

# THE NEW STATESMAN

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## Twilight of the West

Why the American dream  
of remaking the world  
is over. By John Gray



**Woke capitalism!**  
How big business  
embraced identity politics

**After David Amess**  
British terror and the  
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**Free speech wars**  
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# A climate of violence

In his book *Ayes & Ears: A Survivor's Guide to Westminster*, published last November, David Amess wrote: "The British tradition has always been that members of parliament regularly make themselves available for constituents to meet them face to face at their surgeries." It was through such encounters that Mr Amess took up many of the causes he championed, such as better treatment of the debilitating condition endometriosis, and animal rights. But on 15 October he paid with his life as he hosted a constituency surgery in his home town of Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

Mr Amess's killing would be harrowing enough in isolation. But it forms part of a pattern. A week before the EU referendum in 2016, Jo Cox, a Labour MP and Remainder, was murdered by a far-right activist on her way to her own constituency surgery in Birstall, West Yorkshire. Before this, in 2010, Stephen Timms, also a Labour MP, was stabbed by an Islamist extremist while holding a surgery in east London. The Liberal Democrat aide Andrew Pennington was killed in 2000 as he sought to protect the MP Nigel Jones from a man trying to attack him with a sword.

In this climate of violence and fear, it is unsurprising that, as the former justice secretary Robert Buckland tells Tim Ross on page 16, some MPs are contemplating standing down. "It does cause you to question, why am I putting myself and my family through this?"

It is a question that many politicians have had cause to ask. In recent days, the former Labour MP Paula Sherriff has spoken of how police "laughed" after she reported a death threat left on her voicemail, and took "several weeks" to view CCTV of somebody leaving foil swastikas at her constituency office in Dewsbury.

The murder of Jo Cox was supposed to mark a turning point. Yet in the years since her death too little has changed. After the killings of the MPs Airey Neave in 1979 and Anthony Berry in 1984 by the IRA, extra security measures were introduced, respectively, at the Palace of Westminster and at party conferences. But there has been no comparable change to MPs' surgeries, with no advance security checks or police presence.



**David Amess spent his life in public service – it should not have taken his death to unite the House of Commons**

To stem the tide of abuse against elected politicians, wider social and cultural reform is needed. For too long, the tech giants have profited from the threats directed at MPs on social media and have sought to evade responsibility for what is published on their platforms. The discourse on social media is rancid and hyper-polarised; anything goes because the companies refuse to pay for moderators and their algorithms reward abuse and performative outrage.

This must change. Rather than being treated as "platforms", they should be regulated as publishers (as traditional media is) and subject to libel laws. As Barack Obama observed in an interview last year: "They are making editorial choices, whether they've buried them in algorithms or not." Why else was Donald Trump banned from using Twitter and Facebook? His exclusion was an editorial decision. The tech giants should no longer enjoy the privileges of publishers without the costs.

Yet if MPs are to foster a more tolerant political culture, they must lead by example. Robust and fierce disagreement is an essential component of British democracy. As George Orwell observed: "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." In recent years, however, MPs have too often abused and dehumanised their opponents. Conservatives are referred to as "Tory scum"; judges as "enemies of the people". When elected MPs (and national newspapers) use such debased language, it is unsurprising that voters are moved to commit far worse acts.

In the days since Mr Amess's death, politicians from all sides have spoken of their admiration for him and the sacrifices he and others made in the service of democracy. But it should not have taken his death to unite the House of Commons.

In her maiden parliamentary speech in 2015, Jo Cox spoke of how "we have far more in common than that which divides us". Such sentiments are recalled at moments of tragedy, but then too little changes. If MPs are to honour Mr Amess, so brutally killed after a lifetime's service to the public, this time must be different. ●

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# CORRESPONDENCE

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## Letter of the week

### The Church's shameful legacy in Ireland



Revelations of child abuse in France and Canada and the Vatican's lack of action (World View, 15 October) will surely have stirred memories in Ireland. The cases of the Magdalene Laundries and mother and baby homes are well known, but there were also 50 industrial schools for children in the Republic of Ireland housing thousands of children between 1936 and 1970, where inmates suffered horrific physical, emotional and sexual abuse from

members of congregations such as the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers.

A child could be placed in an industrial school if the state deemed their parents unfit to raise them, possibly on grounds of poverty or because they lived in a lone-parent household. Children were known by number, not name, making it hard for them to get in touch with their families upon release at 16. They were used as slaves and severely neglected. In 2002 the state offered the congregations indemnity from prosecution, asking them to pay €128m in compensation. Support for the survivors cost the Irish taxpayer more than €1bn and came too late: survivors, who were often living in poverty because the schools had qualified them for so little, had to help pay for their own restitution.

Vera Lustig, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey

#### From here to eternity

The big flaw in the underlying assumption of the \$610bn "anti-ageing" industry ("Immortality Inc", 15 October) is a narrow body-centric idea of disease and its origination.

Disease is relationally and dynamically formed from environmental, social, material, spatial, motor, body and brain interactions. In this extended conception, health-disease is not binary: we are only ever more or less healthy. There is a gradient of health-disease that transitions across a flow of psychologically experienced, not scientific or clockwork, time – as Henri Bergson would testify.

Today, there is a widespread mental health crisis. Data suggests that depression affects one in every five in most

Western societies. So instead of spending billions investing in single-disease anti-ageing drugs designed for a narrow conception of the body, we need novel approaches for promoting health in its widest context.

Chris Lawer, Buckingham, author of "Interactional Creation of Health"

Jenny Kleeman's article has prompted me to think more deeply about possible downsides of living forever. Possibly the most poignant might be the loss of happiness. We would have plenty of pleasure but, as Phil discovered in *Groundhog Day*, pleasure ceases to please when it has no foreseeable end. He found that perpetual pleasure imparts no existential meaning to life, which is what happiness demands. A second consequence might be a waning of the

creative arts, much of which strives to extract meaning from death. It may be the certainty of death that enables us to find meaning, and so happiness, in life.

Geoff Anderson, Sheffield

Jenny Kleeman's article could have mentioned John Wyndham's 1960 novel *Trouble With Lichen*, which posits the accidental discovery of an age-retarding lichenoid and the ramifications of anti-ageing for society. Wyndham agreed with Celine Halioua that women have a lot to gain from an extended life, but he also anticipated that setting in motion such a radical disruption to economic norms and societal expectations could be violent, not just between the haves and have-nots, but the may and may-nots.

Kate Macdonald, Bath

#### Britain's property burden

Numerous articles in the *NS* and elsewhere in recent weeks have referred to the government's "plan" to create a "high wage, high productivity" economy. But there is no mention of one of the root causes of our failure to invest as much as our competitors: high property costs.

As a nation, we invest in property rather than business. The average Brit will spend vastly more of their income on their mortgage or rent than, for example, the Germans or the French. Successive Tory governments have exacerbated this problem by stimulating demand rather than supply. Thatcher sold council houses and effectively constricted councils' ability to build more houses. Now there are various "help to buy" schemes. All have resulted in higher prices and pandered to the Tory voter who feels good every time their house increases in value.

Jim Young, Halesworth, Suffolk

#### Human rights hypocrisy

It's right to draw attention to human rights abuses in countries such as China and Saudi Arabia that acquire British businesses, but why not express similar qualms about the US ("The great British sell-off", October 15)? What other nation has killed more than 20 million people in foreign conflicts since the Second World War; has a police force that has killed an estimated 30,000 people since 1980; has held over 700 prisoners without trial in Guantanamo Bay; reportedly subjected 136

people to “extraordinary rendition”; has killed at least 8,000 people, including children, in drone attacks; holds 60,000 people in solitary confinement in its prisons; and has meddled in around 80 foreign elections in 70 years?

The US has sanctions against 39 countries that the United Nations defines as illegal “unilateral coercive measures”, causing suffering to millions of people. This has intensified during the pandemic because the US has refused requests to relax its coercion on humanitarian grounds.

The US arguably has a human rights record at least as bad as the other countries you mention, but it’s frequently given a free pass by its Western allies and the international media. It would be good if the NS were to redress the balance.

*John Perry, Masaya, Nicaragua*

## Industrial space

I fear that Bruno Maçães’ piece about tech billionaires unnecessarily mythologises them and thereby helps to hide their aims (“The spirit of the age”, 1 October). One of Jeff Bezos’s spokespersons gave it away on Radio 4 a few weeks ago: he wants to “industrialise space” (the naive radio presenters were fantasising about space travel). I suggest what he sees is not a “higher form of existence” but wasted resources. All those minerals and metals at the bottom of the sea and all those unexploited planets and stars are an opportunity to make more money.

*John Knepler, London SE14*

## A matter of fact

If Pippa Bailey’s summary of EH Carr’s view of history is correct (Reviewed in Short, 15 October), surely such a foolish view can hardly have “changed the study” of the subject. Of course stories have to be told from a point of view, but what point of view can alter the fact that Charles I was executed outside the Banqueting Hall on 30 January 1649, whether that is the fact the historian wants or not?

*Edward Greenwood, Canterbury*

## Eliot’s care in the community

George Eliot’s empathy can be seen in the portrait by Francois D’Albert Durade used to illustrate Johanna Thomas-Corr’s apposite essay on *Middlemarch* (The Critics, 15 October). The “incalculable” in the last paragraph of *Middlemarch* describes much of the goodness that we find in communities up and down the country.

I am in danger of committing the literary virtue-signalling Thomas-Corr describes by admitting that I reread all of Eliot’s novels during the pandemic. But I do wish that, in order to praise *Middlemarch*, critics would not denigrate her other novels. *Romola* and *Felix Holt: The Radical* are not “dry” and do not mark a career slump. In *Felix Holt* the humanity of both Felix and Esther Lyon is beautifully manifested. *Romola* is Eliot approaching the novel as epic and in the eponymous heroine we find

another brave soul who can rise from disappointment and do remarkable acts of kindness that create “incalculable” consequences. Both Esther and Romola are heralds of Dorothea Brooke, but they are not diminished as uniquely memorable characters by being her harbingers.

*Don Gardner, London NW1*

## Against the grain

I’m concerned to read that Nicholas Lezard’s favourite whisky is the Famous Grouse, a grain bottling (Down and Out, 15 October). I would have expected a man of his discernment to be a malt drinker, and while he sometimes notes that he is financially challenged, there are decent malts at prices not much more than grain whiskies nowadays.

*Keith Flett, London N17*

## A turnip for the books

I was intrigued to read Felicity Cloake’s article on the turnip (Food, 8 October). I had just eaten a very good turnip gratin: turnip cooked, then mashed with butter and black pepper, with chopped, crisped bacon stirred through and then topped with Parmesan cheese and baked. I will join her campaign.

*Ruth Potter, York*

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## Outside the box By Becky Barnicoat

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# STEPHEN BUSH



## Politics

### The kindness David Amess showed me as a young journalist was a mark of the man

I only met David Amess properly once, early in my career, when I decided, for reasons passing understanding, that an excellent way to break the ice with a senior parliamentarian was to emulate his famous election-winning celebration.

Amess – whose wide grin, arms aloft, became one of the defining images of the 1992 contest when he took the marginal seat of Basildon – reacted to my strange behaviour with good grace. He gave me some useful pointers about how to approach covering parliament and the inner life of the Conservative Party. He did not say so, but I think we can take it as read that introducing yourself by copying something you've seen on a BBC election rerun is not, in general, a good tactic for a young journalist.

Although we didn't speak much after that, my experience of him was fairly typical. A number of similarly nervous new MPs have, over Amess's long career in parliament, been grateful for his guidance and generosity.

Amess's warmth is one reason MPs are so shell-shocked at the news of his death. While there are plenty of committed Brexiteers with socially conservative views in parliament, few of them have so many friends and admirers across the House. That it coincides with the death of James Brokenshire, the former secretary of state for Northern Ireland and another MP renowned for small kindnesses, means that Conservative MPs in particular have found the week following Amess's death a trial. But the killing of one of their number, particularly a well-liked one, is disturbing for politicians in all parties.

MPs and elected officials know that

they face a greater threat to their well-being than they would in other roles. The most frequent problem I hear about is stalking, in large part because MPs' constituency caseloads bring them into frequent contact with people who are experiencing one form of crisis or another. Politicians are also at the front line of the United Kingdom's battle with terrorism.

At present, the major terrorist threats facing the country come from jihadists and the far right. Jo Cox, the MP for Batley and Spen, was assassinated by a neo-Nazi in 2016, and the following year parliament came under direct attack from a jihadist who used a knife and a car as weapons.

Most politicians enjoy the company of others, and consider being out and about in their constituency a key part of the job. Sadiq Khan, who has 24-hour police protection, takes the Tube when possible – he thinks it is important to use the service that he runs. When Theresa May became home secretary in 2010, she disliked no longer sharing with her constituents a commuter train from London to Maidenhead, as she had done for 13 years.

But the attack on Amess is a reminder of the risks MPs take in fulfilling their duties, and the burden they place upon their families. MPs with young children struggle

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### The attack is a reminder of the risks MPs take in fulfilling their duties

to explain Amess's death and the implications for them, while others have been reminded of the strain it puts on their spouses and parents. One MP wistfully pointed out to me that her son was spending his early twenties worrying about his mother's safety: "Isn't that meant to be the other way round?"

The security threat also takes a direct toll on MPs' office staff. These assistants, researchers and secretaries are the ones who usually have to sift through emails and correspondence to make sure they aren't missing anything that should be brought to the attention of the authorities.

Proposals floated by some MPs include banning anonymity online. It's an idea that emanates, understandably, from the stress and anxiety caused by having to decide whether a particular message about immigration is the beginning of a worrying pattern, or whether a social media rant about faith schools should be forwarded to the police. The reality is that there isn't much correlation between the abusive messages that MPs often receive and the violent physical threat they face from jihadists and the far right. What they do have in common, though, is that they now both originate online.

Long-serving parliamentarians will be able to point out the pub in their constituency with a history of association with far-right groups. Now, the radicalisation journey predominantly takes place not in easily monitored physical spaces but in the more nebulous digital sphere.

Most terrorist attacks across Europe are not what the security services describe as "directed", in the sense that atrocities such as the World Trade Center attacks were orchestrated and devised in a headquarters halfway across the world. Instead, they are "inspired": assaults thought up in a bedroom – usually, in Britain's case, by UK nationals who have been radicalised online or in prison. Banning online anonymity, however, would not tackle the problem, and, in any case, is beyond the reach of the British government or modern technology.

That leaves politicians with a much more difficult challenge: how to remain open to their constituents – to live side-by-side with their voters instead of retreating behind walls of glass and steel – in a world in which the threat of lone wolves cannot ever be fully eliminated, and in which MPs take great risks simply by doing their jobs. ●

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*This week, Philip Collins's column appears online at [newstatesman.com](http://newstatesman.com)*

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# THE NOTEBOOK



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## Newsmaker

### Kathleen Stock and the war over academic freedom

By **Harry Lambert**

On Saturday 16 October nearly one hundred people took over an open day at the University of Sussex to protest the employment of Kathleen Stock, a professor of philosophy. “Stock out!” “Get Kathleen off our campus!” “No Terfs here!” rang the chants. “Don’t come to Sussex!” they warned visitors.

But of what were they warning them? A leaflet handed out by the protesters laid out their views. “Stock is one of this wretched island’s most prominent transphobes,” it said. The letter’s vituperative tone at times overwhelmed its author’s accuracy (“consensus”, “nessecity”). “Fire Kathleen Stock,” it concluded. “Until then, you’ll see us around.”

When I visited Stock recently, she spoke haltingly of the slow burn of her social isolation at Sussex, punctured as it has been by the discovery of new online attacks and internal emails undermining her in the wake of any publicity she attracts.

Stock – who believes that biological sex is



◀ immutable and occasionally takes precedence over someone's gender identity – told me that a campaign has been waged against her since she raised concerns in 2018 over a shift away from sex-based rights to a world where any male could identify as a woman through self-declaration alone (a process known as “self-ID”). “This month is just the endgame. Some of my colleagues have been spinning a line against me for a long time,” she told me.

I asked Nehaal Bajwa, the diversity officer at Sussex Students' Union, how Stock was contributing to the “dire state of unsafety for trans people in this colonial shit-hole”, as the leaflet put it. Stock's views created “an unsafe atmosphere” for trans students, Bajwa said. As protesters overtook the campus square, setting off pink and blue flares, Stock cancelled her courses and followed police advice to stay off campus and secure her home. I asked a protester whether the demo was designed to be intimidating. “We're standing still,” they said. “Her presence to us is intimidating.”

The conflict dates back to May 2018, when Stock published a blog post that calmly raised concerns over the shift to self-ID. “Some have pointed out,” she wrote, that “this change in the law will allow some duplicitous or badly motivated males to ‘change gender’ fairly easily,” putting women at risk not from those who are trans but from predatory men.

Women were being redefined, Stock added. “The category of women has historically been defined...” she noted, “in virtue of oppression on the basis of biological and reproductive characteristics.” Given that trans women did not share these characteristics, their

“Certain people seem to be emboldened to behave badly,” a supportive colleague said

lived experience differed materially from females, she said. It would be inaccurate, Stock suggested, not to distinguish between these sets of experiences.

These views have led to Stock being denigrated by some of her fellow academics at Sussex University. “Certain people seem to be emboldened to behave badly,” a supportive colleague of Stock's told me. “The fact there is a police investigation surely means something really bad has happened.”

Stock, the child of a philosophy lecturer and a newspaper proof-reader, has been teaching at Sussex for nearly two decades. This year has been among the most notable in her career: she was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours (prompting more than 600 academics to sign an open letter in criticism of the decision) and her book, *Material Girls: Why Reality Matters for Feminism*, was published.

Many of her supporters believe that Stock's academic freedom is at risk. After her blog post in May and a follow-up interview in the Brighton *Argus*, her office was defaced with stickers stating: “If your feminism doesn't include ALL women it's NOT FEMINISM. Terfs Not Welcome Here.”

In 2018 the *Argus* ran pieces in which interviewees accused Stock of “putting students at physical and mental risk”, and warned “anti-trans groups” not to “hijack Pride” (Stock, who is gay, was quoted and pictured). The Sussex Students' Union accused Stock of transphobia on Facebook, and a spyhole was put in Stock's office door by campus security. In 2019 she was shown the quickest routes off stage at a graduation.

But the university did not act to address this culture of harassment, despite one fellow professor regularly hounding Stock online in all but name, and another academic openly tweeting “shame” on Stock and her “fellow transphobic ilk”. Instead, administrators gave Stock's critics access to the internal email system to send school-wide messages without offering Stock a right of reply. And those in managerial roles supported her critics rather than remaining neutral. Stock became ever more socially isolated.

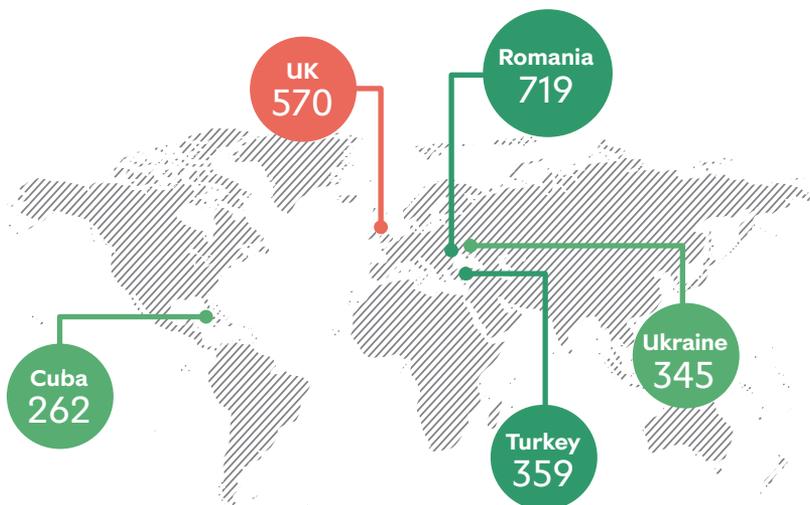
Three of Stock's four fellow professors of philosophy at Sussex told me that they supported her academic freedom, but none would say so publicly, despite more than 200 UK academic philosophers signing an open letter supporting Stock's and others' “right to raise concerns on this matter”. The Oxford historian Timothy Garton Ash tweeted: “Whatever your views on her views on gender and sexual identity, every civilised person must condemn this harassment [and] intimidation of a woman on campus. It's discrimination in the name of anti-discrimination, harassment in the name of anti-harassment.”

The outgoing Sussex vice-chancellor, Adam Tickell, declined to speak to me. In a statement, the university said it had spoken out “against bullying and harassment”. Tickell recently made a clear statement in support of Stock on BBC radio. Yet he and his team are acting late, having left the accusation that one of their professors is “transphobic” unaddressed for years. Stock is now likely to leave her post. ●

## Chart of the Week

### Only Romania has a higher Covid-19 case rate than the UK

Rolling seven-day average of Covid-19 cases per one million population



Figures are for 14 October. Only includes countries with populations over 10 million. Source: Johns Hopkins CSSE

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# The Diary

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## Ecology vs fertility, the Met's empathy problem, and a commitment to weddings

By Rachel Cunliffe

I was surprised to read in the *Daily Mail* that the reason the UK's total fertility rate (the number of children per woman of reproductive age) has fallen to its lowest since records began in 1938 isn't squeezed incomes or a precarious labour market, or that a third of millennials will never be able to afford a home. No, according to "experts", plummeting fertility is down to a "fear of a degraded future due to climate change". Well, one expert: Dr Britt Wray, a human and planetary health fellow at Stanford University.

Wray's assessment is based on a survey of 10,000 16- to 25-year-olds, which found that six in ten are worried about climate change, and four in ten fear having children for that reason. I don't question that climate anxiety might be a factor in young people's future plans. But more than wondering how to raise a baby in insecure rental accommodation when the tax rate is about to hit its highest sustained peacetime level and the average British couple with kids spends 41 per cent of their income on childcare? I have my doubts.

### How the Met can regain trust

Earlier this month, four days after Wayne Couzens was sentenced for the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard – at the time of which he was a serving Metropolitan Police officer – the Met Commissioner, Cressida Dick, announced an independent review into the institution's standards and culture. Up until that point, there seemed to be very little understanding by the Met of quite how much its reputation had been damaged, both by the way Couzens used his status as a police officer to facilitate the kidnap, and by the red flags – from indecent exposure accusations, to his reportedly being nicknamed "the rapist" by past



There is something magical about sharing that moment of connection in person, not on a screen

colleagues – that were ignored by his employers.

But if there were any doubt about the need for change within the Met, it has been dispelled: first by the revelations that Couzens had shared misogynistic WhatsApp messages with other officers, then with the news that another officer in his unit had been charged with rape, and now with a report from the *Independent* that the full personal details, including the home address, of a woman who complained to the Metropolitan Police about a male officer's aggression were shared with the officer in question.

The woman said she felt "vulnerable and exposed, knowing that he knew that I had complained and where I lived". But when she spoke to the officer's line manager, days after Couzens had pleaded guilty to kidnap and rape, there was little appreciation of why she might object to her details being shared. She was told that standard procedures had been followed. Those "procedures" have now been changed, but what I find chilling is not that errors like this could occur, but that no one at the Met had the empathy to think how a data breach like this would appear to a woman in the wake of a horrific murder committed by a police officer.

The independent review of the Met may yield further recommendations, but it seems doubtful that the force will ever be able to regain the trust of the citizens – in particular the women – of London whom it is meant to serve and protect.

### Don't call the doctor

The Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, has gone to war with GPs over his plan to guarantee face-to-face appointments. Doctors are accusing him of being "ignorant" of their needs, implying that 58 per cent of GP appointments now being held in person is good enough. (The pre-pandemic level was 80 per cent.)

On one hand, this looks like a cynical ploy on the part of Javid to get his excuses in early when the health service comes under strain this winter – but he does have a point. Getting to see a GP face-to-face these days is harder than buying petrol. A friend of mine was refused an in-person appointment on the grounds that her GP wasn't offering them at all. The appointment was for removing stitches. If the NHS is recommending patients take out their own post-surgical stitches via phone consultation, I'm on Javid's side.

### The return of high heels and sleeveless dresses

Last Saturday I attended my first wedding since the pandemic began – a Catholic extravaganza in the majestic city of York. We shivered our way into the church (bridesmaids as usual being required to wear sleeveless dresses in near-zero temperatures) and witnessed the joy of two people declaring their commitment to one another in front of their loved ones. On the list of things I've missed during Covid, I hadn't thought weddings would score particularly highly. It's just a party, after all. But there is something magical about sharing that moment of connection – in person, not on a screen. It's even worth wearing high heels for. I've got six more weddings coming up in the next year – and I'm looking forward to every one. ●



## Encounter

“The justice system is failing too many women”

Robert Buckland on policing, MPs’ security and his love of jazz

By **Tim Ross**

From his office in parliament’s Portcullis House, Robert Buckland MP gazed through the autumn drizzle on to New Palace Yard, the cobbled driveway leading to the House of Commons. It was there, he recalled, that on 22 March 2017 an Islamist terrorist fatally stabbed a police officer after running down pedestrians with a car on Westminster Bridge.

When we spoke, Buckland, the former justice secretary, had been trying to make sense of another senseless killing. The stabbing of his Conservative colleague David Amess during a constituency surgery in a church in Southend has led him to consider quitting the political career he loves.

“I feel akin to what I felt in 2017 when we had the attack on parliament,” he said. “It does shake your confidence. It does cause you to question, why am I putting myself and my family through this?”

Buckland, 53, is married with twins, and said his family’s safety and that of his team and constituents is his main priority. He said Amess would want his colleagues “to plough on” and not to compromise the “crowning glory” of British democracy – the close connection and easy contact between MPs and their constituents. Buckland thought he would ultimately decide to carry on, but it is clearly a devastating and troubling time for him, as for many British parliamentarians.

CONOR O’LEARY

His faith (he is a practising Anglican) helps, as does writing down some of his most difficult thoughts. On the advice of the Bishop of Swindon, he started keeping a diary to help him with the “sense of hopelessness” he felt after the 2017 attack. He will be writing about Amess, too, he said, pointing to a blue notebook on the round oak table in his office.

Buckland has seen more political upheavals than most. If he chooses to publish his diaries, there will be plenty of drama to share. He is a veteran of the Brexit battles of 2018 and 2019, when Theresa May repeatedly tried and failed to get her European Union divorce deal through a deadlocked parliament.

After Boris Johnson won the Tory leadership, Buckland was promoted to the cabinet as justice secretary and lord chancellor. As the leading Remainer in the government, he found himself accused of betrayal by fellow pro-Europeans after defending Johnson’s prorogation of parliament and later the Prime Minister’s proposal to break international law by renegeing on parts of the Brexit deal.

In his first major interview since he lost his job in September’s reshuffle, Buckland reflected on the system he oversaw, which includes 500 courts and tribunals and 121 prisons in England and Wales. Despite what he sees as a lot of progress, he feels parts of it are falling seriously short.

A record 60,000 cases are waiting to be heard in Crown Courts, a backlog that has worsened dramatically since the pandemic, with about half taking more than six months to complete. Tory strategists fear the situation is a political time bomb that could wreck the party’s reputation on law and order, already damaged by the Sarah Everard case.

Is the criminal justice system as it stands delivering justice for women? “No,” Buckland said. “I readily acknowledge that, for example, in rape prosecutions the system is failing far too many victims, predominantly women.”

Everard’s kidnap and murder by a serving police officer as she walked home understandably led women across the country to lose faith in the police, he told me. “I’m a huge supporter of the police,” he said. But while the “majority” of officers were “good, decent public servants”, a small minority were not up to the job, “and then there’s a very small minority indeed who are just bad”.

Bad in what way? Seriously incompetent? “No. I’m talking about the tiny minority of people who are people like him [Wayne Couzens, Everard’s killer], in it for the wrong reasons.” It is a shocking observation from someone who was recently so senior in the criminal justice system. “The ‘one bad apple’ argument isn’t good enough.”

Instead of being “defensive”, senior officers must be “constantly vigilant” about weeding out dangerous officers and supporting those who need to improve, he said. “Leadership is all about being honest and there will be times when the police have to own up.”

It’s not just the police who are in Buckland’s sights. A few days before he was sacked, he sent a funding bid to the Treasury as part of the government’s three-year

spending review. The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is due to publish the final settlements for Whitehall departments alongside his Budget on 27 October. Buckland revealed he had asked for “a couple of billion” more for the Ministry of Justice, which he argued would be “tiny” compared with the spending increases planned for the NHS or schools.

The investment would be worth it, he said, because Johnson’s levelling-up mission would falter unless he took seriously the need to help communities blighted by low expectations and a cycle of reoffending. Delivering on his promise to “unleash Britain’s potential” after the pandemic would determine Johnson’s fate. That means the cost-of-living crunch, with inflation increasing, poses a major risk to the Conservatives’ chances of winning again.

“I think the biggest hurdle will be a sense that we haven’t made progress coming out of Covid, that people feel perhaps uncertain about their future and the future for their families. People are going to have to feel... that their incomes are rising and that the cost of living can be managed. At the moment that is a big challenge.”

Buckland was born in Llanelli and served as a criminal barrister in Wales before becoming a part-time judge. Sitting on a green sofa with his jacket off, revealing a pair of red braces, he still resembled a lawyer more than a cynical political operator, though he bristled at the idea that he’s too “nice” for politics.

Buckland had to be resilient to cope with the Brexit debates in the hung parliament of 2017-19. A self-confessed “remainy Remainer”, he was attacked from all sides – by Brexiteers for backing a “soft” Brexit and by pro-EU campaigners for backing any Brexit at all. Amid the angry, late-night sittings and knife-edge 2am votes, Buckland remembers moments “when you just wanted to scream”.

He blames the current hard Brexit on Labour and the SNP for flirting with a second referendum. He lost friends on the Remain side who thought he had “sold out”, he said. But he wanted to stay in government to try to reach compromises that both sides could agree on.

Similarly, he would prefer a middle way between the radically different leadership styles of the two most recent prime ministers he served under: the “formulaic” May, and Johnson, who thrives on creative chaos. “One had almost too much structure and the other one doesn’t have any.”

Buckland’s political hero is another arch-Remainer, Ken Clarke, who also served as justice secretary. He shares his predecessor’s passion for jazz. Buckland’s idea of a good night is dinner with friends and some fine wine (“a lovely white Burgundy” to start, and “a great claret” with the main course), rather than hitting the nightclub dance floor in the style of Michael Gove.

And then there’s his diary, which he insists isn’t really a diary, just a “book” he writes in. “It’s very dull, frankly, but it gives me a chance to sort of vent, I suppose, and I find that quite helpful.” He doesn’t know if it will be published. “You’re not looking at it,” he added. “It’s just to keep me on an even keel.” ●

**“Leadership is all about being honest and there will be times when the police have to own up”**



# NOW'S THE TIME FOR THE UK TO TAKE BACK CONTROL OF ITS PPE SUPPLY CHAIN

The Covid pandemic has taught us many things, one being the need to prepare and be prepared.



PPE resilience has to be the UK's goal, to ensure the secure supply of high-quality protection for the NHS and its frontline workers – as well as for other care, dental and hygiene industries.

Canadian company Medicom is extremely proud of its partnership with the British government, supplying our Kolmi® medical masks to the NHS – the Type IIR standard Op Air™ mask and the FFP3 Op Air-Pro™ mask, which filters out 99% of all airborne particles.

The experience and expertise we've gained from 45 years of PPE manufacturing tells us that we must learn the hard lessons from the early days of the pandemic, when the demand for PPE was overwhelming. As we move into a post-pandemic world focused on economic recovery, the UK has a massive opportunity to develop a much more resilient PPE approach.

Many companies in the UK stepped up to the challenge to deliver PPE for the Government and NHS. Medicom made a significant commitment to the UK, with a multi-million pound investment to develop our new factory in Northampton. The result is a world-leading facility.

We have also ensured that we can source raw materials in the UK, to ensure a resilient supply chain. Such investments support the economy and other businesses. We have created more than 250 jobs in Northampton.

It's often suggested that PPE manufactured in the UK can't compete with cheaper imports from the Far East. This is a myth:

**Quality:** not all masks are made to the same standard. Medicom manufactures the highest quality medical and respiratory Kolmi® masks.

**Safety:** not all masks are manufactured in the same safe setting. At Medicom's hi-tech Northampton site, our masks are made in a particle and microbiological controlled ISO clean room of 10,000 m3. We are the only UK PPE manufacturer with such a facility.

**Carbon Savings:** not all masks are as green. All Medicom's UK products are produced using UK materials – including the filters which are made in Wales. This means our masks have a much lower carbon footprint than Asian imports.

**Sustainability:** not all masks have the same sustainability credentials. Medicom recycles spare materials from our production processes so they can be re-used.

**Waste:** not all masks have the same shelf life. Medicom masks remain viable for five years – more than twice as long as imported equivalents. This avoids product and financial waste, and makes PPE supply more resilient.

There are other wider benefits too. Significant post-Brexit international investment like Medicom's supports the UK's manufacturing and product innovation base, and provides people with employment and training.

*"As a Canadian company, we're on board to grow our presence and investment in the UK. By building on PPE partnerships longer-term, the Government can secure the future resilient supply of PPE to protect our NHS frontline, provide an optimal environment to grow and innovate our businesses – and also signals that the UK is open for global business post-Brexit."*

**Hugues Bourgeois**, Managing Director of Medicom Healthpro UK.

Medicom® Group is one of the world's leading manufacturers of high-quality single-use preventative and infection control products for the medical, dental and hygiene industries. With over 45 years' experience in mask manufacture, they have nine fully owned sites, including one here in the UK, and sell in over 95 countries.

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If you want a symbol of the sad decline of independent institutions in Hungary, look no further than Hír TV. Launched in 2003 as the country's first rolling news channel, it started life as a thorn in the side of Hungary's leaders: after the then prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány was recorded admitting to having lied to win re-election, the ensuing protests were beamed into homes across the country by Hír TV. The channel was initially supportive of Viktor Orbán, but its fortunes deteriorated after its owner fell out with the prime minister: after Orbán's third election win in 2018, he was forced to sell the channel to the pro-government Echo TV.

The result is evident in Hír TV's output since 17 October, when Péter Márki-Zay was selected as the united opposition's candidate to challenge Orbán in the general election next spring. The channel's coverage resembles a rolling election attack-ad by Orbán's Fidesz party. In his Hír TV show on the day of the opposition primary, Zsolt Bayer (a confidant of the prime minister) called Márki-Zay a "rotten-souled unscrupulous bastard" and a "vile ferret".

"I take the risk of announcing to you here and now that Péter Márki-Zay is gay," came his next unsubstantiated proclamation: "I also know who his son is, the champion swinger in [the town of] Hódmezővásárhely." Elsewhere, the channel was branding Márki-Zay a "left-wing" candidate, dropping dark hints about his supposedly "shady" past and warning that "hundreds of thousands" of opposition supporters would not vote for him.

Such is the challenge before Márki-Zay. On the face of things, he has a good chance at next year's general election. Where the opposition in 2018 was fragmented, now the six main parties opposed to Orbán's Fidesz are joining forces in an electoral pact. Their primary election to choose a prime ministerial candidate was a triumph, producing a higher than expected turnout and a committed activist base. "Everyone realises that the stakes are so high," says Katalin Cseh, an MEP for Momentum, a liberal party in the coalition: "The opposition already works together in governing several cities so we know how to cooperate."

It also produced a win for Márki-Zay, a candidate who could hardly be better placed to tempt moderate Fidesz voters away from Orbán. The prime minister had been preparing for an election campaign in which he would brand his opponents radical leftists, globalists and cronies of Ferenc Gyurcsány, who is a super-rich

# JEREMY CLIFFE



## World View

### In Hungary, a united opposition faces an unhinged, Orbán-friendly smear campaign

businessman as well as having been prime minister from 2004 to 2009. But Márki-Zay is a conservative, Catholic, father-of-seven mayor of a mid-sized town in rural southern Hungary and a political outsider (a disillusioned Fidesz voter who ran as an independent). As a result, the unhinged coverage of Márki-Zay in Orbán-friendly media such as Hír TV smacks of panic. "The messaging of government and pro-government media is borderline absurd," says Cseh: "The smear campaign has been going on for more than a year now. Really absurd and bizarre."

The NGO Freedom House, which in 2019 downgraded Hungary from "free" to "partly free", decries what it calls "unequal access to media, smear campaigns, politicised audits, and a campaign environment skewed by the ruling coalition's mobilisation of state resources". Thanks partly to Fidesz's practice of channelling government advertising and other procurement spending towards favourable outlets, at least 85 per cent of Hungary's media is now loyal to Orbán.

Across the board, 11 consecutive years of Orbán have stacked the electoral cards in Fidesz's favour. New registration and financing rules encourage a fragmented opposition. The new opposition coalition

– which spans Gyurcsány's party, liberals such as Momentum and the hard-right Jobbik – will neutralise those difficulties. Yet other risks remain. Freedom House reports that "opposition parties faced bogus competitors in the 2014 and 2018 elections that may have been created by the government for the purpose of splitting the opposition vote. Authorities have also interfered with opposition figures' peaceful political activities." The State Audit Office, which oversees elections, is under political control and in recent times has imposed sanctions on opposition parties.

The opposition is planning a campaign that will focus on ground-level action: both to circumvent the government's near monopoly on the airwaves and to capitalise on the energised base of campaigners built in the primary.

It will be a dramatic campaign. With his every election win, Orbán has weakened Hungarian democracy; chipping away at democratic competition in the country, with every independent media outlet cowed, and with every obstacle placed in the way of legitimate opposition parties. Eventually, it will no longer be a competitive system at all.

For the EU, where the mainstream centre right has shamefully coddled Fidesz for years, much is at stake. How should it respond to, say, a narrow win by Orbán that was obtained through bogus means in an election that may well constitute a last chance for democracy in his country? A significant part of all that, all those expectations, hopes and fears, now rests on Márki-Zay, a politician who until this year had no profile even within his own country. He had better be ready. ●

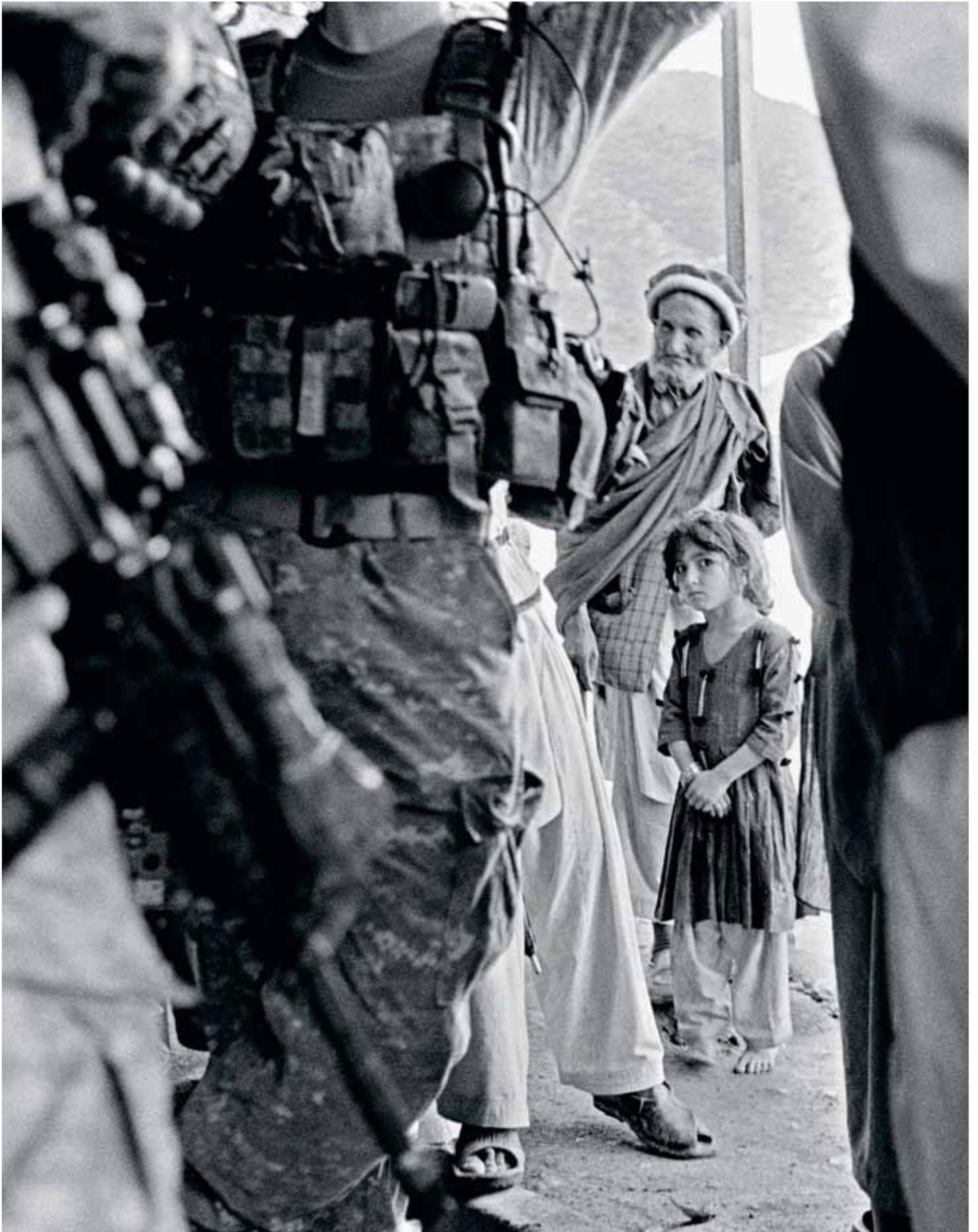
### The 2022 election may constitute a last chance for Hungarian democracy

# End of the grand illusion

The Afghanistan  
debacle shows the  
American dream  
of remaking the  
world is over

**By John Gray**

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LARRY TOWELL / MAGNUM PHOTOS

**Building bridges: a village elder and his daughter at a jirga assembly with the US military on canal construction, Afghanistan, 2010**

## Cover Story

The abrupt disappearance of a familiar world leaves a sense of unreality in those who witness it. When an unhinged rabble stormed the Capitol building in Washington, DC in January, it was hard to believe the scenes broadcast across the world were happening. A similar sense of disbelief is produced by images of American and allied forces struggling to extract their citizens and partners from the grip of a triumphant Taliban in Afghanistan. The two events are part of the same process of disintegration. The disorder that has been loosed on the world reflects the disorder that reigns in the United States itself.

There are many who think Joe Biden's decision to accept the Afghanistan withdrawal plan negotiated by Donald Trump in Doha in February 2020 was simply a default in leadership. Biden should have disowned Trump's deal, or delayed its implementation until conditions looked more propitious. The US's retreat was needless, and the decline of American power can be reversed by an act of will. It is not only a shrunken army of neo-conservatives, seething in their Washington bunkers, who think this way. So does Tony Blair when he fulminates against Biden's "imbecilic" decision.

It is true that the Biden administration's handling of America's withdrawal has been deplorable. Leaving Bagram airbase in the dead of night on 1 July, without informing the local Afghan commander and programming electricity and water supplies to be shut off after the last plane had departed, prefigured the chaos that followed. The base housed a prison – widely feared and hated by Afghans as a centre where large-scale torture was practised – which contained thousands of inmates. Many of them fighters from the Taliban and Islamic State, they soon escaped or were released.

Arrant incompetence characterised the American exit from the start. But attributing the Afghan tragedy to Joe Biden's poor judgement and allegedly waning mental powers is a cop-out. Instead, the retreat is the outcome of 20 years and more of liberal overreach in the US and its allies. If anyone is senile, it is the political class that mired the West in this conflict. Biden's decision may yet be remembered as a long overdue shift to realism in American foreign policy.

It is worth asking what the US and Nato believed they were doing in Afghanistan. The official narrative propagated by the governments involved in the Afghan mission is that the original plan was to prevent the country from being used as a safe haven for terrorists, and that this was achieved. Exiting in present circumstances has left the West more vulnerable, they argue, and at the same time signals to its allies that they cannot count on its protection.

There is some truth in this story. It is not only Ukraine and Taiwan that suspect they too could be abandoned by the US. Japan, Israel, the Gulf states, the Baltic states and Georgia will be wondering how much American guarantees of their security are worth. Jihadism has been re-energised, a trend already manifesting itself in countries such as Somalia and Mali. A horrendous refugee crisis is brewing. Desperate Afghans fleeing terror and famine, who only weeks ago were being assured that human rights are universal, will face sealed borders across Europe. Within Afghanistan, the US pull-out has handed the initiative to terrorist forces even more extreme than the Taliban, such as Isis and various jihadist splinter groups.

The dangers are all too clear. Yet installing an army of occupation was never a sustainable strategy. More than the US switching its attention to another misbegotten war in Iraq, it was this fateful decision that made disaster unavoidable. Occupying Afghanistan meant waging a counter-insurgency campaign, which in turn meant a failed exercise in nation-building. An ignominious exit was preordained.

There were better ways of defending the West. The campaign of disabling terrorist sites by bombing, which drove Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda from the country, could have been turned into a permanent threat backed by that of concentrated ground operations. Pressure could have been exerted on Pakistan, whose military Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) nurtured and sheltered the Taliban throughout its history.

Launching a counter-insurgency campaign defied the lessons of history. The last major victory in a war of this kind was in the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, where the British were able to deploy an existing state infrastructure against communist rebels. In Afghanistan a modern state had to be constructed from scratch – an impossible task, as Afghan history has repeatedly demonstrated. If a small Western garrison had been kept in place, as some have proposed, it would have only delayed the final reckoning. All the Taliban had to do was wait.

When a modern state has existed in Afghanistan it has been superimposed on a country of tribes and clans, and this is the case today. Around three-quarters of the population live in villages, where identities and loyalties are local and tribal. For these rural communities, which suffered the worst carnage of the war, the Afghan nation is a fiction.

This may explain the uncanny ease with which Kabul fell, which seemed to surprise even the Taliban. Knowing the weakness of the state, the real holders of power – local and regional governors, police chiefs and clan leaders – surrendered without hesitation. The



Failed intervention: evacuees board a US Air Force plane in Kabul on 17 August 2021

SENIOR AIRMAN BRENNEN LEIGE/AP

Kabul government functioned principally as an instrument of kleptocratic elites. Aid funds were siphoned off on a stupendous scale. Ghost soldiers were invented and their salaries stolen while actual soldiers went unpaid. The legal system installed by the allies was slow and corrupt, forcing many Afghans to turn to Taliban justice instead.

The government did secure improvements in society, particularly for urban women. But these gains were dependent on keeping the Taliban at bay, which demanded a permanent, colonial-style military presence in the country. It was never a viable option. No democracy can sustain an indefinite loss of life for such an endlessly receding goal. The women and girls who are being denied a proper education and dragged off to sexual slavery are casualties of promises that could not be kept.

Some suggest Afghanistan's new rulers are savvier now than when they were in power between 1996 and 2001. They may be, but that does not make them any less malevolent. The liberal West understands fanaticism as the result of ignorance and error; as human beings grow smarter, they will be less cruel and repressive. It is a dangerous delusion. Taliban forces are making house-to-house searches using handheld digital surveillance devices left behind in the allied retreat. Wherever they can, they deploy new technologies to enforce a virulent fundamentalist ideology. Nothing is more prototypically modern than fundamentalism – the attempt to recreate a crudely simplified version of an irretrievable past. Describing the Taliban as taking the country back to the Middle Ages does an injustice to the subtler cultures of medieval times.

The new self-declared Emirate threatens the West, its friends and its enemies alike. While delighting in America's humiliation, China and Russia have jihadist threats of their own to contend with. India fears Afghanistan will become a base for terror groups like the one that carried out the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. Iran and Pakistan welcome American defeat, but worry about a further influx of refugees on top of the millions they already host. Unlike Vietnam, where American withdrawal failed to cause a domino effect for communism in south-east Asia, Afghanistan's future is a crucial factor in regional and global power struggles.

**N**ation-building in Afghanistan demonstrated the limitations of a model of development that has mesmerised thinkers and governments from all parts of the political spectrum for generations. Modernisation means catching up with the West and adopting its institutions and values. Temporary deviations are permissible, given the imperfections of local cultures, but all societies are moving towards

## The “Biden doctrine” could mark the beginning of a more realistic US foreign policy

a single destination – an idealised replica of the kind of state and society that used to exist in some Western countries.

This view of modernisation was promoted by Ashraf Ghani, Afghan president between September 2014 and August 2021, in the book *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, co-authored with the British human rights lawyer Clare Lockhart (2008). The two founded a Washington-based consultancy, the Institute of State Effectiveness, in 2005. By the time of the American withdrawal, Ghani was a world-renowned expert on development. When the Taliban reached the outskirts of Kabul he fled the country, and now lives abroad.

Ghani's model originates in 18th-century Europe, when economists such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-81) and Adam Smith (1723-90) presented human development as unfolding in a series of distinct phases terminating in commercial societies of the kind in which they lived. Progress consisted of transforming or eliminating any remnants of earlier and supposedly more primitive forms of life in their own societies, such as village communities, while others followed in the wake of this ongoing advance.

Later thinkers accepted the idea of all of humankind moving through the same phases of development, even if they changed the ultimate destination. Karl Marx, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1853, praised British imperialism for disrupting the “undignified, stagnant and vegetative life” of Indian villages. Though modified by Lenin, Marx's view of pre-industrial life framed the Soviet effort to “catch up with and overtake” the capitalist West through forced-march industrialisation, which led to millions dying in the collectivisation of agriculture in the early 1930s. A generation later, a parallel concept known as “forced-draft urbanisation”, developed by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington, was applied as a strategy in the Vietnam War, resulting in the mass displacement of Vietnamese villagers.

The belief that modernising meant copying the West resurfaced during the short-lived Gorbachev era between 1985 and 1991, when jubilant liberals imagined post-communist Russia becoming a democracy like

Canada or Sweden. This fantasy had an academic pedigree in the work of the Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell (1919-2011) who, in *The End of Ideology* (1960), envisioned Soviet communism and liberal capitalism converging in some variant of social democracy. Bell's analysis was revisited by Francis Fukuyama in *The Origins of Political Order* (2011), where the world's central political problem was defined as “getting to Denmark”.

There are radical defects in this neo-colonial vision, which many in the ruling elites of developing countries, for all their anti-Western stances, have embraced. Liberal democracy developed over centuries in conflicts that included revolutions, civil wars, dictatorships and two world wars. The idea that this fraught history could be compressed into a couple of decades was delusional. Conceivably, a modern state could have been fashioned in Afghanistan by building on traditional structures of authority in villages and tribes. But that would have meant admitting that there could be more than one path of political development for the country, a possibility that seems never to have been seriously considered.

**T**oday, the liberal mode of government is decaying in the countries where it originated. The US in particular shows many of the signs of a state in disrepair. An American cultural revolution has transformed the country out of recognition. Police forces are being defunded, and some cities, such as Portland, are not far from becoming ungoverned spaces. A combination of ultra-progressive social policies and neoliberal capitalism is turning others, such as San Francisco, into drug-sodden shanty towns, but without the informal communities that preserve some semblance of order in developing countries. Superficially at odds, neoliberalism and the prevailing progressivism have a common root in the privileging of individual choice over other human values. Together, they erode the social bonds that individuals need in order to make meaningful decisions. The result is an acute form of anomie.

The esoteric liberalism of language-purification and thought-cleansing that has seized control of many American universities and institutions can be understood as an attempt to impose a kind of solidarity on the resulting chaos. Universities in particular are theatres for Maoist-style struggle sessions, while much of the media is engaged in agit-prop. Practically all of America's institutions are sites of political warfare. In these conditions, any attempt to export American ideas of government will be seen as the globalisation of America's disorders.

But there is little likelihood of any future project of that kind. A country that has ▶

## Cover Story

◀ dissolved into warring ideological tribes lacks the taste for foreign adventures. Many expect these divisions will pass, and someday they will. But the world will not wait on America to resolve its internecine warfare, and in the meantime US foreign policies will need to be less erratic if the country's international standing is to be salvaged.

Perhaps Biden has begun this renewal. On 1 September he announced: "The decision about Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan. It's about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries."

This "Biden doctrine" has been denounced as a stratagem aimed at the midterm elections in November 2022. But Biden has voiced doubts about the Afghan mission for at least a decade, and it could be that his new doctrine marks a turn to a more restrained and realistic American foreign policy.

To claim that US withdrawal could have

been averted is to fail to grasp the necessity of what is now unfolding. It may be true that Afghanistan's fate was sealed with Trump's exit plan, which told the Taliban the war was over. But Trump proposed the plan because he knew promising to end foreign wars was a key lever in coming to power, while Biden knew that if he declined to implement the plan he would boost Trump's chances of re-election.

A tragedy that can be avoided by willpower is not a tragedy. A crumbling Pax Americana is the logic of events, and it is not a process America can unilaterally reverse. An argument can be made that the end of the Afghan War enables the US to focus on China, and renew its military pre-eminence through the use of ultra-advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. However, the next phase in world order will be shaped not by what the US plans to do but more by what other states are already doing.

Nations throughout the world that have relied on American power for their security will hedge their bets. In late August this year Saudi Arabia, a long-standing strategic ally of the US, signed a "military cooperation agreement" with Russia. Poland, disappointed and anxious since the US tacitly endorsed Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany earlier this year, has been forging closer links with China – a trend evident in Viktor Orbán's Hungary for years. European leaders such as Emmanuel Macron and Ursula von der Leyen have talked of the need to develop European "strategic autonomy". Yet after decades of declarations of intent, a European army remains a phantom. A creaking structure composed of 27 states cannot support a credible defence union. In practice, the pursuit of a chimerical independent defence capability will only strengthen Europe's urge to seek an accommodation with Russia and China.

This strategic vacuum in Europe may be part of the rationale for the historic Aukus pact between the US, UK and Australia to build a new fleet of nuclear-propelled submarines and collaborate in the Indo-Pacific region. If China's expansion must be contained, only the US can do it. But it should be clear that the upshot cannot be a renewal of American hegemony. The rise of China is part of an unalterable shift from Western dominance. We will continue to inhabit a world more like that before 1914, in which a number of great powers compete with one another for status and resources.

**T**here are many reasons for the Afghan debacle besides the fatal decision to install an army of occupation. Rigid Western military bureaucracies, profiteering Washington contractors, corrupt Afghan elites and the exigencies of American politics have all played

a part. But the ultimate causes lie in the mindset which believes that humankind advances by becoming more like the West.

There is no universal human agent advancing through history. Human beings have common needs, but they also want different futures. Do Afghan villagers truly yearn for the personal autonomy pursued by a Westernised middle class in Afghan cities? Could it not be that much of the Afghan population remains attached to the tribal identities that have thwarted attempts to remake the country in the past? When the West looks at Afghanistan, might it be seeing a blurred image of itself rather than the complex and discordant truth?

For liberals these questions are akin to blasphemy. The "rules-based liberal order" was always in part an illusion. Power was more important than rules, but the illusion maintained a kind of stability until power moved elsewhere with the rise of China, Russia's re-emergence as a major player and India's increasing role as a counter-weight to China. Any reference to the international community today demands a suspension of disbelief. The West has ceased to be the deciding force in world events without noticing the fact.

This blindness is not surprising. For figures such as Tony Blair who imagined a new humanity was emerging, globalised and progressive, understanding the present would destroy their self-image. Dreading this trauma, they remain transfixed by the alternate reality they have constructed in their minds. As a consequence, the West suffers from a chronic cognitive disorder, which prevents it from framing workable strategies for its own survival.

For all its crusades and self-destructive impulses, what remains of a Western way of life is worth preserving. But defending it effectively means renouncing the attempt to project our values into societies we do not understand. There are many ways of being modern. Some of them, like the Taliban's attempt to impose a fundamentalist ideology on Afghanistan and the ensuing resurgence of worldwide jihadism, are a threat to the West. In a different and more profound manner, so is the high-tech totalitarian experiment under way in China. Balancing these and other threats such as climate change and the risk of future pandemics will be extremely challenging. What is needed, above all, is a sense of reality.

But unless the West can shed the delusion that the rest of humankind is a backward version of itself, tragedies like that enacted in Afghanistan will be repeated, in new and possibly more grandiose forms. ●

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# LOUISE PERRY



## Out of the Ordinary The internet encourages women to mine their lives for content – but at what cost?

Earlier this month, a 10,000-word feature was published in the *New York Times Magazine* that described a legal dispute involving two American fiction writers, Dawn Dorland and Sonya Larson. The piece went viral, and the question of its title – “Who Is the Bad Art Friend?” – has since been the subject of much cheerful debate. It’s a story about betrayal, egotism and altruism. It’s also about the value of privacy.

The story begins with Dorland’s kidney donation to a stranger. So far, so noble. But Dorland made the mistake of being gauche about her act of generosity. She created a private Facebook group dedicated to her donation, and invited writer friends to it, including Larson, who was the more successful of the two. Larson had published several modestly praised short stories, whereas Dorland has not yet found a publisher for the autobiographical novel she has been working on for many years.

Larson found Dorland’s donation fascinating, but not in a nice way. She sniggered about it with other writers in private emails and messages (excruciatingly, these were later submitted as evidence in the legal dispute). And she used it as inspiration for a short story about a narcissistic white woman who donates a kidney to an Asian-American woman.

Dorland didn’t take this well. When Larson’s story was picked up by the Boston Book Festival, Dorland hired a lawyer, who sent the festival a cease-and-desist letter. After some legal back and forth, Larson filed a defamation lawsuit and Dorland filed a counterclaim for copyright violation. And all for the sake of a story that earned Larson a total of \$425.

Except that it wasn’t really about the money. The debate over the identity of the “Bad Art Friend” – is it the “plagiarist” Larson, or the “narcissist” Dorland? – has mostly focused on race, class and the excesses of American litigiousness.

Far less has been said about the gladiatorial arena that both writers threw themselves into, first by writing candidly about their own lives, and then by permitting a journalist to do so. I take the view that Dorland was right to be angry at Larson’s representation of her, even if she was not right to pursue the matter in the courts. I also believe that privacy is a precious thing, and that its value has been forgotten in the age of “the first-person industrial complex”, as the journalist Laura Bennett has identified it.

It was wrong for Larson to take Dorland’s life and offer it up for public consumption. But in our culture, such flagrant violations of privacy have been normalised. The internet allows us to live in public, revealing everything about our bodies, relationships and emotional lives. Such disclosures are not only permitted, but encouraged, particularly of writers, and particularly of women. The radical honesty of the genre makes for sometimes gripping reading, but it comes at a cost.

There’s a bottomless appetite in some

### The viral “Bad Art Friend” story teaches us about the value of protecting privacy

parts of the media for confessional writing. In *Self Care*, a witty novel about the world of New York women’s media, the author Leigh Stein portrays a character who makes a living writing for online outlets such as *Jezebel*, *BuzzFeed* and *xoJane*, all of which are known for publishing stories by female writers – often young and poorly paid – who take episodes from their lives and crush them down into clickbait.

In one scene, this character tells her new boyfriend that she’s pregnant and, as he sits in silence, the unspoken word “abortion” hangs in the air between them. “I was already planning how I would turn this moment in my life into content,” she reflects later, having lost all notion of privacy. Torment guarantees clicks, and that’s her livelihood.

Intimate autobiographical writing is hardly a new genre. In the 4th century St Augustine’s *Confessions* introduced us to his torturous relationship with sexual desire by describing a teenage trip to the public baths with his father, who spotted Augustine’s involuntary erection (the father was delighted by this sign of impending adulthood; the son was not).

But publishing confessional writing online is different. Dorland and Larson have both been picked apart on social media, their mistakes and neuroses exposed to public judgement. Several commentators were incredulous at the rumour that it was Dorland herself who approached the *New York Times*, hoping to force the story out into the open. Didn’t she know how bad she’d look? Couldn’t she see it? Well, apparently not. She hoped for a generous verdict from the internet’s kangaroo court. She did not receive one.

Confessional writing has become the norm, and protecting one’s privacy is unusual. I’m in the final stages of writing a book about sex in which I do not once mention anything about my own sexual experiences. I made this choice in part because I thought doing otherwise would be unfair to my husband and to the rest of my family, including children not yet born. I also did it because I wanted to make a point. A writer shouldn’t have to offer herself up, legs splayed. It should be possible to leave some parts of your life unshared.

In the case of Dorland vs Larson, both parties lost – not only their money and their friendship, but also their dignity. There is only one winner from this story: Robert Kolker, the author of “Who Is the Bad Art Friend?”, an excellent piece in which he shared nothing of himself, acting only as a quiet onlooker in the whole sorry business. ●

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# Woke capitalism! How the managerial class created the dangerous myth of the virtuous company

By Will Dunn

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On the morning of 7 April this year, Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase, published his annual letter to shareholders. The head of America's largest bank reflected on "the brutal murder of George Floyd and the racial unrest that followed" (the week after Floyd's murder in May 2020, Dimon was among the first CEOs publicly to take the knee, while visiting a branch in New York) and described how the bank was "fully engaged in trying to solve some of the world's biggest issues – climate change, poverty, economic development and racial inequality".

Later that day, Dimon and the board of JPMorgan Chase published another document, their proxy statement to the bank's annual shareholder meeting. In it, Dimon and his board recommended voting against proposals aimed at helping make the changes he had claimed to support. One called for the bank to undertake a racial equity audit; another asked that it review its practices on political lobbying. Neither proposal was passed. The statement also revealed that Dimon – whose letter had opined, a few hours earlier, that the "fault line" in his fractured country "is inequality" – is paid 758 times the median American income.

For a company to say one thing and do another is hardly new. But in the past year, the contrast between the virtues espoused by businesses and the real activity from which they make their money has become so stark that it has reached a kind of breaking point.

The workplace has become politicised as never before. On the work-focused social network LinkedIn, 188,000 people describe their job as "activist". There are more activists than there are midwives, historians, orthodontists or scriptwriters. In the past year employees at Apple, the world's most profitable company, have broken their strict code of silence with letters that demanded the sacking of an employee who had written a novel they considered sexist, requesting a public statement in support of the people of Palestine, and protesting a policy asking that they return to office working. Google – a company founded with the motto "Don't be evil" – is now engaged in a legal battle with workers who say they were sacked for protesting against its work with US border control.

To ask for ethics from a corporation is like expecting a scalpel to have a sense of humour: it is a mindless tool, the design of which is wholly at odds with such expectations. But it would not be fair to say that the workers of Apple or Google were naive. People have not suddenly become more sensitive or more gullible. But they have, for decades, been told by the managerial class that the companies to which they give their time, their energy, their ideas and their money exist for a higher ►



◀ purpose than simply making a profit.

In many organisations, this is affirmed at board level by a chief impact officer or “impact partner” (Harry, the Duke of Sussex, holds both titles, for the coaching company BetterUp and the asset manager Ethic). Such moral agency must also be communicated to consumers; the PR company Edelman identifies “cause marketing” – taking a position on an issue wholly unrelated to your business – as one of the more effective ways to shift units.

For some, this is as a corruption of capitalism’s true purpose. When Dimon and other Wall Street CEOs were called before the Senate Banking Committee in May, the Republican Tim Scott complained that banks were taking political positions on issues such as Georgia’s new voting laws, opponents of which say restrict the voting rights of people of colour. “Woke capitalism,” Scott said, “seems to be running amok throughout the financial institutions of our country.” In the same week, the group Consumers’ Research launched a seven-figure advertising campaign that targeted the CEOs of Coca-Cola, Nike and American Airlines for “putting woke politics over consumer interests”.

But arguing that capitalism should be unfettered and amoral is itself a political position. No business is without its ideals in the new “emoticonomy”. This is not a circumstance created accidentally by political parties, activists or workers, but deliberately, by businesses. It has been going on for some time.

After the end of the Second World War, companies in the US and Europe made use of low interest rates to launch a long period of acquisition, using cheap debt to make offers other companies’ shareholders couldn’t refuse. This allowed some companies, especially in the US, to grow rapidly into large conglomerates. But because antitrust legislation prevented such businesses from buying up their competitors, these conglomerates were strange, many-tentacled beasts; the telecommunications company ITT bought hundreds of companies in the 1960s, diversifying into hotels, schools, houses, timber, bread and make-up.

The apparently rapid growth of these new corporate giants was attributed to the genius of the captains of industry who oversaw them, men such as James Ling and Harold Geenen. But this scale was bought with bonds and debentures – with debt – and this

debt demanded efficiency. The great conglomerates faced the problem of persuading tens of thousands of people to be loyal, hard-working employees of a giant, faceless holding corporation.

The solution was found in work that had begun in the 1920s at Harvard’s School of Human Relations. As Gillian Tett explains in her recent book *Anthro Vision*, companies such as Western Electric had begun employing anthropologists to listen to their employees and understand their working culture and social relations. Building on the theory of “scientific management” developed before the war by the engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor and the growing field of industrial-organisational psychology, corporations realised there was money to be made in understanding how their employees felt.

In 1953, the American economist Howard R Bowen published *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, in which he introduced the idea of corporate social responsibility – the need not only to respect the rights of those inside the business, but also to avoid causing harm in the wider world. This idea was controversial at first – to Bowen’s colleagues at the University of Illinois, it reeked of socialism, and he was forced to resign in 1950 – but it proved useful to the new corporate titans. Employees of huge conglomerates could now be united by popular values, such as patriotism and a sense of contributing to wider socio-economic progress.

These ideas were spread by the growing class of professional managers. From a handful of students at the Wharton School in Pennsylvania in 1908, the “Master of Business Administration” (MBA) programme spread across American, European and Asian universities in the second half of the 20th century, until by 2008 more than 100,000 MBA graduates were entering the workplace each year.

At the same time that moral managerialism was taking over the world, the political parties to which people had once looked for moral guidance were gradually running out of credibility. In the 1960s, half of British voters knew immediately which side they’d take in a general election. By 2018, just 9 per cent of the electorate identified as strong supporters of any political party, according to a

## People who sell trainers, beer or IT services believe they are solving the world’s problems

report published by King’s College London’s Policy Institute. But people had not become uninterested in politics itself: issues, causes and projects were now their focus.

In his short film *Oh Dearism*, the filmmaker Adam Curtis traces the rise of issue-based politics back to the 1967-1970 Biafran War and the charitable appeals that followed. TV news and events such as Live Aid, he argues, simplified complex crises such as famines and civil wars, removing their political context and presenting them as little more than natural disasters. But while political parties vacillated, unable to respond in equally simple terms, businesses began to claim the moral high ground. No sector was more committed to this transfer than the rapidly growing companies of Silicon Valley.

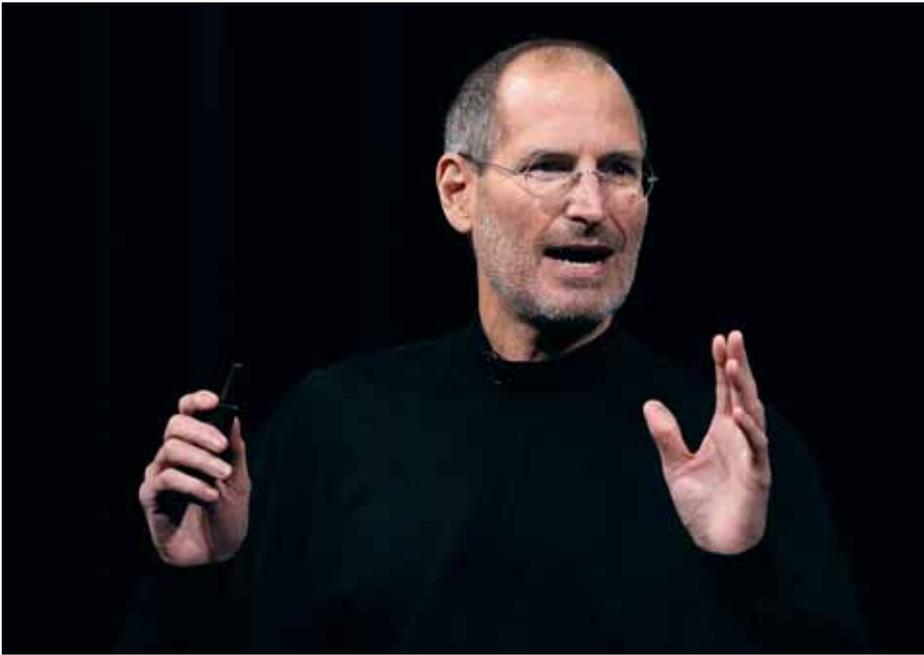
In 1983, John Sculley gave up his job as the youngest ever president of Pepsi when a 28-year-old Steve Jobs asked him: “Do you want to sell sugar-water the rest of your life? Or do you want to come with me and change the world?” When Sculley repeated this anecdote to me, 30 years later – he has repeated it many times – the excitement in his voice was still audible.

What Jobs had offered Sculley was something no benefits package or equity share could ever match: a sense of purpose. In the decades since, Apple has hired thousands of the world’s most talented workers with some version of this promise.

In September 2009, the British advertising executive Simon Sinek spoke at an event in a ballroom in a suburb of Seattle. He began by asking the audience why Apple was so successful, how Martin Luther King came to lead the civil rights movement and why the Wright brothers were first into the air (as if these were all comparable achievements, made by similar people).

“I made a discovery,” Sinek said. “There’s a pattern. All the great, inspiring leaders and organisations in the world, whether it’s Apple or Martin Luther King or the Wright brothers, they all think, act and communicate the exact same way.” On a flip chart, Sinek then drew a circle – “the golden circle” – and in the middle he wrote the word “Why”. The secret to success was not efficiency or inventiveness but vision: “What’s your purpose? What’s your cause? What’s your belief?”

Sinek’s talk has been watched more than 50 million times. The reason for its popularity is not that it’s true – it is the magical bullshit of the professional speaking industry – but because it tells the managerial class that it can (like Steve Jobs!) summon the vision necessary to propel companies to greatness. It will be that vision, not the people in the factory, on the sales floor or in the delivery vans, that is the difference between failure and glory.



Man on a mission: as CEO of Apple Steve Jobs inspired in his employees a sense of purpose

This idea is fundamental to Apple, Google, Facebook and the other companies of Silicon Valley, which are built on the idea that “one can, in principle, master all things by calculation”, as the 20th-century sociologist Max Weber put it. Such companies see social, environmental and political issues, from climate change to racial inequality, as equations to be solved by the genius of a gifted few. Google’s “moonshot division”, Google X, says it aims to use technologies such as machine learning and robotics “to solve some of the world’s hardest problems” and “improve the lives of millions, even billions, of people”. (It also happens to generate thousands of valuable patents per year.)

The billionaire CEOs of these companies are presented as saviours of the human race. Mark Zuckerberg wants to “cure all disease”; Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates want to address the climate crisis; Elon Musk wants to establish human colonies on Mars in case Jeff and Bill’s plan doesn’t work. The former CEO of WeWork, Adam Neumann, claimed that the purpose of WeWork was not to sublet office space, but to end world hunger, to “elevate the world’s consciousness” and to give all 150 million of the world’s orphans a family.

These people are not scientists, doctors or aid workers. They are MBA graduates, selling targeted advertising, web hosting and office space. But as Sinek made clear, there was no longer any need for a business’s real activities to have any connection to its mission.

This mindset allowed Andrew Bosworth,

a vice-president at Facebook and creator of the social network’s News Feed, to tell the “ugly truth” about his company to his colleagues in a 2016 memo. “All the work we do in growth is justified... the subtle language that helps people stay searchable... the work we will likely have to do in China,” he wrote. “Anything that allows us to connect more people more often is \*de facto\* good.”

As Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang described in their book on Facebook, *An Ugly Truth*, this view allowed senior Facebook employees to ignore the crises their company was creating. The managers of Silicon Valley do not need to think about what their companies are doing now; to do so would be a distraction from their real business of changing the world. Any technological (and financial) advancement is to them inherently right because it represents progress.

The Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff has expanded this position over several books, including *Compassionate Capitalism* (2004), *The Business of Changing the World* (2006) and *Trailblazer: The Power of Business as the Greatest Platform for Change* (2019). He has campaigned against discriminatory legislation in Indiana and Georgia, and for greater support for homeless people in San Francisco. At the same time, Benioff has amassed a personal wealth more than 80,000 times the American median, and Salesforce has used legal measures to minimise its tax payments: over the last three years, the company has made \$4.1bn in the US and paid no US federal tax whatsoever.

Executive megalomania extends, in subtler forms, across the whole managerial class. People who once saw themselves as selling trainers, beer or IT services now consider themselves the leaders of “mission-driven” companies, solving the world’s problems.

In recent years the idea has spread that moral authority can be assumed not only by a company or its C-suite, but by capital itself. This idea was codified in a letter sent to hundreds of business leaders by Larry Fink, the co-founder and CEO of the US investment firm BlackRock, in 2018.

BlackRock invests more than \$9tn of other people’s money, and its risk-management platform, Aladdin, is used to manage a further \$25tn. It is the largest shareholder in many of the world’s companies. After reminding the CEOs that BlackRock’s clients “are the true owners of your company”, Fink explained in his letter that governments were “failing to prepare for the future”, and that “society increasingly is turning to the private sector and asking that companies respond to broader societal challenges”.

Carl Rhodes, a professor of organisational studies and author of *Woke Capitalism* (due to be published in November), says Fink’s letter was a turning point: “He’s not talking about their core business activities. He’s saying this is an additional responsibility, which exists above and beyond that.” Fink, arguably the world’s most powerful CEO, was instructing companies that the sense of purpose essential to modern managerialism had now spread to capital markets. Securities would be priced against virtue.

But the growth of investments rated against environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria does not actually entail the “real commitment to green growth” Rishi Sunak said was needed in his Budget speech in March, any more than buying a Tesla will propel humanity to other worlds. Governments, for all their talk about a “green industrial revolution” (Sunak again), have left it to banks to make rules on what counts as ESG.

The result is, to pick one product, the \$244m GIF Global Lower Carbon Equity fund, which states its mission as “reducing carbon exposure” but invests, according to its most recent filings, in coal mines and coal-fired power stations (through AGL Energy and Origin Energy), oil and gas drilling services (through Maersk), and mining (Barrick Gold, Rio Tinto). Its biggest holdings include Microsoft, Amazon and Google, all of which are decarbonising their own companies while supplying billions of dollars’ worth of cloud computing and machine learning services to the oil and gas industry, helping companies such as ExxonMobil and Shell increase production and unlock new deposits. ▶

◀ Many other ESG funds contain investments in BP, which in 2018 claimed to be drilling the Arctic “to support the global energy transition” (it has since sold its Alaskan assets), and Altria (owner of Philip Morris), a “tobacco harm reduction company” that sells more than 200 billion cigarettes per year.

Again, this is about progress. Just as Silicon Valley’s sense of mission persuaded the world that mass surveillance, limitless consumerism and the monetisation of private space were progressive innovations, the moral capital flowing into oil and tobacco companies allows them to argue (with straight faces!) that they are the ones best placed to fix the crises they created.

In the last ten years, Google searches for the term “imposter syndrome” have soared as millennials have ascended to the managerial class and exchanged work that has directly observable results for administration and strategy. In the US and UK, managerial and administrative jobs have grown faster than other areas of the economy. As the late anthropologist David Graeber wrote in his 2013 tirade against the make-work of the modern economy, “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs”, “it’s as if someone were out there making up pointless jobs just for the sake of keeping us all working”.

This sense of corporate uselessness is pervasive. In 2019, a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that almost a quarter of the UK workforce thought their job made no useful contribution to society. Seven million people in this country see no point in going to work, other than to make money.

At the same time, the cost of entering the white-collar workplace has risen precipitously. In 15 years the average level of student debt (at the point of repayment) has more than quadrupled, from under £10,000 to over £40,000. Apprentices, too, pay heavily for their training: the minimum wage for an apprentice is £4.30 an hour. Entry-level workers must contend with much higher costs of living, stagnant wages and competition from others who can afford unpaid internships.

Despite these challenges, Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King’s College London, says it is not the case that an angry new cohort of woke youngsters has arrived to disrupt the workplace. Duffy says there is “not massive evidence that social

purpose is a particularly strong, or new, driver for current younger generations... in terms of what they want from employers. There’s interest in social purpose from all generations.”

What has changed, says Duffy, is the attention paid by businesses to social issues, and with it, the emergence of an “industry of lots of consultants and trainers who focus on micro-differences between generations, devoted to pretending that major generational divisions exist in the workplace”. It is not so much that younger generations demand more from the workplace, but that the visionaries of the managerial class must be seen to understand the future. In the absence of unions, which now represent less than 14 per cent of private-sector workers, it has become much easier for a company to make disputes appear the fault of restive young snowflakes.

“You don’t see corporations arguing for an increase in the minimum wage,” says Carl Rhodes. “You don’t see corporations arguing for an increase in corporate taxation, so that society can provide better schools and hospitals.” There may be limited demand for wokery from employees, but for companies, says Rhodes: “It shifts attention away from economic differences... and works to sever the connection between the political and economic.”

What does woke capitalism want? Beyond the brand value generated by what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the “passionate performance of virtue”, there is a greater prize at stake.

Last month, five of America’s largest financial institutions, including BlackRock and Goldman Sachs, announced plans to use a new questionnaire when buying municipal bonds – the securities issued by states and local governments to raise money for public hospitals, policing, libraries and transport infrastructure. The questionnaire asks whether elected representatives are “willing... to engage with investors on issues regarding



“Welcome to this crisis meeting”

racial equity... on an ongoing basis”, and requests data on police officers’ behaviour.

This programme is still being developed, but it could lead to a situation in which financial institutions decide which cities or states can raise money for public works based on their politics. Executives will decide if a population is morally deserving of new school buildings and water systems.

For such power to be handed over, something essential needs to change, and there is evidence that this is happening. Every year since 2000, Edelman has released its “Trust Barometer”, a global report on attitudes to government, business, NGOs, charities and the media. The 2021 report, which surveyed more than 33,000 people in 28 countries, found that in a year in which governments have raised trillions to fight a global pandemic, it is businesses that have gained credibility. Respondents were more likely to believe a statement from their employer than their government, and when asked which group they trusted “to do what is right”, respondents chose CEOs over journalists, religious leaders or those in government. Business is the “only institution seen as both competent and ethical”, the report states, and the “only trusted institution”.

The final section of Jamie Dimon’s letter to his shareholders is a 19-page section on “public policy” – not the specific policy that regulates the banking sector, but the whole of government. It is a presidential address, Dimon’s vision for his country – a country that has for too long been run by politicians. “Frankly, we punted too much of the responsibility to our government,” he writes. “Few of our institutions are blameless.”

The embarrassing mismanagement of the world around us – the Brexit shambles, the Trump years, the failure to act upon the climate crisis – presents a moment for business to take on the moral agency of government itself: and the power that comes with it. For companies that already straddle the globe, this is where further expansion lies, because they are still, for the moment, much smaller than the states they inhabit.

When Jeff Bezos, then the world’s richest man, took the first commercial passenger flight beyond the Kármán line and into space this year, he did so in safety and luxury, to widespread disdain. Six decades earlier, Alan Shepard made the same trip, in discomfort and the knowledge that his rocket stood a good chance of exploding; he returned a national hero. That 60-year gap, and the risk Shepard was prepared to take, is the difference between the state and private enterprise, between being transacted with as a company and being loved as a nation. And that is the real objective of woke capitalism: faith, and the authority it confers. ●

# JONATHAN LIEW



## Left Field

### The Saudis have promised Newcastle Utd the world. But what do they want in return?

From the bowels of St James's Park a loud and guttural roar went up: a roar of triumph and deliverance and longing. It spread from the Gallowgate on the south side of the stadium to the Leazes End in the north. No goal had been scored. No trophy had been won. The Premier League game against Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday 17 October hadn't even kicked off yet. But here in this hallowed and forsaken place, 50,000 Newcastle United fans were savouring an unfamiliar feeling: feeling.

Over 14 years, as the despised former owner Mike Ashley slowly ground this grand old club into the dirt, Newcastle fans gave up on feeling anything about their club. Even the anger subsided after a while, splintering into ennui and resignation. They still came to watch home games every other Saturday, of course, if only in the hope that they would see a day like this. And so, as their new chairman Yasir al-Rumayyan, the 51-year-old businessman and governor of Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, rose to his feet to greet his public, it acclaimed him – not as the representative of an atrocious regime, but as a liberator who had arrived with a stick of dynamite and blown a hole in the prison walls.

As Saudi flags waved in the crowd, as grown men and children in keffiyehs from Amazon sang "Fuck off Man City, we're richer than you", it was tempting to conclude that this, surely, was why Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund had bought into English football: the sort of instant love and fealty that no amount of PR consultancy can harvest; the laundering of a gruesome reputation on live television.

The reality is probably more complex

– as is often the case with "sportswashing", the oft-deployed but poorly understood umbrella term used to describe the various ways in which regimes or individuals associate themselves with elite sport. For one thing, the Newcastle United buyout has invited more coverage and scrutiny of Saudi Arabia's abysmal human rights record. Before kick-off on 17 October, a poster van circled the stadium bearing a picture of Jamal Khashoggi, the journalist murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018 (the assassination is believed to have been ordered by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman). Until the takeover, a fair proportion of English football fans would probably never have heard of him.

To focus on reputation management alone is to ignore the many other reasons why owners buy football clubs. For the Glazer family, who took full control of Manchester United in 2005, it's a cold business investment – an attempt to sweat the brand value of their asset and maybe fatten it up for an eventual sale. For the royal families of Abu Dhabi and Qatar, who own Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain respectively, it's about creating something timeless and extraordinary: a model of sophistication and the power to mould the world in your image. By contrast,

Behind the scenes, there are tales of a club mired in chaos and confusion

the prodigious rate at which Roman Abramovich has burned through Chelsea managers over the past 18 years suggests his primary motive is his own entertainment.

What about the Saudis? For all the lavish promises of new signings, and investment in the club's infrastructure and the wider city, the truth is that we don't really know, and it's possible they don't either. We should perhaps resist the temptation to assume that this is all part of some immaculate master plan. In the immediate aftermath of the takeover, pundits lined up to declare that Newcastle's ascent to global dominance was only a matter of time. There were airy predictions of an imminent title challenge, Champions League success, the world's best players and managers forming a procession along the Barrack Road. All this may yet come to pass. But even in these early days, it has proven tough to maintain the facade of competence.

Behind the scenes, tales abound of a club mired in chaos and confusion, of frantic calls to agents and prospective new managers, of an alarming lack of footballing expertise. The bulk of the big decisions are being made by the financier and minority stakeholder Amanda Staveley and her banker husband Mehrdad Ghodoussi, who despite having no previous experience in the game is said to have taken personal charge of recruitment. According to some accounts, he has occasionally been seen at the club's training ground kicking a football about.

On the pitch, Newcastle remain a shambles and will continue to be such for a while yet. Their meagre squad bears the scars of a decade of underinvestment under Ashley, and their 3-2 defeat by Tottenham on 17 October left them second bottom in the table, with 11 games to play before reinforcements can be sourced in the January transfer window. Their December fixture list is horrendous, with games against Liverpool, Manchester City and Manchester United. Relegation remains a clear possibility. And despite copious briefings from the new owners that manager Steve Bruce would be sacked soon after the takeover, at the time of writing almost a fortnight later, he remains in post – a coach who has run out of road but is somehow still forlornly pedalling.

Naturally, the history of modern football tells us that if you throw enough money at a problem, it eventually goes away. But on the early evidence, restoring Newcastle to pre-eminence may take longer than many assume. In the meantime, the club's fans have been promised salvation. They will be the first to notice if they don't get it. ●

# The great climate collaboration

By Andrew Harrison, NatWest Group

In partnership with



Small businesses have had a tough year, but here at Natwest we are talking about how to support their recovery and scaling-up. Making them a key part of our climate ambitions as a country could deliver up to half the UK's climate targets in the coming decade. But in order to do that, they need the right financial and non-financial support.

Up to now, the focus on climate action has mainly been on larger companies operating in sectors like energy generation, where the proportion of SMEs is quite small. That will change in the next decade, with that action being focused on sectors such as transport, buildings and agriculture, where SMEs have a larger share.

At our recent SMEs Taskforce we convened a group of experts from across business, academia and politics to talk about the real, practical steps our small businesses can take, and the challenges they face, if they are to become a thriving part of the transition to net zero.

Peter Mannion, associate partner at management consultancy McKinsey & Company, said the opportunities are twofold. First, SMEs can act to reduce their own emissions and costs. "Investments in certain types of electrification, particularly with smaller vehicles, can not only deliver emissions reduction, but also cost savings for an SME," he explained. These changes can be justified purely on the business case in between 55 and 75 per cent of SMEs, without even taking into account the environmental case for action.

SMEs are also well-placed to expand into the markets for deploying the technologies to transition our economy and society to net zero. These new products and services could include components for electric vehicles, heat source pumps and reforesting land, while they reduce their dependence on declining markets based on fossil fuels and anticipate some of the changes to regulation on business and the environment. However, just 6 per cent of SMEs recognise those opportunities in decarbonisation. "The revenue opportunity is very significant, but really under-realised or under-recognised by the SME community," Mannion said.

SMEs also need to be aware of the options, be able to act on them, and have the financing to make those investments, observed Hugo Sloper, engagement manager at McKinsey & Company. This is where banks, government and other organisations can intervene to provide and broker the support SMEs need. "One thing we really heard time and again from

farmers through to consultants was providing peer-to-peer counsel," he said. There is also a need to develop the skills to make those practical steps to net zero in a way that is sector-specific and to understand the financial benefits and navigate the opportunities that are right for each business. "Managing an SME is an incredibly complex process," he said. It requires time and understanding to make those decisions and set the right course.

"[SMEs] can't hedge their regulatory risks," countered Martin McTague, policy and advocacy chair at the Federation of Small Businesses. Some key sectors, such as heat pumps, are not sustainable without the government subsidy to make the market viable, he continued. Some way of hedging against those bigger risks for SMEs would be "really important", he added.

Douglas Chapman MP, SNP spokesperson for small business, enterprise and innovation, raised the challenge of the skills needed across the UK to make the transition to deploy technologies such as heat pumps and to retrofit buildings. "There are all the skills that we probably ignored across the country for too long," he said. "We need the equivalent of boots on the ground, and people actually making the changes."

Some businesses that have struggled with the pandemic will need it to be "genuinely easy" to make those investments to change, said Seema Malhotra MP, the shadow Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy minister. These "structural inputs" made through public policy should sit alongside a better relationship between financial services and banks, and their SME customers, she said, while the Innovation Strategy talks about building a Finance and Innovation Hub and could be linked to this agenda and to the skills issues.

Kevin Hollinrake MP drew on the work from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Fair Business Banking and its recent *Scale Up to Level Up* report. He said that while there has been "a lot of talk about levelling-up" through public sector investment, there has not been the same

## SMEs could deliver up to half of the UK's climate ambitions in the next decade



attention paid to private sector investment. This is vital to "scaling up" the start-up businesses, with access to "patient capital" being a key barrier.

According to Hollinrake, the structure of UK banking is part of the issue, with there being a relatively small mutual banking sector compared to Germany, which expanded finance to SMEs during the 2008 recession while UK commercial banks withdrew financing and SMEs suffered. As a result, most SMEs in the UK would rather grow more slowly than borrow, according to the APPG's work. "It's quite clear: we need to build a better relationship between the banking sector and business to give them more confidence that things will go well," said Hollinrake.

There are also real opportunities for regional "angel investing", according to Jenny Tooth, CEO of the UK Business Angels Association, the trade body for angel and early-stage investing. Over 60 per cent of scale-ups have angel

investment, but much of that is focused in the "Golden Triangle" of London-Cambridge-Oxford in the south-east. It remains a "big challenge" in other parts of the UK. So far, Tooth continued, a £100m regional angel investors programme has delivered benefits, but could be expanded further with co-investment.

The challenges in getting SMEs not just back on track post-pandemic, but to being a strong and thriving sector to support a transition to net zero will take coordinated and considered action. Broad policies to support better access to finance, skills and advice need to be accompanied by a real focus on sector-specific efforts and connect into tackling inequality between regions. ●

*Andrew Harrison is head of Business Banking at NatWest Group. Read more at: [natwestbusinesshub.com/articles/springboard-to-sustainability-160bn-opportunity-for-smes-tackling-climate-change](https://natwestbusinesshub.com/articles/springboard-to-sustainability-160bn-opportunity-for-smes-tackling-climate-change)*



LAURA STEVENS

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# France's action intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy on identity politics and global crises

By **Freddie Hayward**

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Bernard-Henri Lévy has been visiting the Connaught Hotel in London for 50 years. When we met there for lunch one recent afternoon, the French philosopher and public intellectual was dressed in his signature unbuttoned shirt and black jacket. He ordered an egg-white omelette with tomatoes alongside a bottle of Coca-Cola Zero, with added ice. He had ordered the same the day before. Lévy, 72, was laconic at the start of lunch – perhaps because he was at the end of a media blitz for his new book, *The Will to See: Dispatches from a World of Misery and Hope*, which collects his 2020 reports from conflict zones such as the Donbass in Ukraine, Libya and Somalia.

The final chapter, entitled “Massoud Lives!”, prefigures recent events in Afghanistan. It recounts Lévy’s September 2020 meeting with Ahmad Massoud, who has since become the leader of the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front based in the Panjshir valley. Lévy was a friend of Massoud’s father, Ahmad Shah Massoud – a legendary commander who fought the Soviets in the 1980s – and invited him to Paris a few months before al-Qaeda assassinated him in 2001. Information on the activities of the resistance has been scant, with conflicting reports about Massoud’s whereabouts. “He’s alive, he’s in and out of Panjshir, and he’s not decided to surrender,” Lévy said – having spoken to Massoud a few days before we met. “The resistance is in the process of building itself.”

Many viewed the fall of Kabul to the Taliban as an indictment of the hubristic American-led interventionism of recent decades. But for Lévy, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan was a tragic betrayal and he’s adamant that “there was no reason to withdraw”. The “cost of the withdrawal will be much higher than the cost of remaining in the country”, he argued. “It was a big mistake – a moral mistake for sure, but a political mistake as well.”

Lévy believes the anti-Taliban resistance is viable, despite its apparent lack of international support. His confidence remains unshakeable in the causes he champions. “I have not changed in 50 years,” he told me. “I just keep being an internationalist.” (When I asked whether he’s made any mistakes of political judgement over the years, there was a pause before he replied: “I did not commit so many mistakes, honestly.”)

Lévy’s support for Massoud’s fledgling resistance fits into a long history of personal involvement with democratic causes. Known as BHL in France, Lévy – born in Algeria to a wealthy timber magnate from whom he inherited a fortune – came to prominence as a leading member of the Nouveaux Philosophes movement, a generation of thinkers ▶

## The NS Interview

◀ such as Alain Finkielkraut and André Glucksmann who broke with Marxism in the 1970s and attacked the post-structuralism of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Eventually, Lévy left academic philosophy and turned to film-making and writing, charting his travels to war zones in Bosnia, Kurdistan and Libya. He takes inspiration from the Orwellian lineage of intellectuals who put their ideas into action – but in a manner informed by French history and culture. He sees his father as a hero for fighting with the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War in 1938, and then for the French Resistance in the Second World War. He writes that when he travels to countries in crisis, he goes to “plead for *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*” – the watchwords of the Republic.

Lévy’s activism has attracted criticism for relying on media attention to galvanise political action and for neglecting the long-term impact of intervention. In a review of Lévy’s *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville* (2006), the US author Garrison Keillor wrote that it was a “sort of book” that had the “grandiosity of a college sophomore”, and that it was “short on facts” but “long on conclusions”. “The clothes are precise but are his ideas?” asked one French critic. The British historian Perry Anderson has written of Lévy’s “bizarre prominence” in French culture, describing him as a “crass booby” and a “grotesque” indictment of the modern intellectual.

Lévy has also acted as a form of plenipotentiary for France. In 2002, then-president Jacques Chirac appointed him as a special envoy for Afghanistan. Nine years later, he was credited with convincing Nicolas Sarkozy to intervene in Libya to help end the civil war, while in Syrian Kurdistan last year he offered his iPhone to the commander-in-chief of the Kurdish army for a conversation with Emmanuel Macron.

Lévy’s involvement in French politics means he’s worked with politicians on both the left and right. With the campaign for the 2022 French election intensifying, what does he make of Macron’s premiership? “Exactly as I expected. I never expect a perfect leader... I’m too democratic to believe that, to expect that. This being said, Macron has done rather well.”

While Lévy has indicated that he is closer

ideologically to Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris and the Socialist Party candidate for president, he says he will vote to prevent a candidate from the extreme left or right becoming president, which is highly unlikely in any event.

Lévy maintains that public intellectuals unbound to a party or tribe are central pillars of democracy. “I give my voice to no one,” he told me. “This is the luck of being what I am: a free man and public intellectual. I’m faithful to ideas, not to people.” Nevertheless, Lévy will “probably” endorse Macron, but “we will see”.

A fierce debate is under way in France about the apparent threat posed to society by what many politicians and intellectuals regard as American ideas on race, gender and post-colonialism. In an interview in July, Macron criticised “woke culture” for what he described as the reduction of “everyone to their identity or their particularity” – a position Lévy shares. He worries that “liberals” who embrace “woke theory, the theory of the safe spaces” are “turning their back to the best of the liberal tradition”.

Lévy rejects identity-based politics because “any decision to define oneself by an identity or by two identities or by an intersectional identity is an impoverishment of what you are”. He is animated now. “A real being is always richer, more sophisticated, more complicated than any identity. So this will to reduce the singularity of an individual to an identity is a pity. What is interesting in your life is not your identity, but the escape out of your identity. This is what is interesting. You

“Any decision to define oneself by an identity is an impoverishment of what you are”

are a free woman or man if you rebel against your identity, not if you are cocooned in your identity. I am convinced of that.”

Lévy believes the emphasis on identity in politics is a reaction to our “age of fear”. People look to identity to provide comfort: “When you are panicked, you try to find some safe world and identity is a safe world.” His argument implies that the rush towards identity is an accident of our times rather than an intrinsic part of human nature.

But doesn’t Lévy’s internationalism, his nationality, his Jewishness constitute his identity? “No, my Jewishness is not an identity, it is a component of myself. I am always in the process of being a Jew, not settled in my Jewishness. It moves, it changes, it deepens. It’s not a jail. It’s an opening.

“What surprises me, what charms me, what seems to me to add something to the wealth of the world, to the moral wealth of the world, is when someone is different than himself. When someone disappoints his own identity,” he said, sipping an English breakfast tea, “that is marvellous.” ●



The statesman: Bernard-Henri Lévy (left) addresses a crowd of several thousand Libyans assembled in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi on 12 April 2011

PHIL MOORE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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# THE CRITICS



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**Television** Rachel Cooke on a new drama that revisits the Monica Lewinsky scandal. 52

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# Books

## George Orwell's moral universe

What the writer's passion for gardening reveals about his politics of resistance

By Lyndsey Stonebridge



“I am not able, and do not want, completely to abandon the world-view that I acquired in childhood,” George Orwell wrote in 1946. “So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take a pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information.”

Like many educated in the British system in the second half of the 20th century, the world-view I acquired in childhood owed a great deal to George Orwell. Shaped by the optimism of the postwar democratic welfare state and, more fretfully, by the Cold War, that world-view was intolerant of cruelty and injustice and committed to the freedom of the intellect, yet moderately tempered about the prospects for large-scale political change.

It was, in large part, a mythological world-view. But since acquiring it meant reading quite a bit of Orwell in our English classes, we were also given the tools to take apart myths, spot political cant, identify wilful obscurantism, and to believe that words could and should find ways of getting us to attend to the world that were not dishonest.

It's fair to say that for many it feels as if the broadly left, tolerant humanism that Orwell once represented has been abandoned. Or perhaps it has abandoned us. In any case, its absence is conspicuous. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a politics of lying, denial and fear has crept back into daily life. Big organisations are once more messing with our minds. Self-censorship has again become routine in some quarters, as has violent disinhibition in others. Yet the sense of a common culture in which dissent and diversity could be nurtured is missing.

The question now cannot be whether we should abandon Orwell – various high-minded attempts have been made to do this over the years, but he remains present – but which Orwell we should be cultivating for our own “over-the-top-Orwellian” times.

Rebecca Solnit's answer in her luminous new homage to the writer is Orwell the gardener – the man who in 1936 planted roses in his garden in Wallington, Hertfordshire, and in his writing nurtured a sensibility attuned to natural beauty and the life which quietly keeps on generating alongside the weary cynicism and political despair.

Everybody knows, or at least thinks they know, the Orwell who casts a “cold eye on political monstrosity”. Pronouncing on which bits of contemporary life are “Orwellian” or not has become as cynical and ideological as the politics he despised. By contrast, Solnit, the American author, historian, activist, and one of our best contemporary essayists, is interested in the writer who never abandoned his love of the “surface of the earth” and who (also in 1946) recognised that he had “done good unconsciously” when he bought some baby rose shrubs from Woolworths ten years previously, planted them in his garden, and set something going that would endure beyond his too-short lifespan.

Part biography, part memoir, a historical and cultural analysis and a work of literary criticism, Solnit's book is a love letter in prose to those roses, to

REBECCA HENDIN

Orwell and to the enduring relevance of his ethical sensibility. It is efflorescent, a study that seeds and blooms, propagates thoughts, and tends to historical associations.

Solnit describes her writing method as “rhizomatic”, by which she means, following the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, that it connects to other images, stories and thoughts, like the runners and feelers of a strawberry plant; or, updating the science a little, like the “mycorrhizal networks, sometimes called the wood wide web, that connect trees to one another”.

Like Alice in the rose garden, sometimes you can get lost in the tangle of this wood. But part of Solnit’s Orwellian point is that the imagination does not thrive in captivity, and that an over-cultivated landscape is often a document to human bondage and brutality – such as in Sir Joshua Reynolds’ painting of the Honorable Henry Fane from the 1760s, which includes Orwell’s great-great-grandfather, the plantation- and slave-owner, Charles Blair.

This is also a story about ecology and labour, and about how dominating nature and dominating people are the twin faces of modern totalitarianism. Stalin insisted that lemons could grow in the garden of his Kuntsevo dacha just outside Moscow (they could not). In Mexico in 1924, the Italian activist and artist Tina Modotti created one of the most beautiful and celebrated images of roses in the history of photography, yet later abandoned art and became an accomplice to Stalin’s crimes.

“Bread for all, and roses too,” was the radical cry of suffrage and labour movements at the beginning of the 20th century, a protest both for equality and against commodification. In our century, multinational rose farms in Colombia deliver scentless flowers to supermarkets in the US and Europe. “The lovers get the roses, but we get the thorns,” runs a workers’ slogan from a factory Solnit visits; just as industrial Britain got its wealth, and the miners Orwell wrote about in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) got their collapsed lungs and dismal life expectancy.

By tending to his garden, Orwell was creating a refuge from the depredations of advanced industrial capitalism, fascism, war and political mendacity. Like another great theorist of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, he understood privacy – the right to be unworldly – to be a bulwark against authoritarianism. “In an age of lies and illusions,” Solnit writes, “the garden is one way to ground yourself... in nature.” Gardens don’t lie, and getting things to grow requires more than slick rhetoric. In this, they share something with viruses which, likewise, resist domination by political fictions.

Yet unlike Voltaire’s horticulture in *Candide*, Orwell’s gardening was not a retreat from politics. The man who famously felt strongly about prose style understood that because the solid things of the earth require an unworldly attention, they in turn can cultivate new resistant strains of language and thought. In short, if we want to defy the lies, the imagination needs both freedom and care.

Hannah Arendt once suggested something very similar about the connections between culture, nature,

and political defiance. The word “culture”, she observed, “derives from *colere* – to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve – and it relates primarily... to the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation”.

**W**e tend to the imagination, to art, culture, writing and creative thinking, for the same reason that we cultivate the natural world: so that we might find a human habitat.

This “attitude of loving care,” Arendt said, “stands in sharp contrast to all efforts to subject nature to the domination of man”. There is perhaps a reason why climate change deniers also tend to disapprove of research funding for the arts and humanities.

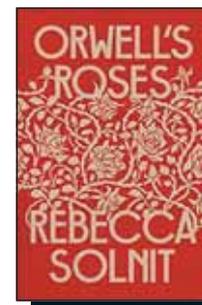
Arendt and Orwell never met, but in the 1950s and 1960s she regularly set his books for her US students in her courses on 20th-century politics. She did so not simply for his analyses of the very personal nature of modern totalitarianism, which she shared. But because like him she believed that exercising the imagination was a form of political understanding. An attitude of “loving care” can also grow free thinking and political dissent. It is this tradition that Solnit’s book affirms and revives for the present.

I’m less sure that Orwell always stands quite so far away from cruelty. He loved his garden, but he was no cricket in the sunshine. The dappled shade of the “Golden Country” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where Julia seduces Winston Smith is indeed a place of beauty, sex, privacy and all the good things. But when Winston finally submits to Big Brother at the end of the novel it is with a shout of “Do it to Julia!”, a cry familiar to many women when it’s closing time for the gardens and patriarchy reasserts itself. Early on, he fought with his publisher, Victor Gollancz, over the edits of the scene of child rape in chapter two of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). He thought it was “the only good bit of writing in the book”. I can barely read it.

Orwell understood the sadism in misogyny because, like the paranoia in anti-Semitism, he shared it. He understood, in other words, that pleasure was also generated by violence and cruelty, and that resistance to domination was to be found not only in gardens but also by being honest about your complicity – sometimes brutally honest. Piety, even about the good things, was also something he distrusted.

Orwell’s shines through in Solnit’s book not least because it is matched by her own. She cares for his words as she does for her own and as she does for the “surface of the earth”. The myth of a common humanism might well now be in tatters, and for good reason – if our times are again “Orwellian” this is in large part because the world-view of the liberal West in the late 20th century has failed so badly. But if we want to learn again from Orwell, and to nurture a common culture of dissent and imagination, this thoroughly loving book tells us where we might begin. ●

*Lyndsey Stonebridge is professor of humanities and human rights at the University of Birmingham. Her book on Hannah Arendt will be published by Jonathan Cape*



**Orwell’s Roses**  
Rebecca Solnit  
Granta Books,  
320pp, £16.99

**In his garden  
Orwell  
created a  
refuge from  
industrial  
capitalism,  
fascism  
and war**



Death from above: despite new technology enabling more precise targeting, civilian suffering in many wars is as extensive as ever

## The battle for profit

The human cost of war is great. But so long as conflict makes money, it will never go away  
By Lawrence Freedman

In January 1961, as Dwight Eisenhower was about to leave office as US president, he issued a stark and unexpected warning: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” Those were the days when Republicans with distinguished military records wanted to restrain defence spending. Eisenhower had spent the final years of his presidency resisting pressure to authorise costly projects in response to exaggerated threats.

According to Andrew Cockburn in *The Spoils of War*, this warning had little effect. The “misplaced power” led not only to a bloated Pentagon budget but also to the wars that provided it with a rationale. Waste, mismanagement and corruption became the norm. Weapons programmes took years to complete, if at all, supported by contracts that encouraged gold-plating, with unnecessarily high specifications and no incentives

NAEBLYS / ALAMY

to keep costs under control. Generals and admirals went along with this because the contractors promised lucrative retirement jobs. Congress relaxed its oversight as orders and military bases were strategically directed to the districts and states of influential House members. Even once the nation was at war, instead of providing decent boots for soldiers, money went into esoteric weapons systems that failed to deliver.

Cockburn, the Washington, DC editor of *Harper's Magazine*, comes from a family of radical journalists who have made it their business to challenge official accounts and expose scandals. He has long been unearthing awkward facts about the practices and policies of the US national security establishment. During the 1980s, he produced a counter to the Pentagon's glossy booklets about the Soviet Union's military power, pointing instead to its weaknesses and dysfunctions, an analysis he could claim was vindicated after the end of the Cold War. In this collection of more recent articles, he picks out choice examples to support his core themes, taking advantage of the "target-rich" environment of this century to show that little has changed.

He is not opposed to all weapons systems. In the opening piece he describes how the A-10 "Warthog" was effective in providing close air support for troops on the ground in Afghanistan. The US Air Force, however, wanted to use the fantastically expensive B-1 bomber – designed for nuclear missions against the Soviet Union and quite unsuitable for the Afghanistan role – which resulted in the deaths of many innocent civilians.

Elsewhere, he tells the story of "Fat Leonard", a naval contractor who serviced port visits for the Seventh Fleet, bribing senior officers with cash and lascivious parties to ensure that their ships visited his facilities. Cockburn's indictment does not stop at showing how defence contractors and their allies extract what they can from the system while giving little of value in return. He also blames them for promoting the arms race and encouraging wars. This has been achieved by pushing for military action and sidelining diplomacy, while demonising potential enemies. He challenges portrayals both of American foes and its friends: the Saudis, for instance, come in for a rough time because of their connections to the 9/11 attacks and the war in Yemen.

This is robust, old-fashioned progressive, polemical journalism. Not all the targets are hit with precision, but Cockburn describes some shocking practices, and provides valuable critiques – for example, of the over-reliance on sanctions as a coercive instrument. He picks up on issues that have been around since weapons manufacturers and their critics discovered war could be profitable. He argues that "the military are not generally interested in war, save as a means to budget enhancement". Considerations of "foreign policy" and "strategy" are deceptive, hiding the real driving force. The most important question is always *cui bono?* Who benefits?

As someone who spends his time studying foreign policy and strategy, have I been missing the point? Cockburn is, of course, right that the Pentagon's enormous budget provides opportunities for schemers

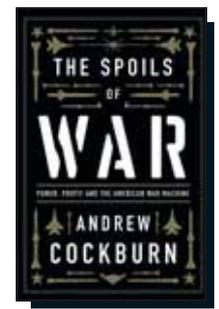
and grifters – some in charge of large corporations – and that the institutional interests of the armed services lead to distorted defence priorities. Greater awareness of these issues helps civilians push back against this "misplaced power" – as they often do. When I started work in this area in the early 1970s, I was attracted by theories of the malign influence of the military-industrial complex, which then acquired added credibility as explanations were sought for the calamitous Vietnam War. Yet I soon discovered it explained less than expected.

For example, Cockburn attributes the "missile gap" scare of 1960 as a pre-emptive response ("on cue") to Eisenhower's military-industrial complex speech. The claim, however, that the Soviet Union was outproducing the US in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) was in part the result of the Soviet Union testing an ICBM before the US, and then launching the world's first artificial Earth satellite (Sputnik 1) in 1957. These events were followed by Nikita Khrushchev's boast that Soviet rockets were coming off production lines like "sausages". Eisenhower, and the CIA, doubted the exaggerated Air Force projections about how far the Soviet Union was ahead with missile development. This was confirmed when US satellites provided evidence that the Americans were, in fact, ahead. It's not clear how satellites fit in with Cockburn's thesis, as in this, and other areas such as arms control verification, they were a source of reassuring evidence.

Another example is Nato's expansion during the 1990s. It is true, as Cockburn notes, that drawing former members of the Warsaw Pact into the alliance was good domestic politics for Bill Clinton. It may have opened up new markets for defence contractors, although they were already opening. But the issue cannot be understood without appreciating the anxieties of those central and eastern European countries which had been let down badly by the Western democracies before and now wanted stronger security guarantees.

The debates about foreign policy and strategy should, therefore, not be dismissed too lightly. In *Humane*, Samuel Moyn, a professor of both history and jurisprudence at Yale University, asks what has gone wrong with US defence policy this century, and he does not mention defence contractors. Instead, he explores a dilemma that has long dogged anti-war campaigners: war is horrible, so we must find ways to alleviate the suffering; but if this results in war becoming less horrible, then it is a more tempting option.

This was a sharp debate in the late 19th century as the first efforts were taken to make war less miserable, such as the formation of the Red Cross; attempts to codify the laws of war so the injured and prisoners could be treated properly; prohibitions on particularly obnoxious weapons; and the first Hague conferences on disarmament. These could be presented as steps towards the abolition of war, but the likely outcome was to sustain war as an acceptable instrument of statecraft. The steps were dismissed accordingly by critics, such as Leo Tolstoy and the



**The Spoils of War: Power, Profit and the American War Machine**

Andrew Cockburn  
Verso, 288pp,  
£17.99

**Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War**

Samuel Moyn  
Verso, 416pp, £20

**The US military's enormous budget provides opportunities for schemers and grifters**

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◀ Austrian anti-war campaigner Bertha von Suttner.

It was not, however, the possibility of a humane war that led the rush into the First World War, but the prize of an early victory for the side that mobilised first. Once there was no quick victory and the fighting took hold, the war became attritional and – with poisoned gas, air raids and attacks on merchant shipping – ever more deadly. After it was all over, efforts to abolish war were taken up again with renewed vigour, strengthening both global organisations and international law. To no avail. Another, even more brutal world war followed the first, this time with organised mass murder.

**T**he Korean War confirmed that nuclear weapons had created an incentive to limit conflicts, although for the Korean people the fighting was as deadly as anything that had gone before. The conduct of the Vietnam War led to more soul-searching, especially after the revelations about the atrocity at My Lai in 1968. Moyn skillfully takes us through the debates prompted by Vietnam about international law and how it should be adapted and enforced. Out of this came a determination to find a more humane way to fight such wars.

From the early 1970s, highly accurate weapons were introduced into the US arsenal that made it possible to avoid large-scale civilian casualties. Now drones can loiter above possible targets before launching missiles. Lawyers can be brought in to check whether the targets are appropriate before they are hit. For the lawyerly Barack Obama – looking for a way to deal with US enemies without getting entangled in more occupations of unfriendly territory – these were the perfect weapons, although his enthusiasm gradually waned as he became more troubled by their legal and ethical implications.

Moyn is also torn between the obvious advantages – if war is going to be fought – of doing so in a way that reduces its human cost, and the concern that if we get too comfortable with “humane wars”, then we will forget about the need to ban them altogether. Despite his claim that the US has “reinvented war”, his focus is too narrow for this to work. Drone warfare is only one part of contemporary military practice. It might provide a means of assassinating terrorists and other hostile figures, but it provides no means of controlling territory, which is what most wars are about. The vicious urban battles fought in Iraq and Syria, and the persistent militia campaigns mixed with gangsterism in Ukraine and in Sub-Saharan Africa, also describe modern warfare. In these cases, civilian suffering is as great as ever. Moyn also fails to address the current US preoccupation with China (also oddly ignored by Cockburn) and what a war over Taiwan might look like.

If the institution of war survives, it will not be because of the lobbying efforts of the military-industrial complex or the promise of combat without tears, but rather because people and states keep finding things to fight about. ●

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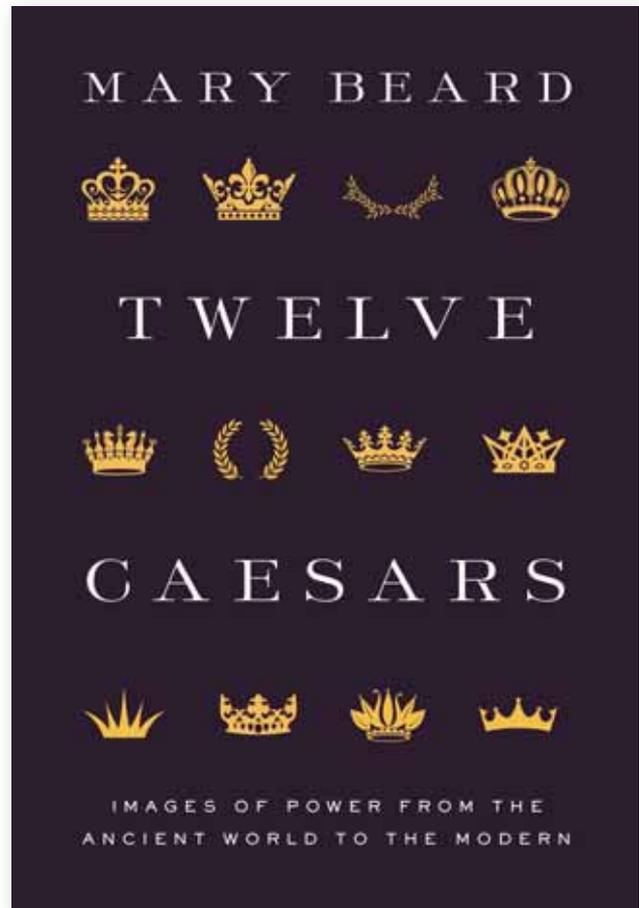
*Lawrence Freedman is emeritus professor of war studies at King's College London and the author of "The Future of War: A History" (Penguin)*

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## New from Mary Beard

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The gripping story of how images of Roman autocrats have influenced art, culture, and the representation of power for more than 2,000 years



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—Rachel Cooke, *The Observer*

“A masterclass.”

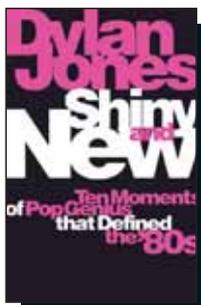
—Simon J. V. Malloch, *Literary Review*

 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Made by the Eighties

A fascinating and frustrating account of the decade when pop music reinvented itself

By Kate Mossman



**Shiny and New: Ten Moments of Pop Genius that Defined the '80s**

Dylan Jones  
White Rabbit,  
320pp, £20

One unexpected fixture of the pandemic was the Friday night reruns of *Top of the Pops* on BBC Four. This mechanical spooling out of the old show in real time, week after week, has been going on for a while – but the national lockdown just happened to coincide with shows from the most forgettable year in music: 1989. Once a week, an imprisoned nation would revisit this strange cultural bald patch from the tail end of pop’s poppiest decade – a top 40 dominated by Stock Aitken Waterman, Jive Bunny, Timmy Mallett, tunes from David Lynch movies and songs sung by actors from *Neighbours*. The music was poor, but one thing was refreshing: unlike most modern music programmes, there was no earnest commentary, no cultural criticism yoking the most throwaway pop to some wider political moment. There was no footage of the Brixton riots set to a soundtrack of the Specials, or Thatcher intercut with Billy Bragg.

Dylan Jones’s 21st book – in 2012 alone, he wrote three – is an attempt to rehabilitate the era they called “the decade that taste forgot” by taking ten famous songs from the Eighties and exploring the deeper cultural significance of each. He covers post-punk and ska, the Smiths and New Order; “Sign o’ the Times”, “Like a Virgin” and “Born in the USA”.

Jones, who left *GQ* magazine last year, may be one of the most successful editors of this century, an old Cameroon and chair of the British Fashion Council, but he is also a geek. *Shiny and New*, at its best, has the feel of a man in his sixties strolling around his extensive vinyl stock, pulling favourite records off the shelves and pulling you down the twisty sinkholes of his knowledge. When the door to the man-cave is thrown wide and the enthusiasm pours out, Jones achieves a pleasant combination of memoir, oral history and eccentric footnotes with an avuncular tone.

But when he attempts, as he frequently does, to bolt social history on to his chosen songs, his writing acquires a naive, almost elementary quality. His chapter on the Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” attempts to consider the tune within the bleak setting

of New York’s most dangerous era. “The city was like one big red-light district,” he writes. “Prostitutes openly walked the streets, movie theatres screened porn around the clock... There were endless potholes in the roads, the trains didn’t run on time, and subway cars were filthy.” Jones was 15 years old and living in Ely during the birth of rap. Elsewhere he talks, BBC Four-style, about the grey breezeblock Seventies transitioning into the Technicolor Eighties. And some of his metaphors leave you confused: with the death of John Lennon in 1980, he says, “the pop continuum” broke. Then he points out it had also broken with the death of Elvis Presley in 1977.

The role of music in our lives is personal and emotional, its cultural significance an abstract concept. A beloved song pulls you backwards to youth – to a time in life when you *had* more time, when your sense of the future was blank with possibility. Jones’s chapter on 1982, entitled “Men in Hats”, is one of the most original sections of his book, focusing on the genre known as “new pop” via the Sheffield band ABC.

There is a real attempt, born of fandom, passion, love, to understand and explain the philosophy behind the lead singer Martin Fry’s retro-futuristic glamour and his iconic gold lamé suit. Not only were pop stars suddenly dressing like it was the 1940s; Dylan Jones and his art school pals were too. “We were appropriating the styles of the stockbroker, the crooner, the spiv and the politician. By using childish gimmicks – dressing up, inexpertly – we were attempting to be adults by very carefully looking to the past.”

I’d never read someone deconstruct a 1980s sense of irony so sincerely. Jones sounds like the young bands who in those days wrote out their manifestos and really believed they were going to change the world. But he spoils it all with a 33-line diversion into the Falklands War, explaining exactly what it was, and where the islands were – and making a bizarre link between the conflict and what the left-wing music press, such as the *NME*, thought of the sharp-suited new pop bands.

“If you were a pop star,” he writes, “who had enjoyed the trappings of success via the pages of *Smash Hits*... you were probably somehow complicit in the aggression.”

Jones describes the great variety of music in the 1980s charts as the “atomisation” of pop – a kaleidoscope of genres existing side by side, putting the Stone Roses next to Jason Donovan in the top ten. His book includes many lists: on one page, he reels off 34 great albums of the Eighties, ending his point with “and so on, and so on”. He explores the decade’s smart reinventions of old styles – “material that was both a celebration of the genre, and a meta attempt to contextualise” – and he likes to make musical mash-ups, finding Kraftwerk in the DNA of rap, and painting New Order, the heroes of post-punk, as gloomy Mancunians making euphoric music. He asks how the bombastic Eighties affected established rock stars: who knew that Bruce Springsteen felt his MTV



**Material world: Madonna, a “committed professional” with humour and ambition, personified the spirit of the Eighties**

videos were damaging his image? Or that he didn't play Live Aid because he was too tired?

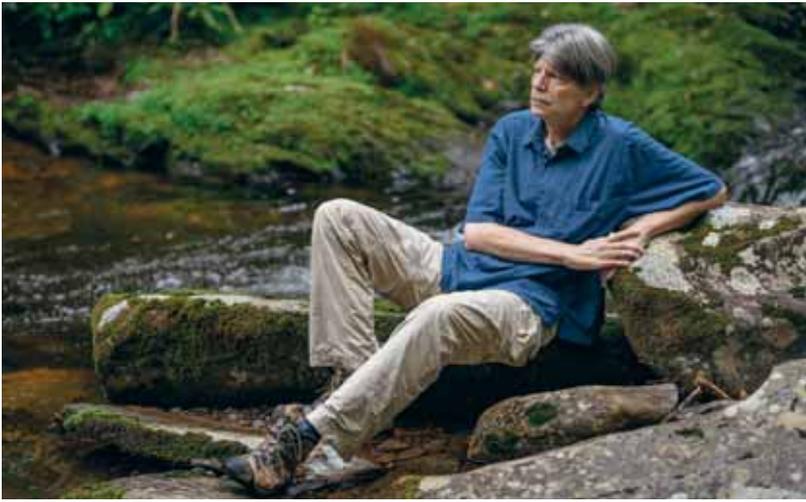
But despite its ambitious proposal, *Shiny and New* can be frustratingly simplistic. Jones is at his best when his cultural criticism is confined to characters, rather than movements. His chapter on Madonna is so vivid you wish he'd written a book on her instead – though he's probably working on one now.

Just a year and a half older than Jones, she seems to have been a constant presence in his life – from his time at the *Observer*, when he sent Martin Amis to interview her, only for her team to decide Amis was too famous; to the *GQ* awards ceremony when, horror, she turned up early and the show started late. Jones ignores the reductive press she has had in the last ten

**Martin Amis was sent to interview Madonna but he was considered too famous**

years and considers her with reverence: “The difference with Madonna was that she had total self-possession,” he says. “She wasn't anyone's adjunct, she wasn't a plus one.” He captures her self-awareness, her humour (“crucifixes are sexy,” she once said, “because there's a naked man on them”) and he affords her belly button the space it is due.

But most importantly – unlike so much else in this book – Madonna seems to blend effortlessly with a broader sense of what the 1980s were all about. She is a “committed professional” whose “ascent just happened to coincide with a shift in culture that had started to celebrate ambition for its own sake”. Clearly a subject of fascination for Dylan Jones, she was made by the Eighties, as indeed he was. ●



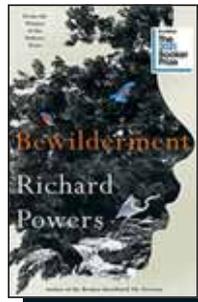
## The world beyond your head

Neuroscience, astrobiology and ecocide mix in Richard Powers's Booker-shortlisted new novel

By Leo Robson

Is Richard Powers trolling Sally Rooney? In reality, you'd have to say no. But it can appear, when placing their last two novels side by side, that Powers is swatting away the concerns that used to keep Rooney busy and now seem to keep her up at night. Powers's astonishing saga *The Overstory* (2018) appeared a few months before *Normal People*. His ensemble cast – nine central characters – and emphasis on arboreal science might have seemed like a rebuke to pokier subject matter even without the moment when Ray, a lawyer, laments that fiction too often mistakes life for “something huge with two legs” and that “no novel can make the contest for the world seem as compelling as the struggles between a few lost people”. *The Overstory* and *Normal People* both made the Booker Prize longlist, but Powers got one stage further, and even Rooney's commercial success may be said to prove Ray's point.

If, the last time around, Powers torpedoed Rooney in advance, then his slighter but similarly far-reaching new book, *Bewilderment*, is arriving late to spoil a party. In the Irish author's *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, the Rooney-like writer Alice bemoans the ethical complacency of “the contemporary Euro-American novel” and fears that to place global suffering next to invented characters



**Bewilderment**  
Richard Powers  
Hutchinson  
Heinemann,  
288pp, £18.99

**Above: Powers near his home in Tennessee**

would be “deemed either tasteless or simply artistically unsuccessful”. Yet Powers, without any apparent self-consciousness, has set the relationship between two characters – a 30-something widower, Theo, and his troubled, possibly autistic son, Robin – against an unspecified future landscape marked by chaos and collapse. Theo's work as an astrobiologist involves finding planets that might offer an alternative to this one – research that seems to grant Robin his only refuge from a life of anger and isolation, until a neuro-feedback experiment turns him into a popular eco-warrior.

The result, though rich, is far from perfect. Powers is so often praised for his intellectual firepower that his qualities as a writer risk going unmentioned, and *Bewilderment*, like many of his books, is full of limpid, light-touch sentences. But the desire to explain, and to express rapture, also produces overheated effects, or just colliding vowel-sounds: in one 50-word passage, we get “splayed”, “cascade”, “crustacean”, “inhaled”, “percolating”, “sensations”, and “elated”. And for reasons that never become clear, the story is told in more than 100 sections – so that's 100 opening gambits, 100 fade-outs or punchlines or cliffhangers. It puts a strain on his resources.

Since the appearance of *The Gold Bug Variations* 30 years ago, the Richard Powers novel has become a sub-genre characterised by multidisciplinary erudition, historical sweep and networks of symbolic imagery. Though *Bewilderment* is being sold as a kind of coda to *The Overstory*, which was awarded the Pulitzer and received praise from Barack Obama, it has more in common with Peter Carey's Powers knock-off, *The Chemistry of Tears* (2012), which concerned a horologist mourning her dead lover while ruminating on the history of technology. You could say that in writing a dystopian fantasy that desires to warm the cockles – a kind of YA version of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* – Powers is being mawkish by design. But the earnestness still grates. Facing yet another science discussion involving father and son (“*How could we ever know aliens? We can't even know birds*”), I couldn't help but recall the narrator of the mockumentary, *Look Around You*, asking: “What are birds? We just don't know.”

Powers gets around the ethical quandary the same way Rooney does. He more or less says that life is just something huge with two legs (“Maybe humanity was a nine-year-old,” Theo speculates). Theo calls Robin a “compact planet”. And just as in *Beautiful World* Alice's friend Eileen assures her we're simply born to love and worry about the people we know, so Theo says that worrying about Robin when “the entire species might have been on the line” is the “trap evolution shaped for us”. Theo's late wife Alyssa sighs in flashback, “*Man, we all fall short so beautifully*”; Eileen roots for human beings to survive “because we are so stupid about each other”. So the latest bout between the hand-wringing novelist of ideas and the increasingly pained writer of love stories probably ends in a draw. Powers, like his younger combatant, has made a valiant attempt at a daunting task while providing a distinctly mixed experience for the reader. ●

## Reviewed in short

### **The Art of More: How Mathematics Created Civilisation** by Michael Brooks

Scribe, 336pp, £18.99

Maths has an ambivalent reputation. A common complaint heard in classrooms is that it's pointless and gratuitously difficult. But maths is also revered, as though it is an innate language that expresses, in its purest form, the logic of reality. In *The Art of More* the science writer Michael Brooks debunks both these viewpoints by restoring the subject to history. He recasts algebra, geometry, calculus, and so on as a series of marvellous innovations with highly practical origins, some of which are staggeringly recent: negative numbers and the concept of zero only caught on in the West a few centuries ago.

Maths is not a primordial reality, Brooks explains, but a man-made way of describing it in order to do useful things – calculate taxes, navigate the seas, construct buildings – without which civilisation wouldn't exist. Explicitly pedagogical, *The Art of More* is an alternative textbook that suggests a new way of thinking about maths, and a more congenial way of teaching it – as not simply an abstract science but as a cultural achievement, an indelible and indispensable part of human history.

By *Lola Seaton*

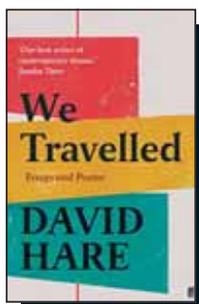
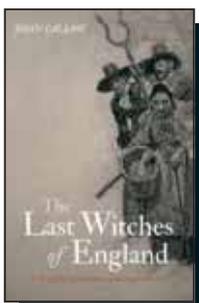
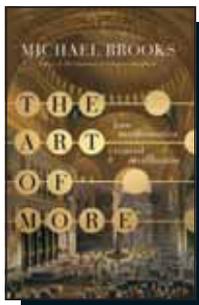
### **The Last Witches of England** by John Callow

Bloomsbury, 304pp, £25

In 1660, the Royal Society was founded, with its early members including natural scientists such as Christopher Wren, Isaac Newton and Robert Hooke: the moment is often held as the starting point of the age of reason. More than two decades later, however, in 1682, three poor women from Bideford in Devon – Temperance Lloyd, Susannah Edwards and Mary Trembles – were hanged for witchcraft. John Callow's intriguing book is both a case study of the Bideford witch trial and an examination of how superstition prevailed in a time of increasing rationality.

When a magpie flew into the bedroom of a sick woman, Grace Thomas, a chain of events started which saw Lloyd accused of having "discourse or familiarity with the devil in the likeness or shape of a black man". It was the Devil who led her into tormenting Thomas with pricks and pinches. The other two women were caught up in the increasingly febrile atmosphere, and hearsay, rumour and public fear were enough to send all three to the gallows. Callow's fascinating and vivid unpicking of the English Salem is also an account of the birth pangs of the modern age.

By *Michael Prodger*



### **Move: How Mass Migration Will Reshape the World** by Parag Khanna

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 352pp, £20

When Parag Khanna goes on long hikes, he falls into a "light trance": daydreaming about a world where "disparate communities" across the globe mix "freely and peacefully" and "people circulate as they please". Khanna, a geopolitical thinker and self-described "citizen of everywhere", decries high school geography lessons for defaulting to "political geography, as if the most arbitrary lines on our maps (borders) are the most permanent". It suits him, then, that planet Earth is hurtling towards a certain future of mass movement, as the ravages of climate change, industrial automation and demographic imbalances accelerate the relocation of future generations.

While the questions he poses in *Move* – where will billions of people have moved by 2050? Which parts of the world will be abandoned, and which will thrive? – are compelling, they are tackled with Panglossian visions ("An archipelago of sustainable Arctic settlements") rather than couched in the messy and often dismal reality of being uprooted or forced to flee. For a study of human destiny, this book contains surprisingly little humanity.

By *Anoosh Chakelian*

### **We Travelled: Essays and Poems** by David Hare

Faber & Faber, 304pp, £14.99

The playwright and film-maker David Hare called his first collection of journalism *Writing Left-Handed*. Yet his essays are a reliable source of delight. His prose is breezy, never overtly stylish but always capable of a ringing phrase, underpinned by anger at injustice and irritation at blinkered thinking. Among the errors he sets about redressing here include the idea that Chekhov was a cool writer, that Terence Rattigan was knocked from his perch atop English theatre by angry newcomers such as John Osborne (a narrative with "so many misconceptions... that it is hard to know where to begin"), and that Tony Blair was merely obsessed with popularity: "How clever of him, then, to prove the opposite – that he gave not a fig for public opinion!"

Hare is a wonderful appreciator, as shown in his tribute to the "hardy heroism" of the New York theatre producer Joe Papp, and in a memorable and strikingly authoritative essay on the photographer Lee Miller. He also displays a newfound – or hitherto-concealed – taste for introspection. The 35 poems that comprise the book's second half are full of allusions to his legion of past failures and too-thin skin, revealing yet another side to this great, unflagging writer.

By *Leo Robson*

## South coast Japanese

Eric Slater was an unassuming man who was briefly the Hokusai of Sussex

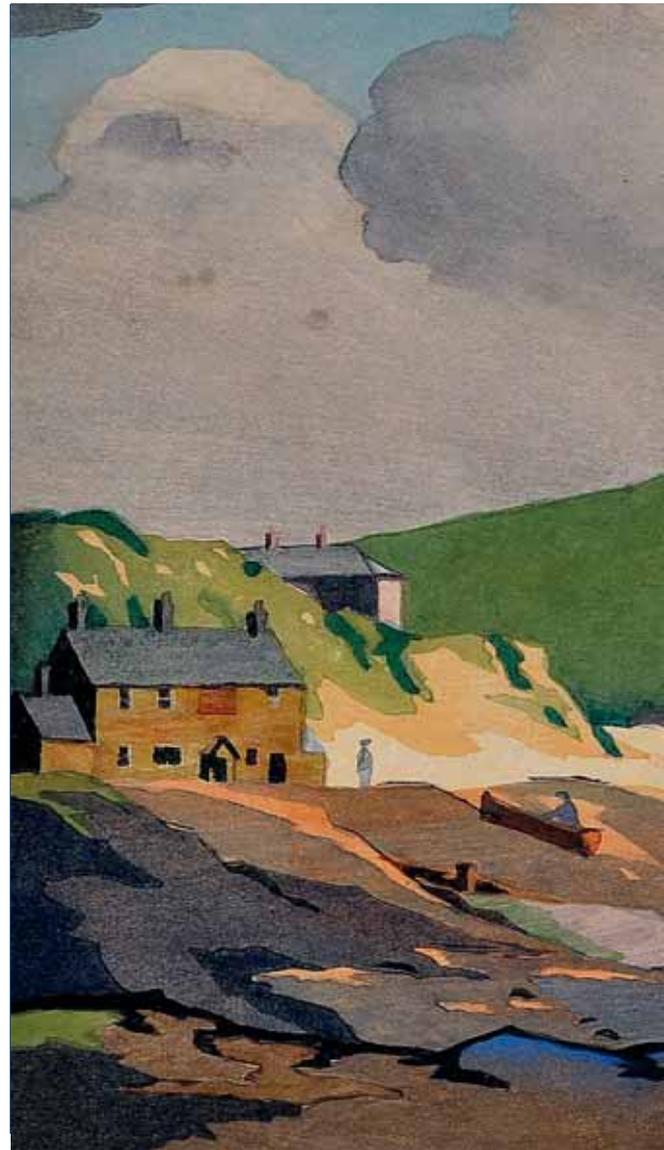
By Michael Prodger

In 1853, when Commodore Perry used his Black Ships to menace Japan into ending its policy of self-isolation, it was the creation of a new market for American goods that was uppermost in his mind. The niceties of cultural exchange were of no concern to the gunboat diplomat. But while the American presence within Japan was widely resented, the dissemination of Japanese culture into the West was both welcome and transformative.

Within a matter of years, Japanese porcelain and prints had started a fad that became a craze among European artists. Manet and Monet, Whistler and Van Gogh, Beardsley and Bonnard were just a few of those whose work shifted as a result of lessons learned from Hokusai, Hiroshige and other Japanese “artists of the floating world”. By the 1920s, Japonisme had made it to Seaford on the Sussex coast too. There, in the small seaside town between Brighton and Eastbourne, a quiet and unassuming man named Eric Slater briefly gave the Japanese art of watercolour woodcuts a distinctively English twist.

In the first decades of the century there was a new interest in printmaking that combined the art and craft traditions. The Golden Cockerel Press run by Robert Gibbings specialised in books with wood engravings by the likes of Eric Gill, David Jones and Eric Ravilious; the Grosvenor School printmakers turned linocuts into an art form; Paul and John Nash and Edward Wadsworth made independent wood engravings and woodcuts; Robert Bevan and CRW Nevinson brought new subtleties to lithography. All, in their different ways, were exploring how to make reproductive art that kept its maker’s stamp – its authenticity – the very problem that Walter Benjamin would address

**Eric Slater**  
Seaford Head,  
1930



in his influential 1935 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.

Whether Slater was concerned with such issues is doubtful. Although his work can be seen as part of a wider cultural movement he kept himself to himself, on the edge of both the country and its artistic conversations. He rarely strayed or drew more than ten miles from his Seaford home and produced only 45 watercolour woodcuts in the decade or so before he gave up art in 1938. Apart from a few flower still-lives and a couple of tourist-spot scenes of places such as Stonehenge and Corfe Castle (drawn from photographic postcards), his work shows just the sea, cliffs and downland of his little patch of Sussex.

When Slater stopped printmaking both he and his pictures slid rapidly into obscurity. While his contemporary Eric Ravilious – who painted some of the same scenes – has been revived as a peculiarly British vernacular modernist, Slater has continued to languish. That he has resurfaced at all is largely down to the work of James Trollope, himself a Seaford



new in this country and Read, after travelling in Japan, learnt it from Frank Morley Fletcher's 1916 manual *Wood-Block Printing*. The method involves drawing the design on to a series of blocks, one for each colour, and cutting out the areas not to be printed. The raised design is then covered with watercolour mixed with rice paste and a damp sheet of paper is pressed on to it to transfer the design. Successive colour blocks are then overlaid until the image is complete. Slater would carve some ten blocks for every picture and make up to 50 copies of each print.

Working from a lean-to built on to the kitchen at the back of his modest house, Slater quickly found success: in 1929, the year he moved to Seaford, he joined the Society of Graver-Printers in Colour and in 1930 won a gold medal from the International Printmakers Society of California with a picture of the cliffs at Seaford Head. He gained a dealer in Cork Street who also dealt in Whistler's prints and his pictures were exhibited in Australia, South Africa and America, as well as in British venues such as the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

*Seaford Head* (1930) shows Slater at his most characteristic. It is a pared-back view with the non-essentials removed to accommodate the colours' sitting on top of one another rather than mixing, as they would with proper watercolours. The palette is limited to dusty greens, greys, blues and buffs, with the unmodulated green mass of the rising slope at its centre. The brilliance of Slater's block-cutting and colouring is evident both in the harmony of the whole and the deftness of the meeting places between colours. A dab of watercolour to pick out the edge of a rock or the shadow on a cliff is easily applied; carving a block to give the effect is quite different.

Slater's technical finesse is especially clear in the sky, where a mass of white, the paper itself, is brought to life by carefully placed incursions of grey. By giving the clouds definition he imparts atmospheric movement across the whole scene. Slater knew not only how to simplify but, just as importantly, when to stop.

The end of his career was precipitated by the death of his mother Charlotte in 1938 from a heart attack. The loss of his greatest supporter sapped his will to make art and the war seemed to finish it off. Seaford itself was bombed and its beach was mined to stop a German landing; Cuckmere Haven, a favoured drawing place a mile along the coast just beyond Seaford Head, was reinforced with gun emplacements, the river was mined, and concrete anti-tank "dragon's teeth" defences and pillboxes were built along the valley sides. Slater's bucolic realm had become the site of frantic military activity and small prints of ageless England seemed otiose as a result.

Slater lived out the last 25 years of his life quietly in Seaford, without making a mark on the wider world. James Trollope tracked down his old housekeeper, who remembered the ageing artist as bald, formally dressed, and looking "more like a bank manager than an artist". He died of broncho-pneumonia in a Catholic nursing home in Hove, and no next of kin could be traced. He was buried back in Seaford, close to all the places he had once made his own. ●

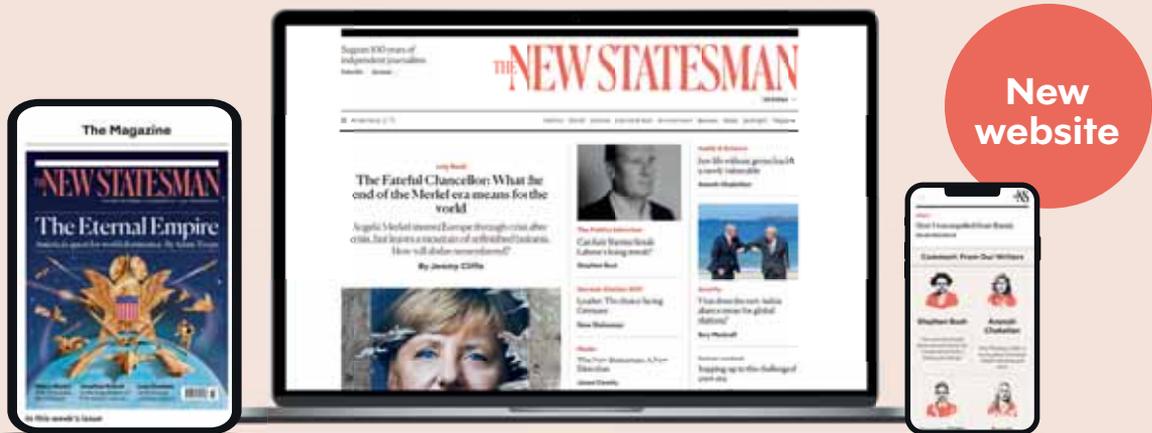
resident, who has championed Slater's work and discovered what little is known of his life.

Slater (1896-1963) was not Sussex-born but came from London, where his father was a successful silversmith. When Slater was eight, however, his father died from pneumonia and with his mother, grandmother and aunt the family downsized in first Bexhill, then Winchelsea and finally Seaford. According to one of the few extant records of the artist, by Campbell Dodgson, a supporter who was Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum (and a distant cousin of Charles Dodgson/Lewis Carroll), until the age of 21 Slater's "health did not permit him to take up any career". This meant he was not conscripted into the army during the First World War either. Instead, true to his father's memory, perhaps, he enrolled at the Hastings School of Art, which had a reputation for encouraging good design.

It wasn't there, however, that he learned how to make watercolour woodcuts but from a Winchelsea neighbour, Arthur Rigden Read. The technique was still

**Slater kept himself to himself, on the edge of both the country and its artistic conversations**

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# Film

## Another old curiosity shop

Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*, which makes a movie out of a magazine, is impossibly accomplished – and a bit boring

By David Sexton

It is possible, after all, to be too pert. Wes Anderson's best films, from *The Royal Tenenbaums* to *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, have an undercurrent of deep feeling, a tugging human story at work beneath their drollery and exquisite artifice. *The French Dispatch*, his most consummately stylised work yet, does not.

Anderson has often started his films with an imaginary book, launching a world from a text. *The French Dispatch*, though, faithfully transfers a whole issue of an invented magazine, its contents an obituary, a travel guide and three feature articles. *The French Dispatch of the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun* is the dreamy creation of its editor, Arthur Howitzer Jr (Bill Murray). Produced from the French provincial city of Ennui-sur-Blasé (Angoulême in real life), it's a romanticisation of the *New Yorker* in its heyday, the film being dedicated to the publication's greatest writers and editors. But those days are already past. As the movie opens, Arthur has been found dead in his office, leaving instructions that the magazine is to be dismantled after his death. So we are invited to feel a kind of pre-emptive nostalgia for what we are about to see: the final, ideal issue.

First up there's a portrait of Ennui-sur-Blasé itself by the cycling reporter Herbsaint Sazerac (Anderson stalwart Owen Wilson) – a prize anthology of gamey French curios, from pickpockets to *pissoirs*, that also serves as a homage to Jacques Tati.

Then comes an art story, "The Concrete



Flat plan: in *The French Dispatch* Wes Anderson's "love of making everything look like a puppet show... completely runs away with him"

◀ Masterpiece” by the critic JKL Berensen (Tilda Swinton), delivered as a lecture. Homicidal maniac Moses Rosenthaler (bearded, growling Benicio del Toro), serving 50 years in the local prison for sawing off the heads of two men, is discovered to be a genius artist by art dealer Julian Cadazio (Adrien Brody), himself serving time for tax evasion. The dealer parlays a single picture into a huge art-market boom, while Moses paints his prison muse, guard Simone (Léa Seydoux), who obligingly poses for him in the nude. But the unveiling of his prison masterpiece goes badly wrong.

“Revisions to a Manifesto” is a burlesque take on France’s period of civil unrest during May 1968. Solitary writer Lucinda Kremetz (Frances McDormand), modelled on Mavis Gallant, embeds herself with the revolting students. She seduces their pretty, naive leader Zeffirelli (Timothée Chalamet), not only reporting on him and his friends but officiously revising his manifesto while actually between the sheets, to the annoyance of his would-be girlfriend Juliette (Lyna Khoudri). Anderson fondly pastiches Godard and Truffaut and the pop songs of the period – but this is a pretty twee revolution. Its slogan? “*Les enfants sont grognons*” (“The kids are grumpy”).

Lastly, there’s an intricately framed yarn, “The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner”. Writer Roebuck Wright (Jeffrey Wright), a James Baldwin lookalike with perfect recall of every word of every article he has ever published, relates the time a planned foodie piece changed into a wild adventure when the son of the gastronome Commissaire (Mathieu Amalric) was kidnapped by a gang led by “The Chauffeur” (Edward Norton) and only saved by a self-sacrificing intervention, with a poisoned radish pie, by the legendary chef Nescaffier (Stephen Park).

Wes Anderson’s love of making everything look like a puppet show, a stage set, a scale model, a clockwork treat, a diorama, a cabinet of highly curated curiosities, has completely run away with him this time and, partly because it has this episodic structure, there’s no emotional depth at all. Though it is incredibly intricate, inventive, and impossibly accomplished – constantly a treat for the eye with its switches of style, knowing allusions, perfect symmetries and rectilinear compositions, with a stellar cast cropping up in tiny cameos, and another parping score from Alexandre Desplat – it even becomes, sorry to say, a bit boring.

All the actors speak and move in that highly stylised, detached deadpan way Anderson specifies (only Frances McDormand seems to have any interiority) and there is no invitation to care for any of them. In his earlier films, there’s always been a sense of pain, a fear of the broken, under the capering (brilliantly identified by the author Michael Chabon as “the yearning for childhood’s lost perfect world”). Not here.

Arthur Howitzer’s two precepts as an editor are “Just try to make it sound as though you wrote it that way on purpose” and “No crying”. *The French Dispatch*, overdetermined and unaffecting, observes them sedulously. ●

“*The French Dispatch*” is in cinemas from 22 October

# Television

## Betraying Monica Lewinsky

By Rachel Cooke

**Impeachment:  
American  
Crime Story**  
FX/BBC Two,  
aired 19 October,  
9.15pm; now on  
catch-up

I haven’t yet reached the moment in *Impeachment* when Linda Tripp (Sarah Paulson) will successfully persuade Monica Lewinsky (Beanie Feldstein) not to visit her dry cleaner. But on the basis of what I’ve seen so far of the latest instalment of FX’s *American Crime Story*, I can hardly wait for their inside-the-Beltway PJ party (according to memory, these adult women were unaccountably having a sleepover when this wild conversation took place). Yes, this series is no less batty – and no less camp – than those that preceded it (*The People v OJ Simpson*; *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*). Poor Clive Owen, who plays Bill Clinton, wears a nose so distractingly ludicrous that every time he kisses his adorable intern I half expect it to fall to the Oval Office carpet (“Don’t worry Monica, Betty’ll pick that up later... You wanna Diet Coke?”). Somehow, though, I don’t care. Paulson and Feldstein are so great, I know already they’ll absolutely nail the debate about whether or not *The Dress* and its stains should be preserved for all eternity.

Paulson, ordinarily greyhound-like, wears padding for her role as Tripp, prowling the corridors of the



Kind of blue: Beanie Feldstein gives a tender performance as Monica Lewinsky

BBC/TINA THORPE/FX

West Wing, where she works as a civil servant, with her legs slightly apart, like some ageing prizefighter. Her character is, we understand, bitter and mean. But the writers throw something else into the mix, suggesting loneliness and envy as the real source of her monstrous treachery towards Lewinsky (she's not sympathetic, exactly, but she's not a caricature either). While her warm-hearted, pretty new pal – she and Lewinsky meet when they're both exiled to the Pentagon – has plenty of friends with whom she might go out of an evening if only she wasn't always waiting for Clinton to call, Tripp is a divorcée who hasn't dated for years: a bleak existence symbolised in the show by a jacket potato spinning round and round inside a microwave.

Lewinsky, then, isn't only Tripp's ticket to fame and fortune, even if her literary agent, Lucianne Goldberg (Margo Martindale) – whose authors include the super-salacious Kitty Kelley – has told her that only serious juice will fly in a market saturated with Clinton-era memoirs. Lewinsky's a genuine source of companionship and excitement, too. How good to have someone to sit with in the horrible Pentagon canteen, and how thrilling to hear details of what the president gets up to behind his filing cabinet. Tripp never liked him anyway, nor his wife. "Mrs Bush would rather have been catheterised than use the communal ladies' room," she mutters, having bumped into Hillary Clinton (Edie Falco) while washing her hands.

*Impeachment* is intermittently funny, albeit in the way that watching old episodes of *Falcon's Crest* might be funny if you're in a certain kind of mood and have consumed too much Aperol. The hair! The jackets! The loaf-haired colleague with whom Tripp must share her little grey cubicle at the Pentagon! (I love the war between these two, its front line marked out by bags of Cheetos, bottles of Snapple, and the odd half-eaten bagel.) It's not exactly feminist, of course: the show plays poor Paula Jones, who in 1994 accused Clinton of having asked her for oral sex, entirely for laughs ("It takes a dramatic turn," she announces to her sombre-faced lawyers, having helpfully sketched the president's famously distinctive "area"). But at its heart *Impeachment* is sweet and good and brave, and this is what counts in the end.

Almost a quarter of a century on from Clinton's impeachment, there can't be a person alive (OK, Ann Coulter excepted) who doesn't admire the grace and spirit Lewinsky has shown in the face of the horrors that flowed from Tripp's duplicity, and Feldstein makes the most of this (she must also have met Lewinsky, who worked as a producer on the show). It has, I think, emboldened her, a brilliant comic actor, to deliver a completely straight performance, with the result that when Lewinsky makes excuses for Clinton – and even when she talks of her love for him – it seems not ridiculous, but tender: a painful reality rather than a girlish fantasy. He might have been the president, but the way he treated her was, and is, paradigmatic nevertheless. What unnecessarily flowery lies some men tell; with what unwarranted fervour do they throw out their hollow vows. ●

**God Squad**  
BBC Radio 4,  
29 October,  
11.30am

**Everyone is so terrified of giving offence that they can't decide whose side they're on**

# Radio

## The not-so divine comedy

By Rachel Cunliffe

There's a proud history of mixing comedy with religion – just ask Monty Python, or Bill Hicks, or Tim Minchin. So, as someone who can sing Tom Lehrer's "Vatican Rag" off by heart, when I saw Radio 4 had a sitcom about a University Christian Association struggling to remain relevant in this apathetic age, I was intrigued.

*God Squad* follows UCA president Sophie, cheese-loving theologist Phil and evangelical hardliner Kat fighting over the soul of their college society. Outsider Dan – a swanky eco-activist who does yoga in the multi-faith chapel – enters and shakes things up. His actual level of faith is questionable ("Late nights with my twin poisons: Hitchens, Dawkins – shot, chaser"), but while Phil and Kat have their doubts about the newcomer, Sophie is convinced Dan is the answer to making Christianity cool again. In a plot development clearly borrowed from *Life of Brian*, UCA splits between the Modernisers and the True Believers, and hilarity ensues.

Or rather, it doesn't. *God Squad* trundles along with a narrative reminiscent, ironically, of a student sketch show. The jokes are painfully obvious – Phil gets his foot stuck in a mop bucket, for instance, purely so that Kat can exclaim "Forget your wet shoes, there's a more important soul at stake here" (soul/sole – geddit?). The climax might have been vaguely amusing ("I'm Protesting! I am, after all, a Protest-ant!") if we'd been given some reason to care about any of the characters.

Everyone is so terrified of causing offence – either to Christians or to those who find religious zealotry distasteful – that they can't decide whose side they're on. Are we meant to laugh at the fundamentalists, or see them as loveable misfits staying true to their beliefs? *God Squad* doesn't know. There is definitely something witty to be written on student attitudes to religion – about naivety and intolerance and the blind faith we all have that our world-view is right – but this isn't it. If your punchline is a pun on the pronunciation of Jesus in Spanish, you should probably stop now. ●



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# THE BACK PAGES

Drink



**Nina Caplan**

Studying what's beneath the surface can tell us a lot about wine – and ourselves

**T**he prehistoric era known as the 1980s was a terrible time to be attempting an education, at least for me. I can't accept full blame for the garish lipstick – a shade of electrocuted magenta – that got me thrown out of one geography class, but I must take responsibility for opting to keep the war paint and bunk the rest of the lesson, and for my failure to remember almost anything of those I did attend. On the other hand, I could still pick that lurid lip-slap out of a line-up.

The pity of it is that the fragments of geography I did retain have come in useful since my passion for hot pink mellowed to a preference for Burgundy. It ▶

FABRIZIO ROMAGNOLI / EYEEM



◀ turns out that vines really care where they live: how much sun they receive and how cold they get, whether they are cooled by high altitudes or ocean breezes, and what the difference is between nocturnal and daytime temperatures. The crucial importance of location should have come as no surprise to a first-generation Brit, but I failed to take into account the relevance of another area of the syllabus: geology.

“What could be more boring than the varying composition of different patches of earth?” hisses the ghost of my 14-year-old self, through carmine lips. But the answer, it turns out, is almost anything. The right kinds of rocks, crumbled by friction and time, have an obvious effect on the grapes they nourish, but also a more mysterious one.

I fell in love with the black-cherry, almost chewy Gamay grapes made by serious Beaujolais producers such as Château Thivin in Brouilly and Jean-Marc Burgaud in Morgon; with the Alsatian Rieslings grown on the Grand Cru vineyards of Sommerberg and Schlossberg; and with the rich, bombastic dry reds of Portugal’s gorgeous Douro Valley. When I searched for the links between them, I found that their common ground was made of granite.

This was my first inkling that geography is as much about narrative as is the literature or history my schoolgirl self preferred. Vines favour mineral-rich soils that are porous, so that water doesn’t inundate their roots, but not so porous that they die of thirst. Stones are welcome, as they help regulate heat – as does colour: the lighter the soil, the more it reflects back the sun’s warmth; darker soils stay warmer.

But those facts, while useful, leave out a lot. How

close is the connection between the crushed remains of ancient sea creatures that form limestone and the refined acidic purity of Champagnes from those chalk soils? Or that between the dramatic mineral buzz from volcanic vineyards – the black soils of Lanzarote, the white pumice plains of Greece’s Santorini – and the intense drama of the molten lava those vineyards once were? It seems more than possible that some of what we taste in great wine is the work of our imagination, filtered like rainwater through this ancient rock, but how much is impossible to calculate.

Even in Burgundy, where tiny differences between one row of vines and the next result in startlingly varied wines, nobody can quite figure out exactly how much influence the soils have on the liquid in the glass. But that doesn’t stop anyone from trying. It is by looking beneath all kinds of surfaces that we learn about the world and about ourselves – a truth that was lost on my adolescent self, who wasn’t terribly interested in surfaces, except in so far as she could layer them with paint.

Still, with time, we all change, in shape and behaviour. Granite, coming from the Precambrian era more than 600 million years ago, has the advantage on me there, but in both cases, the resistance was stubborn and its erosion comes with substantial benefits. Into my glass, via vines just sufficiently nourished, come the stony flavours I love best. And I enjoy them all the more because I understand something of their provenance, and because the grinding years have, slowly but inexorably, bestowed on me at least a modicum of that vital human nutrient: good taste. ●

## This England

*Each printed entry receives a £5 book token. Entries to [comp@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto: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.*

### Attack of the clones

A judge rejected 28 couples’ divorces because they gave “absolutely identical” reasons for their failed marriages. The cases were referred from Bury St Edmunds Family Court to the High Court after they all used the same wording – claiming “the respondent would become moody without

justification” and “would often ignore the petitioner... about two days every week”.

The judge, Mr Justice Moor, said it was “impossible” for all 28 “to have behaved in exactly the same way”. He said a director for iDivorces, which drafted the petitions, “apologised profusely”.  
*Metro (Jenny Woodhouse)*

### Tea for two

A mysterious abandoned afternoon tea has been found in the middle of Lake District woodland. Photographer Ashley Cooper said when he first found the table and chairs he thought it was an art installation. But on closer inspection he thought the half-eaten food was abandoned by a couple.

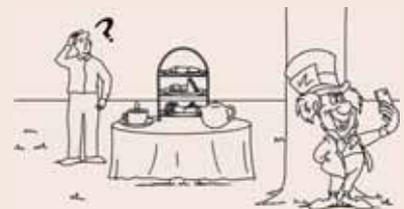
Cooper said that the table, above the Blea Tarn, was

probably left “by someone from the Instagram generation”.  
*BBC North East and Cumbria (Janet Mansfield)*

### Taken for a ride

A bike lane that is only 10ft long and takes two seconds to ride has left cyclists in a spin.

The tiny stretch in Stapleford, Nottinghamshire, was installed by the county council to encourage green transport but has been labelled “pointless” and a “crazy waste of taxpayers’ cash”.  
*Metro (Amanda Welles)*



ALEX BRENGCHLEY

## Off the Record



### Tracey Thorn

## How I wish my old diary held more detail of the night I first met Ben

My daughter moved into a new flat recently, sharing with three other students in north London. I visited her, and as we sat having tea at a café it occurred to me that my dad had grown up in the same part of the city. A few years ago I researched my family history, and while my parents were still alive, I had asked them to write down the details of their early lives. When I dug out these notes, I discovered that my dad had been born in the exact same street where my daughter now lives.

My dad's family lived in one flat for a few years, before moving next door. While that seemed a bit mystifying, when I looked at Google Maps, I saw they had moved into the house on the corner of the street which overlooked the park. He went to the primary school in the next road, so I imagine he must have walked past my daughter's flat most days. I picture him as a small boy in shorts, and it feels as if he is here right now. Once again, I think of the great quote from William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

This sentiment seems truer the older you get. The past seems ever-present, the dead and lost seem to be with us still. A few days after the discovery about my dad, Ben and I celebrated the 40-year anniversary of our first meeting. It is a momentous milestone to have reached, and as I looked back, I thought about how you can't recognise the pivotal moments in your life while they're actually happening. It's hard to tell the difference between an average day and a life-changing one.

I found my diary from 1981 and looked up the entries for the week I left home to go to university. I'd spent the Saturday night of my 19th birthday playing a Marine Girls gig in Covent Garden, followed by an

all-nighter at the Scala cinema in King's Cross. During the week that followed, I'd hung out with friends at their newly rented flat. In some bizarre gothic mood we had decided to paint the walls black – which matched my frame of mind, since I was immersed in a fruitless, unrequited passion for a boy who was just a friend.

The night before I left home for university, I was at a party until 4.30am. I recorded nothing in my diary about packing, or being sad about moving out. There had been no shopping trip to buy lamps and cushions; there was no mention of my parents. Apparently I arrived in Hull on the Saturday at about 2pm, and my first meeting with Ben is mentioned only fleetingly. We went back to his room and listened to the Durutti Column. I didn't record any first impressions.

Well, I didn't know he was going to be so important. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I'd added more detail, as I'd like now to have a clearer picture of the evening. Ben remembers that, while we stood in the union bar, the record playing was "Souvenir" by Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark. When I look up the lyrics they seem significant, as if someone scoring the soundtrack had wanted to make a point.

All I need is/Co-ordination/I can't imagine/  
My destination/My intention/Ask my opinion/  
But no excuse/My feelings still remain.

Here we are, 40 years later, and my feelings still remain. When I tweeted about the anniversary, and how glad I was to have met Ben, the replies flooded in. Many people shared their own memories of meeting significant others at university, and many more said how grateful they were that we'd met because of the music we'd gone on to make. That's a big part of it for me too, but it is outweighed by the life we made – the home, the children.

Except that when, sitting at the dinner table, I begin to tell one of those children about the anniversary of me meeting her father, she grimaces. I realise the idea of so many years is horrifying to her. When you're young, large timescales are unimaginable, meaningless. The future is impossible to see and you're not really even looking for it. The present is everything, until suddenly it is the past. ●



I was immersed in a fruitless, unrequited passion for a boy who was just a friend



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# AFGHAN CRISIS APPEAL

“Fighting in Afghanistan had been intense since May, but in August the situation got progressively worse.”



**SARAH LEAHY**  
**PROJECT COORDINATOR**

“For a time, the frontlines ran right by our hospital in Lashkar Gah.

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Helmand province. We have nearly 1,000 Afghan staff, an emergency room where we treat more than 500 patients a day and a maternity ward with an average of 60 deliveries a day.

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Many people who needed medical care struggled to reach us. People were forced to wait at home until the fighting subsided, while others were caught up in crossfire on their way to hospital. People would be coming to see us for pneumonia, then get caught up in the fighting and arrive with a bullet in the

shoulder or the leg. Roads and bridges had been bombed, so what should have been a 40-minute journey to hospital took four hours. There was no fuel, but people were coming on foot from all over the province, on pushbikes with pregnant women, all in 48-degree heat.

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Above: An MSF team perform surgery in one of three operating theatres at Boost hospital, Lashkar Gah, Helmand province. Photograph © Tom Casey

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*giftaid it*

## Down and Out



### Nicholas Lezard

#### I marked a year in my flat by setting off the smoke alarm with burnt popcorn

It's now been a year since I moved into the new flat. Actually, it's been a lot more than a year, but so many exciting things have been happening to me that I haven't had the time to give you my reflections on this milestone.

On the day itself I was in Edinburgh and I got a call from the landlord telling me that the kitchen window had fallen out during a gale and that they needed to get someone in to board it up. I didn't like the idea of someone coming into the flat while I wasn't there, but they weren't having any of it. When I got back it was to a kitchen whose light was now entirely blocked off by a sheet of MDF. As there are only three windows in the place, or 0.75 windows for each room, this was a bit of a drag; even more so because they'd somehow arranged it for the rain to get in. Both the toaster and the radio (which runs off the mains) are situated beneath the window and yet amazingly, both of them survived the deluge and more to the point, so did I when I used them unthinkingly. Meanwhile, the natural light in the Hove-I (a nickname which has never quite taken off, as "the Hovel" did, but I don't have anything better) has been reduced by a third, and it wasn't particularly abundant in the first place. It all just adds to the general gloom.

I always like to mark significant anniversaries with a small ceremony, and so for this occasion I decided to set the smoke alarm off at 11 o'clock while making popcorn. I have never burnt popcorn before (I make it in a pan as there is no room for a microwave, and this is not a figure of speech; the kitchen is the smallest I have ever seen – I've seen larger ones on boats), and I speak as someone who has been making popcorn for many years. I really don't know how it could have

happened, especially as I was supervising the process the whole time. But what with the window being boarded up, there was no ventilation, and the smoke had to go somewhere, so it went where it could cause maximum inconvenience and irritation to everyone.

I have written about the alarm before: you may recall that it is like the voice of God, and not in his still, calm mode. It is loud and shrill enough to cause actual pain, but when you set off an alarm here, it goes off in everyone's flat, and so I had to deal with very pissed off neighbours as well as the alarm itself (actually, only one of the neighbours was pissed off; the other one is pretty mellow, so we went outside for a smoke and a chat while waiting for the alarm people to talk us through the procedure of resetting it). One day they will invent a smoke alarm that turns itself off when you shout "I'm cooking" at it, but until then we are where we are.

The board has now been replaced with something that lets half the light in. It has been glued round the edges to keep the rain out, which is a huge improvement, but there is still no fresh air, which means that anything cooked in the kitchen pervades the rest of the flat for some time. At least not cooking so much means I use less gas: and I must admit to now being terrified at the price rises in the offing. It wasn't as if they were easily manageable in the first place. To remind you: like many people in this country, I spend well over half my income on rent, and that is before I even start paying off the utilities and council tax. I foresee a winter of staying in bed with a jumper on for even longer than I did last year; but then I managed a vicious winter in the MacHovel in Scotland without any central heating, and if I can manage that, I can manage anything.

Another thing it is the anniversary of is the beginning of my clandestine lockdown affair, and my fortnightly trips to Durham to visit a woman who came to occupy a larger place in my heart than I thought she would. Being increasingly aware of, and susceptible to, the seasons' nuances as I age, this means even the bloody weather is reminding me of her. What with this, and being sensitised to mentions of the north-east of England whenever it's in the news – the selling of Newcastle United to the Saudis, for instance, was surprisingly painful; and every time Dominic Cummings gets headlines, even more of me dies inside than it would under normal circumstances – I'm looking forward to an even grimmer winter than usual. And the glazier tells me the window won't be replaced for another four to six weeks, which means two months of cooking very gingerly, if at all.

Meanwhile, as I write, the sun shines and the view from the living room is still pleasant. My health miseries have, touch wood, disappeared, and the only problem I now have in that regard is really quite astonishing insomnia (sleep finally came to me at around 6.30 this morning). But that tends to be only on those evenings where I decide not to drink. Well, I think we all know how I'm going to deal with that one. ●

There are only three windows in the place, or 0.75 windows for each room



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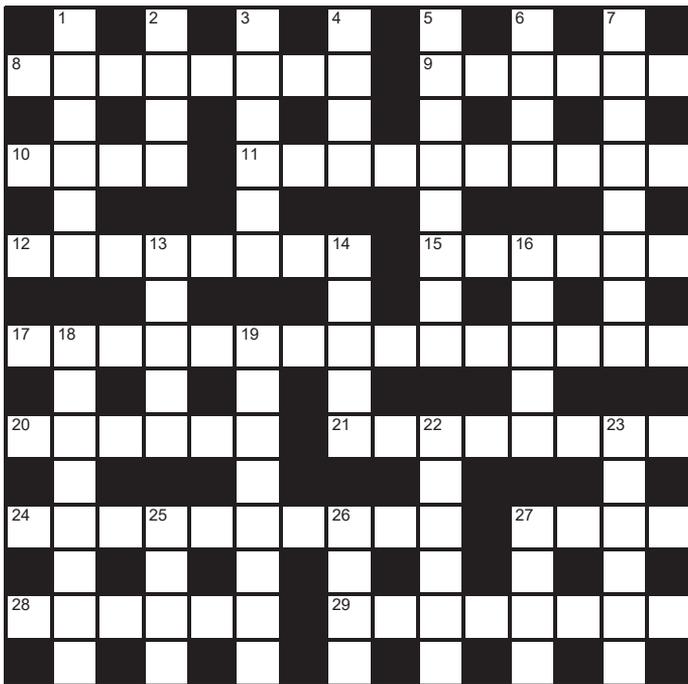
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## The NS Cryptic Crossword 559: by Aranya



### Across

- 8 Guileless boozier with no money (8)  
9 Chap stops Conservative speculation (6)  
10 Bread in Ankara or Algiers, as seen regularly (4)  
11 Criminal trial, never unimportant (10)  
12 Insect is hot and cross in the air (8)  
15 Sample Rita's terrific sandwiches (6)  
17 Poor Roger badly hit by blatant overcharging (8,7)  
20 Part of motor revolves backwards, losing energy (6)  
21 See tails cut badly (8)  
24 Longed to feed American writer with good German food (7,3)  
27 Rip off last of attire after party (4)  
28 Endless rally round single town in Italy (6)  
29 Sour gent boiling fish (8)

### Down

- 1 Violet's neighbour edges

- 2 away from windy bigot (6)  
2 What Homer says on Acre, Middle-Eastern port (4)  
3 Misrepresent female intuition (6)  
4 Extremely short, angular celebrity (4)  
5 Steps over unruly tot in female footwear (8)  
6 Oil is partially undervalued (4)  
7 Fashion undergrad ultimately lacking impressiveness (8)  
13 Final bit of face powder used up for ostentation (5)  
14 Head off feisty, frenzied Himalayans (5)  
16 Dry blubber eaten reluctantly at first (5)  
18 Share out nuts in cinema (3,5)  
19 Bad drainage for shrub (8)  
22 Energy of cities, modern and ancient (6)  
23 US cops heartlessly offing lackey (6)  
25 The Third Man has the ability to enthrall setter (4)  
26 Player's partner oddly hiding net assets (4)  
27 Persistently troubles boxers, perhaps (4)

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

### Answers to crossword 558 of 15 October 2021

Across 1) Epstein 5) Issue 9) Pierces 10) Village 11) Stone Age 12) Feeble 15) Overturns 16) Texas 17) Elgar 19) Apennines 21) As ever 22) Off and on 25) Inspect 27) Rapture 28) Nadir 29) Retreat  
Down 1) Eyesore 2) Sachertorte 3) East German 4) Nave 5) Ill 6) Soapbox 7) Elevenses 8) Opus 13) Eating apple 14) Asked for it 15) Operation 18) Guessed 20) No doubt 23) Need 24) Stir 26) Ear

## Subscriber of the Week: David Oliver

### What do you do?

Retired headteacher; ceilidh band accordionist.

### Where do you live?

Hexham, Northumberland.

### Do you vote?

Yes, always.

### How long have you been a subscriber?

About seven years.

### What made you start?

My daughters gave me a gift subscription for Christmas.

### Is the NS bug in the family?

One daughter shares mine.

### What pages do you flick to first?

The Leader and Back Pages.

### How do you read yours?

Sporadically, sometimes over two or three weeks.

### What would you like to see more of in the NS?

The case for electoral reform – our greatest national need.

### Who are your favourite

NS writers?

Previously, Laurie Penny and Ed Smith. Now, Emily Tamkin.

### Who would you put on the cover of the NS?

Clement Attlee.

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

Nigel Farage.

### All-time favourite NS article?

"Murder By Numbers" by Laurie Penny, post-Grenfell.

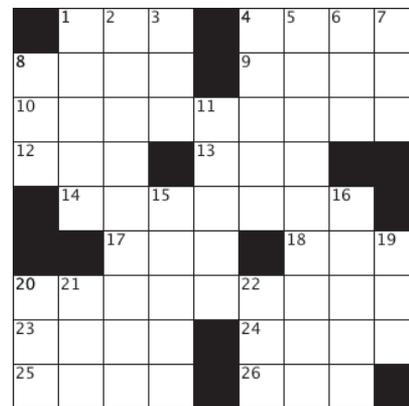
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Please email [ellys.woodhouse@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:ellys.woodhouse@newstatesman.co.uk) if you would like to be featured

## The NS Crossword 7: In brief by Miriam Estrin



### Answers to crossword #6 of 15 October 2021

Across 1) Stripe 7) The Arts 9) Reagents 11) Arlo Parks 13) Nel 14) Aim 15) Doing Time 19) Neonatal 20) Dearest 21) Swanks  
Down 1) Strand 2) Thereon 3) Reallied 4) Iago 5) Prep 6) Etna 8) Straiten 10) Skimask 12) Smelts 16) Noes 17) Gnaw 18) Tara

### Across

- 1 Home of *Strictly Come Dancing*  
4 "1, 2 \_\_\_", Ciara song  
8 *Call Me By Your Name* name  
9 Garb for Gaius  
10 Meta-TV show on Channel 4  
12 Gob, slangily  
13 Medium for a Turner painting  
14 Online parenting forum  
17 Cover exposed roots?  
18 Ingredient in a daquiri  
20 Energy drink and shot combo  
23 Black cab competitor  
24 "I'll pay!"  
25 Majorly disappoints  
26 Queen \_\_\_ (pop star nickname)

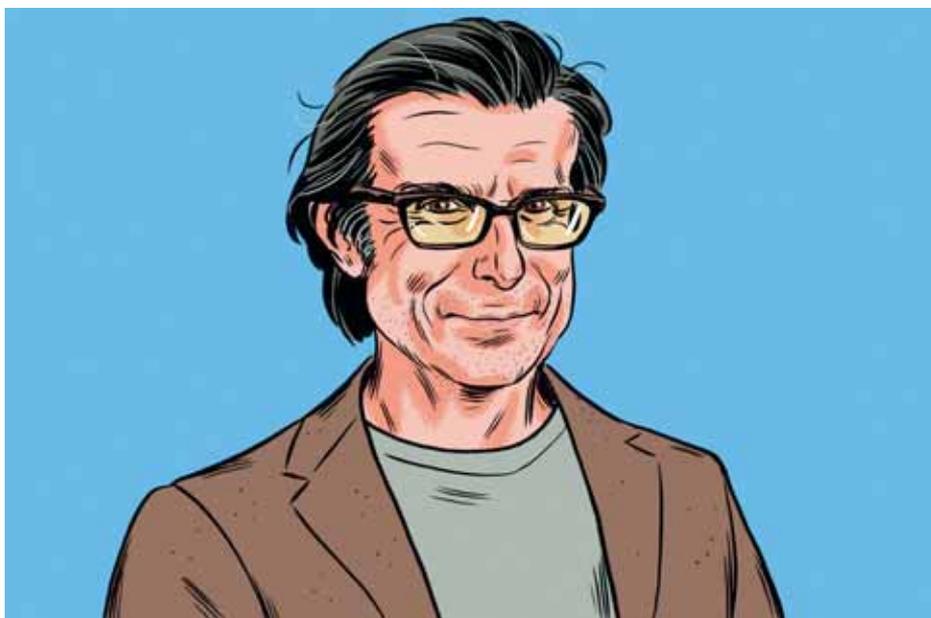
### Down

- 1 Flourish  
2 Like the Marvel film franchise  
3 Bit player  
4 Author Gertrude  
5 Duty free staple  
6 It's a "me" thing  
7 One of the Jolie-Pitts  
8 Poacher's target?  
11 Churchill in 1945, e.g.  
15 Mike from Austin Powers  
16 Prominent Pooh Bear feature  
19 Hon. for Adele  
20 Toby \_\_\_  
21 Father of, in Arabic  
22 Actor Odenkirk

## The NS Q&A

**“If only Gordon Brown had abandoned his obsession with being prime minister”**

**Robert Peston, journalist**



**Robert Peston was born in London in 1960. As business editor of BBC News, he was commended for his exposé on the Northern Rock crisis. He is currently the political editor of ITV News.**

*What's your earliest memory?*

When I woke up in a cottage hospital with the worst sore throat – having had my tonsils and adenoids removed – and I wondered whether the nurse was being deliberately cruel by offering me fish and chips. Surely she knew I could not eat.

*Who are your heroes?*

As a child: Bobby Moore and John Lennon, the quiet gent and the loud rebel. Now, I don't like the idea of heroes, but I am prone to tearing up at exceptional performance achieved through graft against a backdrop

of adversity. The footballer Raheem Sterling is a great role model.

*What book last changed your thinking?*

The collected works of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Through his depictions of the Shtetl Jews of eastern Europe in the 19th century, and the emigrés to Yiddish New York, he has helped me to understand who I am.

*What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?*

I remember an unhealthy amount about fiscal and monetary policy development from 1994 to 2001.

*Which political figure do you look up to?*

Gordon Brown, for his increasingly rare moral purpose. If only he had been content

to rest on being the most important chancellor of the Exchequer for a century and had abandoned his obsession with being prime minister.

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

In 1945, when lasting and important change was achieved through political action.

*What TV show could you not live without?*

*Peston* on Wednesday nights. It pays the bills. Or anything made by Peter Kay.

*Who would paint your portrait?*

There have already been too many piss-taking cartoon caricatures of me for the world to need any more.

*What's your theme tune?*

I've always thought of Beethoven's late string quartet No.14, Op. 131 as the noise at the back of my brain. If anyone is with me when I'm dying, please play it to me.

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

My dad, who was an economist, would harp on about not crying over spilled milk. Which is not surprising since the concept of “sunk costs” – the technical term – is key in economics. It has governed my life.

*What's currently bugging you?*

That our leaders, even after the world was caught napping by Covid-19, are again engaged in wishful thinking by failing to take the important decisions to decelerate climate change.

*What single thing would make your life better?*

Coffee is my most important daily treat. If I weren't such a puritan, I would buy a top-of-the-range espresso machine.

*When were you happiest?*

As a question that doesn't really compute for me because I always try to make the best of things. It is the terrible lows that punctuate my life.

*In another life, what job might you have chosen?*

I would have been a great rabbi, if only I was a believer.

*Are we all doomed?*

I've made a career out of shouting that we're heading for the edge of a cliff. But our species' creativity tends to pull us through in the end. ●

*“The Whistleblower”, a novel by Robert Peston, is published by Zaffre*



## 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.

[christopherward.com](http://christopherward.com)

 **Christopher Ward**

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Unsurprisingly Swiss.



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