 10,000 years. In each chapter, quarantine is the testing ground for critical questions: is it possible to totally contain risk? When is individual freedom superseded by collective safety? And who has authority to decide? If these questions were once abstract experiments in political philosophy, they are now problems that most of us navigate daily when we consider something as ordinary as whether to have dinner with friends.

Manaugh, a writer on cities and the built environment, and Twilley, a host of a podcast on the science and history of food, finished *Until Proven Safe* during the first wave of lockdowns in 2020, when, as they tell us, nearly half of the world’s population was living in some form of medical isolation. And so their evidence, once historical curiosity, now prompts weary familiarity; it’s easy to sympathise with the Russian poet



CHUNG SUNG-JUN/GETTY IMAGES

The gloves are on: Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley provide a timely intellectual history of quarantine in *Until Proven Safe*

Alexander Pushkin, locked down during a cholera outbreak, complaining that he was “in a foul mood”, living on porridge and growing a beard. The artist Francis Hervé, quarantined on the Austro-Hungarian border in the 1830s, described the monotony of isolation: his friend went to bed at eight o’clock “to kill some portion of time”, only to lie awake for hours. Whether quarantine has improved over the centuries seems very much a matter of personal opinion. The 15 Americans who contracted coronavirus onboard the cruise ship the *Diamond Princess* in February 2020 were locked down in the brand-new National Quarantine Unit in Nebraska, and seemed cheerful enough. As one representative boasted, “they had access to Amazon, so they could pretty much order anything they wanted”.

“Quarantine” takes its name from the Italian *quaranta giorni*, or 40 days. The first quarantine is thought to have taken place in Dubrovnik in 1377 in response to the plague: the city’s council mandated that all ships spend a month docked on an island offshore. Venice soon did the same, creating *lazzaretti* – permanent quarantine islands – in its marshy lagoon. The forty days recalled biblical stories of cleansing and purification: Christ in the desert, Noah in the deluge. As Manaugh and Twilley write, quarantine is enforced in cases of potential infection, of possible risk, and therefore admits a degree of uncertainty. One of the striking continuities in their history is how this uncertainty has been exploited to deepen gendered and racialised inequalities.

The “American Plan”, implemented in the US in the aftermath of the First World War, empowered local authorities to quarantine any woman suspected of spreading venereal disease. These young women – with jobs, apartments in cities and casual sexual partners – were disciplined by the blunt threat of medical lock-up. In 1900 authorities in San Francisco established a quarantine that neatly clung to the borders of Chinatown, gerrymandered around white-owned businesses. In court, a judge found the quarantine to have been applied with “an evil eye and an unequal hand”, in contravention of the equal protections enshrined in the US constitution. Such measures aren’t relics of a more brutal past. George HW Bush and William Barr’s travel ban against non-citizens with HIV or Aids was only repealed in 2010.

Manaugh and Twilley extend their investigation of quarantine into the non-human world, too, in order to think through the problem of isolation on a grander scale of space and time. In their most surreal chapter, they describe efforts to quarantine radioactive materials that have the potential to harm living things for millions of years. How to design a quarantine that will last beyond our own human civilisation? The problem is not only technological but communicative. Even if scientists can design a physical architecture of isolation, there remains the problem of informing future generations of its danger. The US Department of Energy’s “Human Interference Task Force” came up with proposals: surround the building with soft-tall

concrete spikes; paste reproductions of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* all over the region of radioactivity; or – quaintly – create a website with detailed instructions. Of course, the project of total and eternal containment is inevitably doomed; but its pursuit is a reminder of human hubris on a nuclear scale.

In October 2019 a group of representatives from international organisations, medical authorities and corporations gathered in New York to simulate their response to a pandemic of a novel coronavirus. It didn’t go well. Stock markets crashed, PPE was in short supply, conspiracy theories multiplied. As Marty Cetron, the director of global migration and quarantine at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tells Manaugh and Twilley, authorities are “always fighting the previous pandemic”: our epidemiological data comes from the last catastrophe, the last wave, and so the public health response is always already obsolete.

In future, data-driven forms of medical surveillance offer the possibility of a predictive or anticipatory pandemic response, and so a more sensitive and sophisticated quarantine. This form of medical isolation would target at-risk individuals based on personal data agglomerated from our smart homes, Google searches, or even from coughs picked up by Amazon’s Alexa. Data surveillance is already an uneasy reality. The data aggregation firm Palantir signed a £23m contract with the NHS in March 2020 to analyse health information in order to guide the response to the pandemic. (On the walls of the Palantir offices there is a portrait of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the patron saint of surveillance.) If sophisticated data technology offers a glimmer of a life beyond lockdown, it is at the cost of entrusting our freedom to Silicon Valley corporations.

And yet despite the inequalities of its past and the intractable ethics of its future, Manaugh and Twilley believe that quarantine can be reformed. The future of quarantine, they argue, relies on “cooperation and self-sacrifice”, on becoming “good neighbours” who privilege the collective over the individual. Their call for civility makes this book as much an artefact of the Donald Trump era as of Covid-19: their frustration at anti-maskers is conspicuous in their wish to reframe quarantine as an act of personal, neighbourly responsibility. But toggling between the history of quarantine charted in *Until Proven Safe* and our own, too-fresh experience of lockdown, I am not sure that civility is enough to secure an exchange of freedom for safety. I found the most compelling argument in the book to be Cetron’s – that anyone asked to submit to quarantine in order to protect the public is owed a duty of care by the public. This is not a matter of personal sacrifice or of being nicer to each other, but of guaranteed, publicly funded food, shelter and healthcare in exchange for constrained freedom. In his words: “There’s no control without care.” ●

Erin Maglaque is a historian of early modern Europe at the University of Sheffield and the author of “Venice’s Intimate Empire” (Cornell University Press)

Our data comes from the last crisis, so our public health response is always already obsolete

Every family is different when it comes to digital

In paid partnership with



Almudena Lara has an important job. As Google's global lead on child safety policy, she is focused on ensuring young people have more positive and safer experiences online and learn how to be informed and engaged online citizens.

She joined Google from the NSPCC, where she led their work to influence the debate on online safety and issues such as access to mental health care for children. She also led major programmes at the UK Department for Education for improving outcomes for children and worked at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, advising on issues from welfare reform to social investment and social action.

Almudena's experience of working with young people and families – as well as raising her own family – has made her very aware of the challenges modern parents face and has become critical to her work at Google. She shares her thoughts on how families can get the most out of a rapidly changing digital landscape.

What should parents consider when thinking about their children's digital experiences?

It is important to remember that most children have very positive experiences online most of the time. Technology helps them to stay connected with loved ones, explore, learn and have fun. But it is normal for parents to feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of digital options. It can be easy for us to feel like we're not getting it right, or that we're not striking the perfect balance between the online and offline world for our families. Every child and every family situation is different, and everyone uses technology differently – and that's OK! However, there are a vast range of tools available for parents to help guide their children's experience online – whether it's the type of content they see on YouTube Kids or the amount of screen time on their phones.

How do you find the right balance with screen time?

There is growing consensus that it's about the quality of your time online, not the quantity. If a child is being creative, or doing their homework, or even just video-calling their Granny, that's good! But playing a football game online for hours instead of actually kicking a ball might not be the best idea. It's a great idea to talk to your child about what they enjoy online and then set digital ground rules together – Google's Family Link app lets parents set limits on their children's devices, and then set a "digital bedtime" for their device.

GOOGLE



Above: technology helps children explore, learn and have fun. Below: Almudena Lara is Google's global lead on child safety policy

What do you most enjoy about your job?

There's nothing more exciting than creating new products that you know are genuinely going to impact on people's lives. I spend a lot of time listening to what parents and children themselves actually want and need. A great example of this is YouTube Kids, which we built to give children a more contained environment that's simple and fun to explore, and make it easy for parents and caregivers to guide their time online. But what we found was that older children – “tweens”, although I hate that word – wanted to explore the online world with autonomy, and not be told they were a “kid”. Those children were

“There is growing consensus that it's about the quality of your time online, not the quantity”

also being encouraged by their teachers to go and look at videos about history, maths or literature on YouTube. To give families another option, we introduced supervised experiences on YouTube for parents who think their child is ready for a broader online video universe. Created with a Google Account managed by Family Link, this new experience comes with content settings, limited features, educational public service announcements (PSAs), and extra digital well-being protections for young people. We've also created a guide to help parents decide if a supervised experience makes sense for their child. In this way children can exercise their autonomy, while families find the right balance for them online.

What's the next big challenge you're thinking about?

I've been pleased to see a focus on Online Media Literacy among policymakers, particularly on how to empower citizens to make informed and safer choices online. For years Google has been investing in Be Internet Legends, a programme which has now reached over 70 per cent of primary



schools in the UK, which teaches children both the practical skills and crucially the behaviours involved in staying safer online. We run it with a fantastic organisation called Parent Zone, and the curriculum was drawn up in collaboration with the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Association. Thinking through how we teach our children to feel and behave when they see different kinds of content online – not oversharing, and being kind to others – is incredibly important. ●
Find out more about how Be Internet Legends could help in your school and play the Interland interactive game at: g.co/beinternetlegends

Critic at large

The sound and the Fury

For all its excitement and drama, the boxing ring is a place where terrible things happen

By Robert Colls

Tyson Fury vs Deontay Wilder part three – the fight that was never going to happen – was preceded by the fight that was never going to happen either. As early as June 2020, Tyson Fury was all set to face Anthony Joshua for six world heavyweight titles, until a judge ruled that Wilder retained the right to fight Fury for two of them. After more delays involving ticket sales, Covid scares and the difficult birth of Fury's daughter Athena, the fight to be heavyweight champion of the world will finally happen on Saturday 9 October in Las Vegas, the most non-fungible showbiz city in the world. It will be Fury vs Wilder – for the third time.

But who are heavyweight champions of the world anyway? When Fury last fought Wilder, Wilder was the reigning World Boxing Council champion, and Fury the undefeated, former unified World Boxing Association, World Boxing Organisation, International Boxing Federation, International Boxing Organisation and *The Ring* magazine champion. In boxing terms, it's an administrative mess, but when it comes to making money, there's always another world champion around the corner.

On 9 October, Fury may look like he's thinking of Deontay Wilder in the opposite corner. But Wilder isn't currently a world champion and some part of Fury will surely be thinking of all the extra money he could have banked fighting Anthony Joshua, who is British, before Joshua lost his world titles to the mandatory challenger, Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk, in north London on 25 September. Are you following?

There is a simpler way of looking at boxing. Choosing world heavyweight champions could also be said to go something like this. Nothing happens except

Gene Kelly wasn't the first dancer to box, and Muhammad Ali wasn't the first boxer to dance

a lot of talk until the money is agreed. Then there is a lot of play-acting, to raise a crowd. This seems to involve everybody calling everybody else a bum, up until the point that two men try to inflict such violence on each other that one is rendered incapable of standing up.

The first Anglo-American fight to be touted for the "World Championship" happened in April 1860, when the English champion Tom Sayers fought the Irish American John Heenan in a damp Hampshire field at seven in the morning. Both men stood to earn a few hundred pounds, not millions.

Nevertheless, the mid-Victorian press spent months stoking the fight on both sides of the Atlantic and once the men stopped play-acting (Sayers's corner included a caped bird-man making "halloo" sounds), they fought for more than two hours to such a bloody and chaotic end that one of them could hardly see and the other could hardly punch. When Heenan tried to strangle Sayers on the ropes, the fight was broken up by police and the crowd (rumoured to have included the prime minister Lord Palmerston) scattered.

Though never strictly lawful, bare-knuckle boxing, also known as "pugilism", or "prizefighting", surged in popularity in England in the 18th century. Following repeated attempts by the Puritans to stamp the theatre out, it came back at around the same time. Both entertainments dazzled the Georgian imagination. The poet John Clare ended his days in an asylum announcing he was the boxer Jack Randall and offering to fight any man. Lord Byron was prince of the beautiful people and, in order to stay that way, he was also a regular at "Gentleman" John Jackson's gym near Drury Lane. "I am here boxing in a Turkish pelisse to prevent obesity," he wrote in his diary.

Every Londoner wanted to see a great fighter, or a great actor, or both, on the boards. When William Hazlitt, champion theatre critic of his day, reported on the 1821 fight between Bill Neat and Tom Hickman as if the boxers were actors and the fight a scene from Virgil's *Aeneid* rather than what it was – a breach of the peace – he changed sports journalism.

But violence and corruption obliged prizefighting to reinvent itself as a respectable modern sport. By the turn of the century, spiked boots, muddy fields, bare knuckles and shady deals were out, and canvas rings, bright lights, Queensberry Rules and shady deals were in. The more the ring looked like a stage, and the more fighters were seen as actors on it, the more Hazlitt's depiction of the boxing match as theatre applied.

Great fighters never felt more at home than in the theatre: saluting from the balcony, actresses hanging on their arm, actors hanging on their every word. Boxers learned their moves in training like actors learned their lines in rehearsals – again and again until it became second nature. Gene Kelly wasn't the first dancer to box, and Muhammad Ali wasn't the first boxer to dance. Charlie Chaplin did it in *The Champion* (1915), where he shows ▶



HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

Bright lights: Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury in their first fight, at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, December 2018. The result was a draw

◀ you what a great little lightweight he would have been.

Joyce Carol Oates called boxing “America’s magic theatre”. Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer both wanted to be boxers. Mailer noted how both Marlon Brando and Muhammad Ali each inhabited their roles as extensions of their mood. Paul Simon was only a singer, but went looking for work on Seventh Avenue (which intersects Broadway and 42nd Street) as a boxer, “a fighter by his trade”.

You may think all the movement and drama of boxing would make for great movies – but too many boxing films try to render boxing and acting the same, by making the actual fighting too theatrical, too furious, too clean. Bidap bidap bidap, they go. There’s not enough drag down, catch breath, snot and spit mauling. It’s telling that the most celebrated boxing scene in all cinema takes place not in the ring but in the back seat of a car. In *On The Waterfront* (1954), Brando, a fighter past his prime, tells his older brother that had he not thrown a crucial fight, he could have been somebody. He “coulda’ had class, coulda’ been a contender”, instead of “a bum”, a man with a “one-way ticket” to that modest obscurity also known as “Palookaville”.

The first time Fury fought Wilder in 2018, the British boxer was put down, but climbed back to take a draw. He’d already climbed back from much worse. After beating Ukraine’s Wladimir Klitschko for his world titles in 2015, he suffered prolonged depression and addiction problems and was unable to defend his titles. But in his astonishing return fight with Wilder in February 2020, he overcame this personal pain to beat the previously unbeaten champion in seven rounds.

Fury is white British and Wilder is black American, but they have more in common than boxing. Born in 1988 in Manchester, Tyson Fury is not your average example of white privilege. He left school at 11 to work on the roads. He and his wife Paris both come from travelling families. They married young, and have six children. Nine of the wider Fury family are or have been professional fighters, and you wouldn’t want to get into the ring with any of them.

It’s true Fury doesn’t always look fit, or particularly fast, but he’s strong and awkward with quick hands, a huge tradition, and an iron will. At 6ft 9in and 19 stone with an 85-inch reach and unbeaten in 31 fights, including 21 knockouts, if he is not yet up there with Lennox Lewis as Britain’s best-ever heavyweight, he could be soon.

Wilder is three years older but looks three years younger. Born in Alabama, the son of a preacher, there were few privileges on his side of the line either. He stands 6ft 7in, fights at about 15 stone with an 83-inch reach. In a busy career, he has achieved 42 wins, 41 of them knockouts. Unlike Fury, he’s had a couple of minor run-ins with the police. Like Fury, he has several children (five) and suffers from depression. Both men say they have contemplated suicide, and Fury has attempted it.

Tris Dixon’s *Damage: The Untold Story of Brain Trauma in Boxing* (2021) tells us that in a professional career a fighter might take 40,000 hits to the head. It also tells us that when that soft mass of nerves and blood vessels that float in a bowl of fluid we call the brain is jarred against the skull, it is permanently damaged. In the bare knuckle days, the hits were lighter because the hand is delicate and the skull is hard. But with the gradual introduction of padded gloves from the 1880s, the hits became harder and the fights more frequent. With the introduction of the “ten count”, the best way to win was by hitting your opponent’s head so hard it would cause the serious damage known as concussion.

We have known about the consequences of professional boxing for at least a hundred years – blurred vision, slurred speech, mood swings and so on. In 1928 the American pathologist Harrison Martland called it “punch drunk”. Nowadays neurologists call it chronic traumatic encephalopathy, and link it to early dementia and Parkinson’s disease. Few are spared. Even the greatest and most skilful fighters have shuffled their way towards boxing’s final judgement. Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Floyd Patterson, and even Muhammad Ali were all in the sick-head queue.

In Wilder and Fury’s last fight in February 2020, Fury was carried into the ring singing along to Patsy Cline. Wilder, on the other hand, rose up in honour of Black History Month dressed like Darth Vader on stilts – a blue-black statuette in shoulder pads and sequins. The *New York Times* said it was all too camp. Wilder said it was all too heavy: the weight of it, he claimed, exhausted his legs early on. But he has said he will wear another “something special” on 9 October, despite insisting that the last one cost him his world title.

Mike Tyson would come into the ring wearing an old T-shirt and socks – to remind him of his street fighting days, he says. Either way, it’s all theatre. Last June, the YouTube star Logan Paul and retired boxer Floyd Mayweather went into the ring, did something, went viral, and took millions of dollars home. Nobody knows if they had a fight or not. Paul isn’t an actor, let alone a fighter. Mayweather isn’t a fighter any more, though he was great in his day. “I retired from boxing,” he says. “But I didn’t retire from entertainment.”

Then as now, the best thing at a fight is the boxers, and the worst is everything else. In the past, Fury has made some ill-considered remarks, for which he was quick to apologise. Both he and Wilder have made millions out of boxing (and boxing out of them), but the fight game has also given a lot of poor kids a few of the things money can’t buy, such as discipline, belonging and self-respect. For more than 200 years, boxers have been admired for the courage they brought to the national story. At the same time, for all its heart and soul, the ring is a place where terrible things happen, where there are no fantasies and precious few winners. ●

Robert Colls is author of *This Sporting Life: Sport and Liberty in England, 1760-1960* (Oxford University Press)

Then as now, the best thing at a fight is the boxers, and the worst is everything else

Film

The knight and the living dead

David Lowery's *The Green Knight* makes the Middle English poem intelligible and peculiar

By Ryan Gilbey

Film-makers over the years have bashed and battered Arthurian legend like a suit of armour. For every *Lancelot du Lac* or *Excalibur*, there is a travesty such as Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, a sort of "Lancelot du Lad", redolent less of King Arthur at Camelot than Arthur Daley down the Winchester.

The Green Knight is of a far higher order. Its writer-director, David Lowery, has adapted the anonymously authored 14th-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (translated most recently, in 2007, by the poet Simon Armitage) into a form both intelligible and peculiar. The opening scene suggests a rude awakening: the young knight-in-waiting Gawain (Dev Patel, the gangly hero of *The Personal History of David Copperfield*) is roused from his dreams by having a bucket of cold water flung in his face, Teasmades not being widely available in the Middle Ages.

In fact, the film is more of a waking dream than a wake-up call. Freakish sights pass before us, including a tribe of plodding, doughy giants that resemble miserable Morphs, yet none causes the pace to vary. Magic is simply part of the fabric (literally so when Gawain receives an enchanted sash protecting him from mortal injury).

No one seems taken aback when the Green Knight (Ralph Ineson) rides unbidden into Camelot during the festive period, ruining Christmas in the process. His ►



Blade runner: Dev Patel plays Gawain in *The Green Knight*, an adaptation of the 14th-century Arthurian poem

◀ face has the texture of bark, his neck crunching horribly when he moves. He presents a challenge to King Arthur (Sean Harris) and his men, who are seated not at a round table but one shaped like a giant stone C. It's a pleasing piece of design, even if it does make them look like the knights of the juice bar.

Any one of them, growls the Green Knight, may strike him with a blade. But whoever lands the blow must find him again in a year and a day, and allow themselves to be struck in return. This he calls his Christmas Game. Hasn't he heard of Jenga?

Gawain, green in another sense of the word, accepts the challenge, divorcing his opponent's head from his body in one go. It's not the grisly decapitation that lingers so much as the details that follow, such as the moss that springs up between the cracks in the floor where the Knight lays his axe, or the Magritte-style mismatch between murky landscape and blue sky as he gallops away, his head now back on its neck.

Ticking sounds are heard from the film's first few seconds – water dripping, strings being tersely plucked – but only after the Green Knight's departure does the countdown begin in earnest on the soundtrack, the metronomic rhythm building until it seems to mimic the blows of an axe. As his day of reckoning grows nearer, Gawain becomes quite the celebrity. He poses for his portrait, and finds himself recognised in taverns. Privately, though, his concerns are mounting. "I fear I'm not meant for greatness," he tells his lover, Essel (Alicia Vikander). "Why greatness?" she asks. "Why's goodness not enough?"

Few modern actors are better built for fretting than Patel, with his high, fluty voice, glittering eyes and pointed, El Greco-like gauntness. He's so unselfconsciously handsome that any burdens play all the more sharply on his features. Put him in the frame with less legible or trustworthy actors, such as Joel Edgerton, as a lord who gives Gawain shelter, or Barry Keoghan, as a malevolent urchin who emerges from infernal smoke, and Patel seems instantly imperilled.

Lowery attends as carefully to the sensual, tactile details in the story's margins as he does to the grand quest at its core. We hear the metallic clink as a bandit scrapes the tip of his knife along his victim's chain mail vest; we see Gawain preparing himself to be a knight on the town, his grooming conducted by candle-light alone. Fittingly for a story that is often opaque, the action plays out in muddy light or at arm's length: this is a movie to be squinted at as much as watched.

Meaning clicks into place ecstatically during a montage near the end of the film in which Gawain imagines the sort of life he might lead should he fail to fulfil his side of the bargain. The lesson he learns – that there is no shortcut to honour, no life-hacks to achieve integrity – feels as relevant as ever. ●

"The Green Knight" is now in cinemas and on Amazon Prime

Television

When things could only get better By Rachel Cooke

**Blair and Brown:
The New Labour
Revolution**
BBC Two,
4 October,
9pm

At first sight, the BBC's series *Blair and Brown: the New Labour Revolution* would appear to prove the adage that when ambition ends, happiness begins. Peter Mandelson purrs. Ed Balls beams. The air around Neil Kinnock is more redolent of something spicy by Jo Malone than of fire and brimstone. Give it time, though. Some are more peaceable than others. Before the first episode is over, Gordon Brown will indeed utter the words "it could have been me", as if politics is just another reality show, and he has still not got over the fact that in the public vote, he lost out to a guy with too many teeth.

Tony Blair's multitudinous incisors, incidentally, continue to mesmerise, though perhaps not quite so much as when they were matched with snow-washed jeans and the kind of political enthusiasm that can only come from not having grown up with the knot of vipers that is the Labour Party. Why, you wonder, did he want to get into politics at all? He presents his epiphany as architecture-induced. Visiting the Palace of Westminster, he gazed at the arches of Central Lobby and... boom! "I've got to be here," he thought.



Incisive: Tony Blair and Gordon Brown at Labour conference in 1999

JEFF OVERS/BBC NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS VIA GETTY IMAGES

But ambition was soon on the march: sly, fatally incremental, impossible to silence. When Brown decided not to run against John Smith for the leadership in 1992, the scenery, as Mandelson put it, “shifted in Tony’s head”. The spear-bearer now hankered to be the leading man. Quick, fetch the panstick and that gold-trimmed toga.

Given how many thousands of words have already been devoted to analysing New Labour – as I write, Alastair Campbell’s diaries alone run to 63 volumes – I’m amazed to find this series so compelling, a fascination that may have to do, somewhat kinkily, with the fact that it’s also deeply chastening. How shamefully fast one forgets the good stuff. Can the Corbynites’ Year Zero attitude to New Labour have corroded even my centrist soul?

But while these films handle New Labour’s early dynamism with dexterity – I’m two episodes in, and already the Bank of England has its independence, the utility companies have been hit by a windfall tax, and a peace agreement has been signed in Northern Ireland – it’s the small, strange things that linger in the mind: Cherie Blair’s fringe (tufty); Patricia Hewitt’s voice (plummy); that Stephen Byers actually existed (crazy).

How glamorous a certain kind of ruthlessness can be – and how reassuring, too, especially in a crisis. Blair, of course, had a particular gift for identifying crises. “This is enormous doings,” he announced to Anji Hunter, his closest aide, on hearing that Princess Diana had died. According to Hunter, a woman who might have bounced straight out of a narrative poem by John Betjeman, this was a favoured phrase: one that signified, for all that it makes Blair sound like a yokel as played by Ronnie Barker, his sense not only of imminent danger, but also of yawning possibility. The initiative, like a constituent’s hand, must always be seized.

Blair is on camera more than most in this series. Why does he agree to be interviewed? Is it a fear of being talked about that drives him? (Better to put your own side.) Or is it just straightforward neediness? Either way, his presence is felt as a kind of absence. His manner is unnervingly affectless. Unlike others, distance from power has brought him no obvious freedom; he seems more ill at ease now than he ever was as a young man.

And yet, there is a bitter honesty here, too. You’d never know, to hear him, that he was Labour’s most successful leader; that he was the prime minister; that he will never need to worry about money again. What is it that he wants, exactly? What to make of his acrid admission that he is relieved not to have shared in the euphoria on the night of Labour’s 1997 election landslide? (“Because it was never going to last, was it?”) Unlike some, I don’t believe Blair is haunted by Iraq; I don’t attribute his blankness to any feeling that there is blood on his hands. But I do wonder at his state of mind. Some vital part of himself has gone missing: the bit that lots of us liked, and which duly allowed him to like himself. ●

Radio

It’s my house, and I live here By Anna Leszkiewicz

A Home of Our Own
BBC Radio 4,
weekdays from
4 October,
1.45pm

Phil Salter bought his house in Cornwall in 1989 by giving the previous owner £55,000 and his smaller, ex-council house up the hill, on a handshake. He lives in a 17th-century whitewashed fisherman’s cottage in St Mawes, now one of the county’s most desirable villages. When he bought it, it was valued at £135,000. Today, his small home, the oldest in the village, is worth more than £1m. He will never sell it: he loves it too much; loves sitting outside his front door with a gin and tonic, chatting with passers-by. “I’ll be going out of here in a box,” he tells BBC Radio 4’s Lynsey Hanley. But it’s a savage indictment of the cost of living in Britain today, where home ownership is once again becoming a privilege reserved for the very wealthy.

A Home of Our Own, running over a fortnight in the 15-minute slot after *World at One*, explores how the housing crisis is affecting people across the country, starting in Cornwall. Salter calls those buying homes locally “house farmers”: they come into the village, buy up property, remodel or extend it, and put it back on the market at a significant mark-up. Hanley marvels at the cost of homes in St Mawes: “£1.25m for a three-bedroom cottage, once inhabited by fisherman and their families, lit by fish oil and filled with a tank of pilchards. I wonder what they would have thought!”

Across ten episodes, Hanley speaks to people who are shut out of the housing market. The picture is bleak. Rachel and Angus are determined to live in the beautiful village where Rachel grew up, Solva, in west Wales, but with prices inflated by second-home owners, they are stuck with a caravan. In Crawley, West Sussex, Dorine and her husband, three children and two sisters all live in a two-bedroom flat. And in Tooting, London, 32-year-old Danielle still lives with her mum, unable to buy on her NHS salary. She dreams of her own home. When she gets one, she says, she will drink her morning coffee while looking out of her windows, listening to Diana Ross’s “It’s My House”. ●

Cottages in St Mawes, Cornwall, that were once lit by fish oil and filled with pilchards, are now valued at £1m

How the pandemic encouraged entrepreneurship

By Andrew Harrison

In partnership with



The coronavirus pandemic has forced businesses to think differently. While lockdown measures designed to stop the spread of Covid-19 were frustrating – even if necessary – they did also offer opportunities to try out new ways of trading, and even paved the way for entirely new markets to be created.

Technology, of course, is at the core of both of these trends. Many companies have enhanced their online offerings. Indeed, the internet has allowed businesses to reach wider audiences when previously they may have been limited to localised footfall. A user-friendly app or website and an active social media presence have quickly escalated from being nice to have to being essential components of any modern business. This was the consensus reached at a recent online round-table event sponsored by NatWest and hosted by the *New Statesman*, which brought together several industry experts and policymakers.

Going forward, as the UK comes out of lockdown measures, many businesses are likely to keep their pandemic-induced changes in place. The most successful companies will be those that can be flexible and responsive. As Bally Bhogal, the managing director and principal instructor of BBX Fitness, noted at the round-table event: “We have to think on our feet.” There is now a growing expectation among consumers for more products and services to be available online, for more to be deliverable, for more to be customisable, and for all of them to meet new, higher standards of hygiene.

BBX, a company that runs workout programmes involving Bhangra music and dance moves, has thrived in lockdown. Bhogal said the pandemic had offered “some positives, as well as challenges”. The context of a public health crisis, she added, created a “renewed sense of urgency” around the fitness market. “People suddenly became more aware [about the importance of managing their health].” While BBX’s online offering grew, naturally, within the circumstances of lockdown, Bhogal pointed out that people had started to take “their weight and their general well-being more seriously”. Bhogal explained that her company’s next goal will be to upscale, something that might have been “unthinkable earlier on [at the start of lockdown]”.

Mark Hart, professor of small business and entrepreneurship at Aston University Business School and lead author on the NatWest-sponsored Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report

SHUTTERSTOCK



During the pandemic, small businesses adapted to newer, online ways of working

regarding small business growth, said Covid-19 was a skills issue and a public health issue. He called for “our nascent and newly established companies to lead the way” in offering up-to-date training, and helping society to adjust more quickly. “In many ways,” Hart added, “retaining is as important as recruitment. Existing staff need to be comfortable with the new technologies in the workplace.” Hart suggested entrepreneurship be “embedded” into school curriculums.

The pandemic, according to Hart, has also offered companies the chance to “re-evaluate” their customer bases and explore new opportunities in how they

The UK’s post-Covid recovery will need resilience similar to that seen after the 2008 crash

took payments, “perhaps, for example, in the form of subscriptions”. Hart said he was “optimistic” about the UK’s post-pandemic recovery and nodded to the GEM report’s findings that the country ranked in the top third of the 43 economies surveyed – at 14th, two places behind the US – and ranked the same as Germany.

Also in attendance was Paul Scully, the parliamentary undersecretary of state for small businesses, consumers and labour markets. Scully called for more collaboration between government, business and academia. Whether small businesses sank or swam, he said, relied on “steady access to reliable advice, access to finance [support], and infrastructure [such as good transport links and digital connectivity]”. Scully said he wanted more “peer-to-peer networks and mentoring”, so that businesses that had already set a precedent during the pandemic could potentially help others to adapt and share their expertise. “That doesn’t mean that you need Richard Branson on the other end of the line,” he joked. “It could even just be talking to someone who is a year or 18 months ahead.”

The UK’s post-Covid recovery, ultimately, will require a resilience similar to that demonstrated after the 2008 global financial crash. Just as entrepreneurial spirit was required then to bounce back better and to try out new, novel ideas that later became mainstream, it will be needed again in 2021. Small to medium-sized enterprises – that is to say firms with fewer than 250 staff – represent 99 per cent of all UK business. It is vital that these companies are suitably supported with finance, learnt at competitive yet affordable rates, and advised properly at every step of their journey. Banks have a role to play in facilitating conversations between policymakers, policy influencers, and between businesses themselves. It is a role that NatWest is relishing, and out of this crisis we are confident of delivering a more productive and prosperous future. ●
Andrew Harrison is head of business banking at NatWest. For more information, please visit: natwestbusinesshub.com and download the 2021 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor here: natwestgroup.com/news/2021/09/natwest-publishes-2021-global-entrepreneurship-monitor.html

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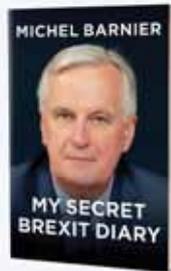
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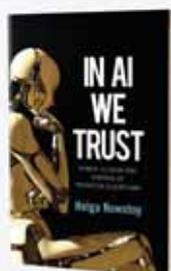
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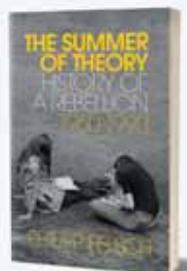
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THE BACK PAGES

Nature



John Burnside

Those who came before us knew how plants could reveal a more vibrant reality

Towards the end of the last century, I lodged, briefly, in a traditional prairie house near Emporia, Kansas. The house was so cosy as to be slightly claustrophobic, but it had a wide porch out front and an acre or so of yard, given over exclusively to those extravagant, eerily white flowers known as Angels' Trumpets. My host was an elderly Christian woman who told me that this planting scheme put her in mind of heaven – a destination for which she seemed to think that she, and by association, anyone in her immediate circle, was inevitably bound.

At that time, I was not particularly familiar with ▶



◀ the flora of the American Midwest, but one thing I did know was that those elaborate, fluted blossoms belonged to the species *Datura*, a plant used, in former times, by the indigenous people of that place in their shamanic rituals. It tickled me, rather, to know that this deeply pious lady had become an unwitting custodian to one of the most powerfully hallucinogenic plants in nature; a plant that, carefully prepared to isolate its psychotropic properties, had been a key sacrament in rites that she would have considered heathen, un-Godly and, no doubt, un-American.

It is tempting to think that any society gets the sacraments it deserves. All the world over, those who came before us were practised in the art of drawing visions from flowers and roots and the fruiting bodies of certain fungi, an art that allowed them to voyage into the otherworld on a regular basis in this life, rather than waiting for some nebulous and entirely posthumous ever after. Sadly, we enlightened folk of the “developed world” – the self-anointed missionaries of God and reason – have gone out of our way to ban any substance that might reveal a more vibrant reality; or, as Aldous Huxley puts it, following William Blake, to outlaw anything that might cleanse the doors of perception. There are probably several reasons for this – the most obvious being that some people just enjoy banning things – but what seems most likely is that, long ago, some authoritarian soul worked out that a frequent outcome of any organically guided trip was not so much inebriation as a tiny, but possibly cumulative, advance in wisdom.

The *Datura* is not banned, however, presumably

because preparing the plant for consumption is such a complex task – and the risk of getting it wrong and being fatally poisoned deters all but the most determined of would-be visionaries. On the other hand, these angelic plants are not the only means to wisdom that the American continent has to offer.

Everyone knows about peyote, the desert succulent used widely across the lower United States and Central America for centuries in indigenous rituals, and many are aware of the properties of psilocybin, a constituent of several fungus species, commonly known as magic mushrooms. Research has shown that these natural medicaments have healing powers: in the early 20th century, peyote was used by the Native American church to treat alcoholism, while psilocybin is understood to help with a variety of mental disorders. Casual users also report experiences of unity, of a moral and psychic wholeness that, for those still inclined to the old terminology, might be compared to the state of grace. Inevitably, this has led to the use of such naturally occurring sacramental plants being banned.

Why is this? In a world so lacking in opportunities for grace, surely anything that cleanses the doors of perception ought to be welcomed, especially when it occurs naturally. True, the *Datura* plants growing in profusion around my pious host’s B&B were deadly poisonous. But are they really so much more dangerous than a belief system that worries less about the Earth than its dreams of a heaven whose only music is a silent chorale of cold white Angels’ Trumpets? ●

This England

Each printed entry receives a £5 book token. Entries to comp@newstatesman.co.uk or on a postcard to This England. This column – which, though named after a line in Shakespeare’s “Richard II”, refers to the whole of Britain – has run in the NS since 1934.

Upping sticks

Sir, it is clear from Prue Blake’s letter that it is still virtually impossible to return walking sticks or crutches to an NHS hospital.

Some years ago I had the same problem, having promised an elderly friend with an overdeveloped conscience that I would find a way to

return her crutches. In the end I went into the local emergency department, laid them on a chair and then ran like hell.

A letter in the Times
(Terry Timblick)

Better late than never

As excuses for the late return of a library book go, Clare Henderson’s was one of the best. When the archaeologist was contacted about her overdue book, *The Buildings of St Kilda*, she said she couldn’t return it because she was repairing the buildings of St Kilda, 112 miles from the mainland.

Henderson, 41, borrowed the book from a library in Perth when she was applying for the job on St Kilda, and after she was offered the post, asked if she could have the book for a bit longer. Culture

Perth and Kinross Libraries have accepted that the book will be nearly 17 months late by the time it is returned.

Sunday Post (Ron Grant)

Nummy Dumpty

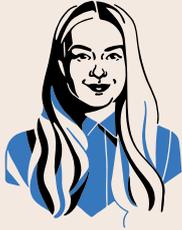
A health centre in Shetland has apologised after a “rogue” phone message addressed the caller as a “complete numpty”.

The fault at the Lerwick GP Practice stemmed from an automated test message which was accidentally left on its new phone system.

Aberdeen Press & Journal
(Chris Cope)



Deleted Scenes



Pippa Bailey

My solo hotel weekend serves up both emotional trials and small consolations

My solo hotel weekend was off to a dubious start when the first thing the taxi driver said to me was, “You’re not going alone, are you?” I’d forgotten the defensiveness, the self-justification, that is demanded by being single – or, at least, by being a single woman of a certain age. It won’t be too long before some well-meaning relative asks, “So... how’s your love life?” à la Bridget Jones’s dreaded Uncle Geoffrey.

There are plenty of what my fellow columnist Nicholas Lezard calls “microaggressions from the callous workings of the universe” – those quotidian triggers, the memories you didn’t know were memories. The first night I am wakeful, all too aware of my aloneness in a bed big enough for four, and when I sleep I dream – as I so often do these days – of my ex. I am separating my laundry from his (embarrassingly mundane), and when I recount this to my therapist she struggles to contain her glee over the symbolism.

Saturday morning comes, and I am beginning to feel I might quite enjoy this weekend, actually, sitting in the sun with a croissant and a copy of *Empire*, and planning my London Film Festival viewing. But then the coffee bar plays Lewis Capaldi’s “Someone You Loved” (“I let my guard down/And then you pulled the rug”) followed by Lany’s “ILYSB” (“And you need to know/That nobody could take your place”) – the closest thing we had to “our song” – and it feels like a small act of bravery simply not to return to bed.

That evening I go for dinner at the kind of restaurant that has a five-course set menu and waiters who give you a tour of the plates. It is fancy enough that, out of self-consciousness, I trade the book I’m really reading – a tatty copy of Michael Crichton’s

medieval sci-fi romp *Timeline* – for an intellectual-looking hardback I’m reviewing for this magazine. My table is, of course, sandwiched between two couples, both of whom are there to celebrate their anniversary. After the first course a waiter uses a tiny brush to sweep away the breadcrumbs, and I am reminded of a lunch my ex and I had together at Del Posto in New York: of whipped butter so light and perfectly balanced we declared it heaven, and of how the waiter laid a fresh tablecloth over any spillages, so you did not have to look at the mess you had made. Details inexplicably, uselessly, retained. How I wish I did not have to look any longer at this mess he has made.

There are moments of happiness, too – fleeting but full. Sunlight streams through my bedroom window on to the carpet so that I cannot resist lying in it, Nirvana in my headphones, like I used to as a teenager. I say yes to the decadences I would normally wave away, and so meals begin with olives and negronis, and end with espresso and sorbet. The woman who does my facial tells me about her puppy, Luna, and how she has her hair dyed to match her fur, and how her husband left her without explanation. She is so kind I could cry, and afterwards I wonder if it would have been a breach of GDPR to give her my number.

Best of all, though, is a pottery throwing class. I am surprised first by the force required to bend the clay to my will, my bodyweight thrown behind two fingers, and, later, by the lightness and liquidity of touch called for; how quickly it can all go wrong, fall apart. I’m sure there’s a metaphor in there somewhere. For two glorious hours my mind is full only of the brace of my elbows on my knees, the pressure on the pedal beneath my foot, the clay spinning between my wet palms.

Within days of returning home I am signed up for a regular weekend throwing class at London’s City Lit college – because, as anyone who knows me will attest, what I don’t have enough of in life is hobbies. My friends joke that I am in training for some sort of reality-TV housewife triathlon: competing on *The Great British Bake-Off*, *The Great British Sewing Bee* and *The Great Pottery Throw Down*. How grateful I am to have hands that work somehow independently of my mind. That, even when my head feels like a rattling kitchen drawer full of discarded receipts and unidentifiable keys, I can still produce works of beauty – wonky, wobbly beauty, but beauty all the same. ●

I am wakeful, aware of my aloneness in a bed big enough for four, and when I sleep I dream – as I so often do – of my ex



WHY DO SOME FAIL TO MAKE THE FINAL LEAP TO THE TOP?



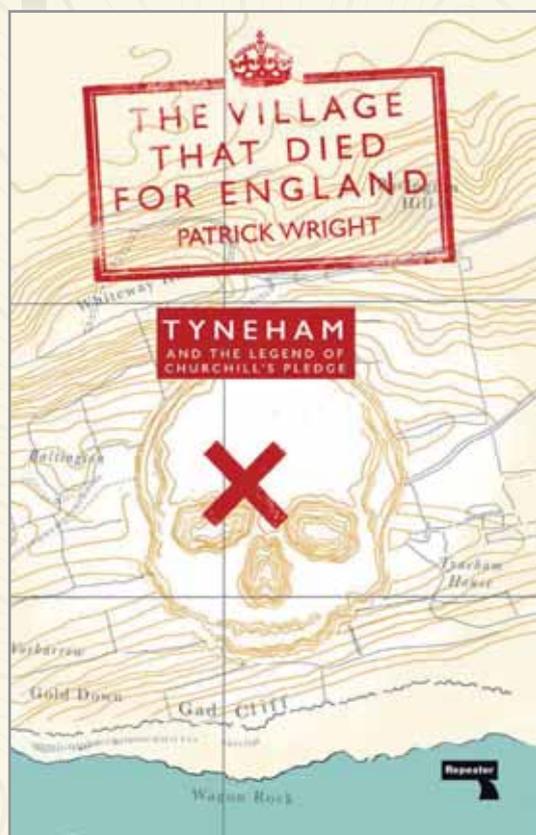
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Down and Out



Nicholas Lezard

One dodgy kebab and I miss out on a memorable restaurant experience

Hurrah! I'm off to London, to meet my old *compañero* Razors at the very swanky Rules in Covent Garden, no less, the country's oldest restaurant and certainly one of its most expensive. And what is a column called "Down and Out" doing eating at such a venue? It's being paid for, that's what. Razors has found some gig in Los Angeles which earns him an obscene amount of money and years of guilt have accumulated enough in his black soul to stir his conscience into action. The date was made a couple of months ago, and I have been ticking off the days with increasing eagerness.

Actually, scratch that: I'm not off to London, to the very swanky Rules in Covent Garden, because on the morning of the bash I wake up at 8am in the greatest pain I can remember experiencing. I know I've been going on about pain a bit in the last couple of weeks, but that pain... that pain was nothing compared to *this*. That was a soothing back rub, a tickle from a dancer's ostrich feather on the nape of the neck. This is hitting the lower abdomen, and is so severe that after a few minutes sweat is dripping off my face and audibly splashing on to the bathroom floor between my feet. From which position you will probably be able to work out what has happened, especially if I mention the kebab I had last night.

The annoying thing – or one of the secondary annoying things – is that this is an establishment I have patronised before, quite a few times, and their kebabs are so tasty I have been known to have them when quite sober. Was that my mistake last night, not having enough alcohol in my system to neutralise the bacilli?

The most annoying thing, though, is not being able

to see my friend. Moving beyond the orbit of bed and bog is beyond me. The pain is almost indescribable, but "having your guts gnawed from the inside by rats" more or less covers it. The nausea – that's fun, too. Well, you've all had food poisoning, it was like that, I won't belabour the details. The next day on, it's still a bit like that, but at least I was able to go out and buy some Gaviscon and all the trimmings.

But it is so depressing, missing out on Rules, and Razors. I have been to Rules a few times, and always on someone else's dime. There is absolutely no way I could afford even the meanest plate of its native oysters for my first course. I think the best time I went there it was at the invitation of Ian Martin, co-writer of *The Thick of It*, *Veep* and *The Death of Stalin*, among other things. He didn't know me: he just liked my stuff, and due to some recent Hollywood work was flush and felt like spreading some happiness around. We lunched from 12.30pm until about 5pm, and the maître d' had to come over and tell one of us to start minding his language, as some of the other diners, presumably wealthy Americans, were getting upset. Guess which one of us had the potty mouth. Clue: it wasn't the one of us who had coined the phrase "as much use as a marzipan dildo".

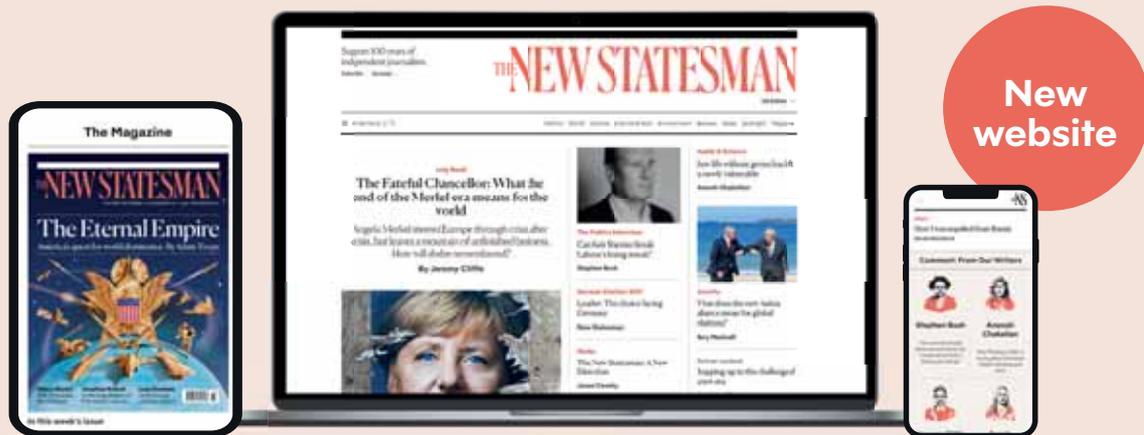
So I lie in bed instead, or rather writhe about in it, groaning and feeling very, very sorry for myself. My attention span is shot to hell so I try to distract myself by reading boneheaded questions on Quora (sample: "What is the best way to go to Canada?") and listening to the radio. I catch a bit of Richard Osman's new comedy panel show, *The Birthday Cake Game*, which seems to have been devised for the entertainment of people who have been kicked in the head by a horse. I listen to it with fascination. In it, people of whom I have never heard are asked to guess the age of a celebrity whose birthday it is in the week of broadcast. "I'm thinking 44... no, I think I'll go for 47." That's it. I listen for an entire episode waiting for a joke but there isn't one in half an hour.

How, I wonder, does Osman do it? His novel *The Thursday Murder Club* has sold more copies than the Bible but I could only manage 20 pages before throwing it across the room. Its follow-up is apparently one of the fastest-selling books of all time. One does not expect the very-best sellers to be stylistically accomplished but we're talking prose, if not subject matter, on the level of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or something by Dan Brown. Has Osman sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads? Everything he does is wildly, inexplicably successful. He was even profiled in this magazine a few weeks ago. I bet he can afford to eat at Rules three times a day if he wants to.

In the end I give up on Osman because it's not really helping with the pain and fiddle around with the BBC Sounds app so that I can listen to a succession of Radio 3's *Night Tracks*, followed by *Through the Night*. This is music for the still watches of the small hours, as the titles imply: music that manages to be both weird and soothing at the same time, and evidence that maybe there is something salvageable in culture after all. Gaviscon for the soul. ●

The pain is so severe that after a few minutes sweat is dripping off my face and audibly splashing on to the bathroom floor

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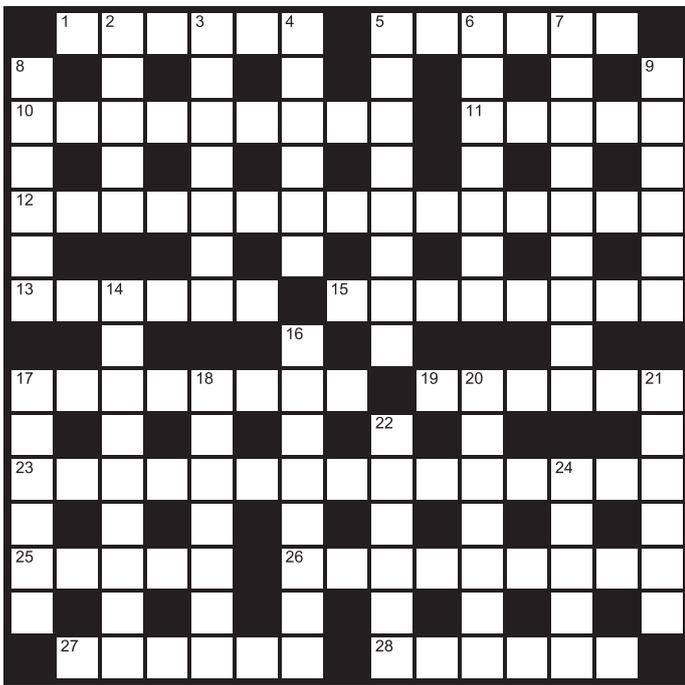
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The NS Cryptic Crossword: 556 by Anorak



Across

- 1 Backed rosy horse and farm bird (6)
- 5 Shrub from Azed by a meadow (6)
- 10 Travellers' delight (9)
- 11 Nameless object by husband's body part (5)
- 12 End of term activity before coming out? (9,6)
- 13 How to spell this alcoholic drink (6)
- 15 Don't stand with your back to the elevator for cosmetic surgery (4-4)
- 17 Hassled poor US actor at start of drama (8)
- 19 Stable boy making loose talk regularly with Her Majesty (6)
- 23 Change TV programmes over to France (5,3,7)
- 25 A bit of tranquillity is reported (5)
- 26 Time French philosopher gets a bride's collection (9)
- 27 Family member with set-back at French city (6)
- 28 Weapon from Knight of the Round Table – look out! (6)

Down

- 2 Range's popular encore? (5)
- 3 Sailor left, freed of notion that's wrong and obsolete (7)
- 4 Novice run out – that is alright first (6)
- 5 West Indian islander opposed to most of the fertiliser (8)
- 6 Could be the magazine contribution (7)
- 7 Leading article I tailored newspaper opinion piece (9)
- 8 A lot of personnel in small county (6)
- 9 Tea allowed at alpine home (6)
- 14 Dead Roman giving name to constellation (9)
- 16 Dislikes topper Pete's wearing (3,5)
- 17 Bite half the edible fungi takes muscle! (6)
- 18 During tea – siesta – that's not at all difficult (7)
- 20 Actress Gloria's endless final performance (7)
- 21 Fag will arrive by car (4,2)
- 22 Educate porpoises? (6)
- 24 Another French city housing European relative (5)

This week's solutions will be published in the next issue.

Answers to crossword 555 of 24 September 2021

Across 1,5) Sandwich boards 9,10) Ballroom dancer 12) Dressing down 15,17) Television set 19,20) Par excellence 22) Answered back 26,27) Double negative 28,29) Riding breeches
Down 1) Sobs 2) Null 3) War grave 4) Clogs 6) Orange 7) Recrossing 8) Strengthen 11) Pilose 13) Stepladder 14) Ultrasound 16) Sexier 18) Blockage 21) Merlin 23) Blear 24) Fish 25) Keys

Subscriber of the Week: Michael Kynaston

What do you do?

I am a policy and communities officer at a London council.

Where do you live?

South London.

Do you vote?

Yes.

How long have you been a subscriber?

On and off since university.

What made you start?

The student deal was very good value!

Is the NS bug in the family?

Yep. There has always been a *New Statesman* in the house.

What pages do you flick to first?

Stephen Bush is always good.

How do you read yours?

I'm fond of a physical copy.

What would you like

to see more of in the NS?

Articles on the problem of rooted education inequality.

Who are your favourite NS writers?

Kate Mossman, and I'm a big fan of George Eaton's online presence.

Who would you put on the cover of the NS?

Gareth Southgate.

With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?

Robert Jenrick.

All-time favourite NS article?

"Education's Berlin Wall."

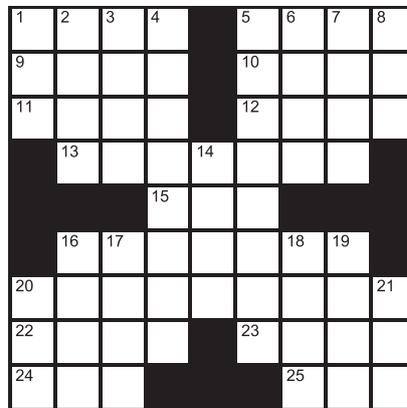
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The NS Crossword In Brief: 4 by Ali Gascoigne



Answers to crossword 3 of 24 September 2021

Across 1) Arms 5) Oh No 9) Leap 10) Woot 11) Odd Isn't It 13) Oshea 14) Pro 15) Astor 17) Aft 19) I Lied 22) Do The Deed 24) Area 25) Isla 26) Mars 27) Etsy
Down 1) Aloo 2) Reds 3) Mad Hatter 4) Spies 5) Own 6) Hot Priest 7) Noir 8) Otto 12) Satie 16) Oldie 17) Adam 18) Fora 20) Eels 21) D-Day 23) Has

Across

- 1 "Well, clearly", in texts
- 5 The Great North Run, eg
- 9 lambi
- 10 Swear to
- 11 Gallery based at St Ives
- 12 "Fiiiiiiished!"
- 13 Leave quickly and quietly
- 15 Medic
- 16 Lies in ambush
- 20 Red wine variety
- 22 Informed about
- 23 Language of Pakistan
- 24 Actor Kingsley
- 25 Beer container

Down

- 1 Frequently
- 2 One of many on a rosary
- 3 Say no to
- 4 "Woah, take it easy!"
- 5 Teenage tennis ace Emma
- 6 Bath water?
- 7 The nose, slangily
- 8 Female on a farm
- 14 Aptly named Olympic sprinter
- 16 Erase, as data
- 17 Soon, to Shakespeare
- 18 City with The Shambles
- 19 Neeps and tatties, eg
- 20 Local
- 21 Hairpiece

The NS Q&A

“I can tell you everything you need to know about vegetable preparation”

Yotam Ottolenghi, chef



Yotam Ottolenghi was born in Jerusalem in 1968 and was a pastry chef before opening his eponymous London delicatessen. He has been credited with “making the world love vegetables”.

What’s your earliest memory?

When I was three or four I climbed up on a bench and reached out to a birds’ nest. I fell and brought the nest down with me. I was severely told off by my nursery teacher.

Who are your heroes?

In childhood I looked up to my teachers. Every year, a different one, but I thought the world of them. In adulthood I admire Claudia Roden, who’s been a constant in my professional life for many years. She’s someone who writes very well-researched cookbooks about vast subjects.

What book last changed your thinking?

Empire Falls by Richard Russo. It’s a big thing to say that it changed my thinking, but it definitely put things in perspective, because the hero runs a restaurant, then he loses it, and there is a whole range of emotional reactions to it.

Which political figure do you look up to?

The late Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. I never sided with his politics, but I thought he was brave to have broken down some barriers between Jews and Palestinians. He paid the ultimate price when he was assassinated in 1995.

What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?

Vegetable preparation. I can tell you everything you need to know, I assure you.

In which time and place, other than your own, would you like to live?

I would love to go to the time of the hunter-gatherers. It seems to me, in a very romantic way, like a much less stressful time to have lived in, a completely unmodern world before all the trappings of civilisation, which I find so complicated to manoeuvre around.

What TV show could you not live without?

Better Things, a comedy made by Pamela Adlon, who also stars in it. It’s the story of an LA actor and her three daughters. She struggles through all kinds of challenges and I end up in tears of laughter when I watch it.

Who would paint your portrait?

Lucian Freud. I want to see something that I don’t know about myself, and he’d be able to see into my soul.

What’s your theme tune?

“Love’s In Need of Love Today” by Stevie Wonder. It’s a happy, wonderful song that I listen to again and again.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

I don’t know if anyone has ever given me this advice, but I would give it to myself: move on and don’t ruminate. I find it difficult to move on when I get stuck on something – a problem, a situation.

What’s currently bugging you?

Not knowing what the world will be like tomorrow. Things have shifted so much over the last few years. I feel anxious about the state of the world in the near future.

When were you happiest?

Last night when I was watching a show called *Blown Away* on Netflix with my two boys. It was so much fun to see people struggling with the incredibly difficult task of making different things out of glass.

In another life, what job might you have chosen?

A researcher of some description. I always love tackling a subject and learning as much as possible about it. I forget it all later, but I love reading and cramming, and putting things in order.

Are we all doomed?

Give us a bit of time to enjoy what we’ve got, but eventually, yes. ●

“Ottolenghi Test Kitchen: Shelf Love” is published by Ebury Press



Product of the environment

When polar ice melts, it harms habitats as far away as Asia and Africa. In 2022, conservationist (and Christopher Ward Challenger) Tom Hicks will lead an expedition to the North Pole to measure ice melt rates for the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF). On his wrist will be the C60 Anthropocene GMT. Able to monitor two time zones at once, waterproof to 600m and with a sapphire dial that recalls polar ice, it can withstand whatever the Arctic throws at it. And with five percent from the sale of each watch going to DSWF, it's playing its own part in the fight against climate change.

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