

THE NEW STATESMAN

New Times New Thinking | 7-13 January 2022 | £4.99 | newstatesman.com

Johnson's Last Chance

Can the Prime Minister take back control? Tim Ross | Philip Collins



Katie Stallard
Peng Shuai and the limits
of Chinese power

Ross Douthat
The tangled legacy of
Christopher Hitchens

What to read in 2022
The essential books
for the year ahead

At Facebook, we're collaborating with UK partners to reduce COVID-19 misinformation.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of collaboration. We're continuing our work with governments, not-for-profit organisations, and researchers globally to support the pandemic response and reduce the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, including:

- Partnering with 35 fact-checking organisations covering 26 languages, such as Full Fact in the UK
- Displaying warning screens to highlight possibly incorrect COVID-19 content

Learn more about our global partnerships and find helpful resources at about.fb.com/actions/uk

FACEBOOK



The libertarian delusion

The Conservative Party's relationship with Boris Johnson has long been one of convenience. He became the party's London mayoral candidate in 2007 because it was desperately seeking a winner. In 2019 similarly ruthless electoral logic made Mr Johnson Conservative leader at a time of struggle and division in the party.

But the Tories' superficial loyalty to Mr Johnson is being tested. After a succession of sleaze scandals and dismal opinion polls, the Prime Minister's opponents are circling. As Tim Ross reports in this week's cover story on page 20, "many of Johnson's colleagues have already had enough". Should the Conservatives perform poorly in May's local elections, the Prime Minister could be removed through a no-confidence vote by MPs. Unlike Labour, the Tories have never been shy of ousting failing leaders.

Mr Johnson's vulnerability has prompted a battle for the party's ideological soul. On 18 December the Brexit minister, David Frost, resigned over his opposition to tax rises, the net zero emissions target and Covid passports. In recent speeches he had warned against importing the "European social model". Meanwhile, Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, the front-runners to succeed Mr Johnson, have positioned themselves as free-market alternatives to the Prime Minister.

The principal charge levelled against Mr Johnson by the right is that he is "unconservative". But what is a conservative? Under Mr Johnson, after a decade of austerity, British public spending is due to reach its highest sustained level since the pre-Thatcherite 1970s (settling at 41.6 per cent of GDP). As a consequence, the tax burden will rise to its highest rate since the early 1950s (36.2 per cent). To the disdain of the right, the government has also reaffirmed its pledge to reduce carbon emissions by 78 per cent by 2035 and to eliminate them by 2050.

This is not the post-Brexit agenda that the libertarian right wanted. In their view, EU withdrawal was the method; the object was to change the soul of the British people. Freed from the bureaucratic shackles of Brussels, so the argument went, the UK would pursue radical deregulation, privatisation and tax cuts – "the Singapore model"



Boris Johnson, it seems, has a better understanding than some of his opponents of where the true centre of public opinion lies

as it was labelled by some. But this was always a fantasy.

Far from being a vote for a smaller state, Brexit was, if anything, a vote for a larger one. The Leave campaign thrived by promising an extra £350m a week for the ultimate monument to postwar social democracy: the National Health Service. Its injunction to "take back control" appealed to those disturbed by the effects of market-driven globalisation. Polls have long shown that there is no electoral appetite for libertarian economics.

As for Singapore, it has a significantly more *dirigiste* state than the UK, encompassing publicly owned banks, airlines and investment agencies. The government owns 90 per cent of land, and 80 per cent of Singaporeans live in state-built apartments.

The reality is that conservatism, at different times, has been compatible with big, interventionist government. Tory prime ministers from Harold Macmillan to Ted Heath promoted a central role for the state in the economy. In Europe, Gaullists and Christian Democrats have embraced interventionism.

Mr Johnson is not a true statist or One Nation Tory. Rather, he is a political opportunist and shape-shifter who embraces or discards policies based on his own advancement. Having heralded market rule in his 2013 Margaret Thatcher memorial lecture, and called for radical tax cuts for the affluent, he has now embraced higher public spending and greater state intervention.

This is classic conservative pragmatism: he is prepared to change in order to conserve and hold on to power. Mr Johnson, it seems, has a better understanding than some of his opponents of where the true centre of public opinion lies. Ageing populations, heightened voter expectations and green investment all demand a leading role for the state. It is not Mr Johnson who is unconservative but his libertarian opponents, who have forgotten Michael Oakeshott's dictum that conservatism is a disposition rather than a dogma. The UK, a land that reveres free healthcare and has a strong instinct for social justice, is not the place for a radical free-market experiment. In forgetting this, the libertarian right is seeking to govern a country that does not exist. ●



Be More Confident.

We're on a mission to make the uncomfortable, comfortable. To make discussing finances normal, helping you and your family to avoid any unexpected surprises.

No matter what stage of life you or your finances are at, we're here to make sure you're confident and in control of your financial future.

**Find out how our financial experts can help
you be more confident.**

Scan the QR code to download your free 'It's time
to talk' guide, or call 020 3813 7176



IN THIS ISSUE

20

Last chance saloon

Has Boris Johnson's luck finally run out?

24

Soft power, hard tactics

Katie Stallard on China's silencing of Peng Shuai

30

Christopher Hitchens's failures

Ross Douthat on the writer's troubled legacy

34

Books of 2022

The themes and titles dominating the year ahead

42

Joni Mitchell and me

Kate Mossman meets Cary Raditz

51

Paul Thomas Anderson's delight

Why his new film *Licorice Pizza* is a tonic for dark days

62

The NS Q&A: Steven Pinker

The psychologist on social media and 1950s New York



Hitting the wall: Tim Ross on Boris Johnson's crises



Break point: Peng Shuai



Mean old daddy: Cary Raditz

MORE IN THIS ISSUE

THE NEW STATESMAN

Up front

- 3 Leader
- 17 Correspondence

The Notebook

- 9 George Eaton on the cost of living crisis
- 11 The Diary by Pippa Crerar
- 12 Rachel Cunliffe meets Brian Klaas

Columns

- 15 Stephen Bush on the Lib-Lab relationship
- 18 Jeremy Cliffe on Éric Zemmour's dark fantasies
- 19 Louise Perry on Ghislaine Maxwell
- 29 Philip Collins on the Tories' lack of policy
- 32 Anoosh Chakelian on Armenian Christmas



Anoosh Chakelian
on Armenian Christmas

Features

- 20 Tim Ross on Boris Johnson's last chance
- 24 Katie Stallard on China's treatment of Peng Shuai
- 30 Ross Douthat on Christopher Hitchens

The Critics: Books

- 34 The titles to look out for in 2022
- 37 Robert Halfon on *The New Snobbery* by David Skelton
- 38 Harry Eyres on 100 years of José Ortega y Gasset's *Invertebrate Spain*
- 40 Philippa Nuttall on *Youthquake* by Edward Paice
- 41 Reviewed in Short

The Critics: Arts

- 42 Kate Mossman meets Joni Mitchell's "Carey"
- 48 Art: Michael Prodger on "Dürer's Journeys"
- 51 Film: David Sexton on *Licorice Pizza*
- 52 TV: Rachel Cooke on the BBC's *Four Lives*
- 53 Radio: Rachel Cunliffe on *Desperately Seeking Wisdom*

The Back Pages

- 55 Nature: John Burnside
- 57 Health Matters: Phil Whitaker
- 58 Down and Out: Nicholas Lezard
- 59 Deleted Scenes: Pippa Bailey
- 61 Crosswords and Subscriber of the Week
- 62 The NS Q&A: Steven Pinker

Standard House, 12-13 Essex Street, London WC2R 3AA
Tel 020 7936 6400

Editor-in-chief Jason Cowley
Chief Executive Ken Appiah
Global Head of Sales Phil Davison
Events Director Sara Donaldson
Marketing Manager Alfred Jahn

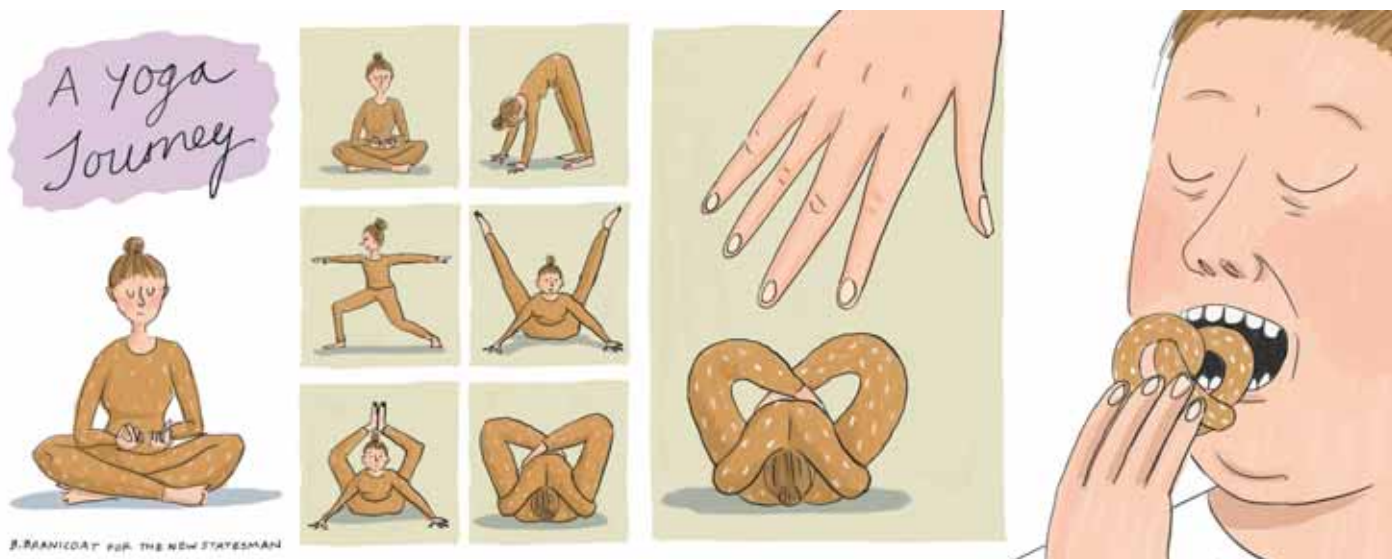
Cover illustration André Carrilho

Subscribe
from
£1
a week

Subscribe to the New Statesman from just £1 a week. Turn to page 63 for more about the offer, or go to: newstatesman.com/subscribe

Just £199.99 for a one-year print subscription – even cheaper for students! Subscription enquiries: subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk
0808 284 9422

Outside the box By Becky Barnicoat



OPTIMISE DIGITAL PRODUCT AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT WITH ITIL

Digital Transformation has become the ultimate mandate for companies and entire industries; Organisations that use technology to innovate and embrace digital change will thrive in the modern service economy and the increasingly volatile environment they operate in.

Trust your Digital Transformation journey to proven Best Practice. ITIL: the most adopted methodology to deliver digital products and services worldwide.



An Hour
*Charging the car
for another
family adventure*



Our Hour
*Cutting carbon in our
business, our designs
and our advice*

wsp

www.wsp.com/en-GB

THE NOTEBOOK



TOLGA AKMEN / AFP

Comment

Can the UK avoid
two lost decades?

By George Eaton

This decade began with Conservatives heralding a new “Roaring Twenties”. Brexit Britain, we were told, would boom and ordinary workers would benefit.

Two years on, the reality has disappointed. Having endured one lost decade for living standards, the UK is likely to suffer another. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that average real wages will be lower in 2026 than they were in 2008, shortly before the financial crisis. Ironically, this makes comparisons with the 1920s more rather than less appropriate. While the US boomed, becoming the world’s largest economy, the UK was afflicted by recession and stagnation for much of the decade (prompting Britain’s first and only general strike in 1926). Will the 2020s be any different?

In recent months, Boris Johnson has broken with neoliberal orthodoxy by vowing to build a “high-wage economy” and berating businesses for “mainlining” cheap migrant labour. Britain, if

◀ Johnson is taken at his word, would abandon its bargain-basement model and embrace a more German- or Nordic-style economy. (The Adam Smith Institute responded by accusing the Prime Minister of “levelling down to a centrally planned, high-tax, low-productivity economy”.)

In some sectors, such as hospitality, retail and social care, wages have risen as employers seek to fill post-lockdown vacancies. (Amid shortages in September, lorry drivers were offered salaries as high as £78,000, compared to the average of £32,500.) But the economic rebound has proved short-lived. In October, the most recent month for which data is available, real wage growth was flat (0 per cent) and the UK's GDP rose by just 0.1 per cent.

But it is April, as TS Eliot wrote, that may prove to be the cruellest month. Inflation, which stands at 5.1 per cent, is expected to peak at around 6 per cent this spring. In April, energy costs are forecast to rise by 50 per cent (pushing the average bill to almost £2,000). Finally, the Conservatives' manifesto-busting 1.25 percentage point increase in National Insurance (NI) will also take effect.

Much has been made of how the UK tax burden is approaching its highest level since the early 1950s (36.2 per cent of GDP). But far less has been said of the consequences for the poorest: workers earning as little as £10,000 will now pay an NI rate of 13.25 per cent. If student loan repayments are included, graduates earning more than £27,295 will pay a marginal rate of 42.25 per cent.

Despite their low-tax reputation, the Conservatives have historically not been shy of raising taxes on the

Energy costs are forecast to rise by 50 per cent, pushing the average bill to almost £2,000

poor: it was the former chancellor Geoffrey Howe who increased VAT from 8 per cent to 15 per cent in 1979, and George Osborne who increased it from 17.5 per cent to 20 per cent in his 2010 Budget.

Although the UK is being assailed by a new wave of Covid-19, workers have never been less protected from its economic consequences. As the Resolution Foundation has noted, owing to the end of the furlough scheme and the withdrawal of the increase in Universal Credit, a single earner on £15,000 who loses their job will see their income fall to 30 per cent of their previous earnings, compared to 40 per cent if they'd lost their job earlier in the pandemic, or more than 80 per cent if they'd been furloughed.

Where does this leave Johnson's promised high-wage nirvana? It suits the Prime Minister to pretend that the UK's parlous living standards are the result of excessive immigration. But dismal productivity (reflecting a lack of investment) and enfeebled trade unions are more important culprits.

In countries such as the Netherlands and Norway, for instance, industry-wide collective bargaining has long ensured that lorry drivers are not vulnerable to a race to the bottom on pay and conditions. But in the UK, only 26 per cent of workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, compared to an EU average of 61 per cent and 98 per cent in Austria, 94 per cent in France, 90 per cent in Sweden, 78 per cent in the Netherlands and 54 per cent in Germany.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that real wages have remained stagnant. Yet in the political universe of most Conservatives – with the exception of MPs such as Harlow's Robert Halfon – trade unions only ever feature as ideological foes. Johnson may be prepared to will the end of high wages but he is less prepared to will the means.

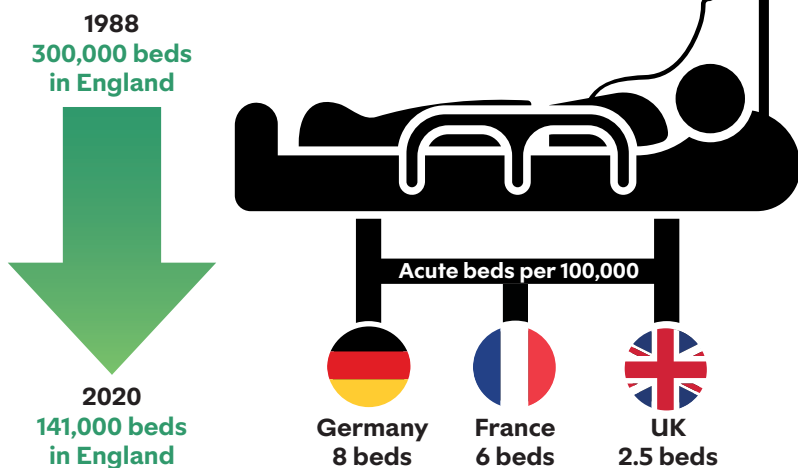
A notable exception is the UK's national minimum wage, which has grown twice as fast as average earnings and will rise to £9.50 in April, making it the eighth highest in the world. But the proliferation of insecure, casual employment in Britain, combined with cuts to in-work benefits, means that a higher minimum wage does not guarantee higher living standards. Two-thirds of the growth in employment from 2010 onwards was accounted for by self-employment (which is not covered by the minimum wage), zero-hours contracts and agency work. As a consequence, the proportion of people living in poverty who live in a working household has reached a record high of 56 per cent.

With the aid of a house price boom (stoked by ultra-low interest rates and mortgage subsidy schemes), tax cuts for the affluent and ring-fenced pensioner benefits, the Conservatives have been able to survive in office despite a decade of wage stagnation. But the depth and breadth of the approaching living standards crisis may force a reckoning. Libertarians are right to fear that the pandemic has heightened expectations of government action. As Boris Johnson and his cabinet are about to discover, it is hard to be only a little bit interventionist. ●

Chart of the Week

The hospital bed crisis

Over the past 30 years the number of hospital beds in England has fallen from around 300,000 in 1987-88 to 141,000 in 2019-20.



Source: NHS England

The Diary

How my story about the Downing Street Christmas party shook Westminster

By Pippa Crerar

On the morning of 30 November 2021, I was sitting in the Downing Street briefing room. The UK Health Security Agency chief Jenny Harries had just said on the radio that people should be “careful, not socialising when we don’t particularly need to” in the weeks ahead. But the PM’s official spokesman didn’t appear to agree, telling us that Harries “gives advice to the government, she is not the government”. I had been working on the No 10 party story for about six weeks, but knew that now was the moment to publish. Covid was making headlines again, and Christmas was approaching. The public interest argument felt overwhelming.

We ran our splash with the headline “Boris party broke Covid rules”. No 10 didn’t deny the claims but insisted no rules were broken. There’s always a moment when you publish a story you think has the potential to have impact when you feel slightly sick. Some in Westminster were sceptical. “It’s a bubble story,” one insider told me. “It was a year ago. Not sure it goes anywhere,” another added. At Prime Minister’s Questions, I sat in the press gallery flanked by two of my team for moral support. The Labour leader Keir Starmer accused the PM of “taking the British public for fools”. Downing Street aides tied themselves in knots afterwards. The broadcasters went big with the story, but the papers were more cautious.

Quizzes, buffets and hypocrisy

After a week of obfuscation from the government, the story exploded when ITV’s Paul Brand got hold of footage of Boris Johnson’s team joking about the No 10 staff Christmas party. It led to the PM’s senior aide Allegra Stratton quitting – rightly, although it’s always



With our childminder sick with Covid, my ten-year-old had to answer a call from the Cabinet Office

a bit depressing when the woman in the room is the only one who takes the hit. The PM was forced to announce an inquiry by the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, into the parties. We had revealed two gatherings in Downing Street and one at the Department for Education. Other events came to light, including pictures of the PM at a “virtual” festive quiz at No 10 (even though most participants were in the building) and a bash held at Conservative Campaign Headquarters with a very dubious-looking buffet. All while the rest of the country was following lockdown rules. The PM’s personal ratings started to plummet – the public hates double standards.

Starting them young

On 17 December it was my children’s last day at school before Christmas and I was supposed to be off work. But just after 4am I was glued to my phone watching the results of the North Shropshire by-election. In a disastrous turn of events for the Tories, the Lib Dems took the previously true-blue seat. My phone started pinging shortly after, with Tory contacts lamenting how Johnson had lost his way. More revelations followed – that the PM attended a gathering in the Downing Street garden in May 2020 and that there was a party in Case’s own office, rendering his role overseeing the inquiry untenable. The senior civil servant Sue Gray has since taken over and expanded the investigation, leaving some in No 10 quaking in their boots. I fielded calls from contacts while getting the kids ready for swimming lessons. With our childminder off sick with Covid and my husband working, my ten-year-old even had to answer a call from the Cabinet Office.

Family reunions

Although colleagues joke I’m never going to get invited to another party again, I do love a good knees-up. But like many families, we were concerned about Omicron ruining our Christmas so cancelled our social lives, worked from home and tested for Covid daily. Luckily, the caution paid off and we were able to pack up the car and head north for a week. As for so many people, 2021 had been a tough year for us, so it was a joy to watch the kids sing slightly out of tune carols through the open window of their grandma’s care home. At one point they went 18 months without being able to see her.

The scoops to come

I’m now back in London, after a restorative week in Scotland, full of long and muddy dog walks and catching up with loved ones over (too much) wine. It’s always a bit of a gear change getting back into work, especially amid high expectations about what comes next. But I think back to this time last year when somebody mentioned to me that somebody else had told them of a Christmas party at No 10. Despite my best endeavours, I wasn’t able to get the story over the line back then. But I filed away the nugget in case it proved useful. I have several other nuggets in my head right now. Let’s see what comes of them in 2022. ●

Pippa Crerar is political editor of the Daily Mirror



Encounter

Why we choose
the wrong leaders
The political scientist
Brian Klaas on how the
corruptible gain power
By Rachel Cunliffe

We often wonder why so many leaders do terrible things and seem utterly unsuited to their roles. But most of us don't wonder enough to sit down with a former Thai prime minister who allowed the army to shoot civilian protesters, or the daughter of an African dictator who fed his opponents to crocodiles. For the political scientist Brian Klaas, that's the only way to find out.

"What I was trying to understand is what was going on inside their head, what had allowed them psychologically to do these things, and how had the systems promoted them, tracked them into power," he explained, speaking to me via Skype from his home in the south of England. Behind him was a copy of his new book, *Corruptible: Who Gets Power and How it Changes Us*.

Klaas, who is 35 and an associate professor in global politics at University College London, doesn't seem the type to go gallivanting around conflict zones to talk to coup-plotters and war criminals. With a cheerful Minnesotan accent that will be familiar to fans of his *Power Corrupts* podcast – in which he explores new and terrifying ways civilisation could end, from accidental nuclear war to cyber attacks poisoning national water supplies – he talked excitedly about his new puppy and the beauty of the English countryside.

It's a world away from the interviews that fill the pages of *Corruptible*. As well as the Thai prime minister

TOM PILSTON

and dictator's daughter, the book features a former cult-leader turned bioterrorist who tried to poison an entire community to rig an election. (She offered Klaas a glass of water; he declined.) There's a lawyer who made the legal case for green-lighting torture by US forces during the Afghanistan War, and another tasked with putting a monetary value on the lives of victims of 9/11 as part of the compensation scheme. In one remarkable episode, Klaas takes a skiing lesson with the man who was sent by George W Bush to run Iraq. The diplomat suggested those looting in Baghdad in the wake of Saddam Hussein's fall should simply be shot.

The aim is to work out whether the adage (and podcast title) is true and power really does corrupt – or if something more interesting is going on. Power manifestly can distort the morality of individuals who hold it – there's evidence that it even changes our brain chemistry. But more important to Klaas are factors we think far less about: what kind of people are drawn to power in the first place? Why do our systems for appointing leaders repeatedly put the wrong people in charge? And what do we have to change to weed out corruptible candidates and help leaders who do have a moral compass maintain their integrity?

The answers are complex, spanning the fields of neuroscience, sociology, evolutionary psychology and even biology. But the starting point is simple: power-hungry people are, by definition, more likely to seek power. Whether running for national office or applying to manage the local homeowners' association, those who get off on the idea of controlling others naturally put themselves forward, while most people look at the stress, scrutiny and public pressure, and politely decline.

"Our modern society has made it extremely unattractive to normal, decent human beings to end up in positions of power," Klaas said, noting that he himself gave up any childhood fantasy of becoming US president as soon as he realised how dirty American politics is. "I don't think I'm alone in that. I think there's lots of people who think: I could make the world a little better, but the cost might be enormous to me."

For that reason, Klaas believes, the pool of prospective leaders is already skewed towards those who should be kept well away from power. "I conducted 500 interviews with some of the worst people around – and they weren't normal," he recalled. "There are quirks about them, there's something wrong with some of them, but they're all very, very good at getting into power. And that's not an accident. There are ways you can counteract that tendency or amplify it, and I think we're unfortunately amplifying it quite a lot."

The issue of recruitment doesn't usually come top of the list when debating how to reform our political structures. But the impact of who applies for a role – and how much competition there is – can be substantial. One particularly chilling section of *Corruptible* deals with the remote village of Stebbins, Alaska, in which every single police officer had been convicted of domestic violence. Low levels of applicants meant the police force had to accept anyone who applied – including criminals. How can you tackle police abuse in that situation?

"It's a lesson: if you have a low number of recruits, so you don't have much competition or only the power-hungry compete, it's no surprise that you end up with these corruptible people in power," Klaas warned. "So you have to proactively seek out people who don't want power, which is very difficult to do but is also the quintessential starting point."

Speaking of corruptible people in power, I feel compelled to mention the elephant in the room. As well as his podcast, Klaas is known for his *Washington Post* column, which he has used to highlight the corruption of the Trump administration and the breakdown of democratic norms in the US. He wrote a book in 2017: *The Despot's Apprentice: Donald Trump's Attack on Democracy*. Yet in his new book, which is all about bad leaders who get into power thanks to bad systems, the former president is not mentioned. "I've devoted a significant chunk of my professional life over the last five years to shouting from the rooftops that Donald Trump is a dangerous individual," Klaas said. "When I sat down to write *Corruptible*, one of the first things I decided was that Donald Trump's name will not appear in this book."

What does appear is a list of remedies that, taken together, might help us get better leaders – in politics, business and beyond. Some are designed to improve the systems that enable corruption: rotating police officers and bankers around departments to make spotting abuse easier; or compelling those in charge to confront the people their actions are harming. Others target corruptible individuals themselves and urge us to rethink how we assess the qualities of those who lead us – at the very least, screening them for psychopathic or narcissistic traits.

Klaas told me he's training to become a volunteer guide at a historic site. "It's a six-month training programme, I have to do two-and-a-half hours every Monday, and then I have to pass the test twice in order to be unleashed on the visitors for my 45-minute tour. The prime minister has fewer requirements than I do for leading an entire country."

"Maybe there should be a test, maybe there should be a psychological assessment, maybe we should think a little bit about whether the standards we apply to people who have much less important jobs should be applied to the people who end up in charge."

Klaas, who has spent his career studying dictators and despots, says he oscillates between "short-term pessimism and long-term optimism". He thinks there are ways to fix our broken systems, although the strain on democracy in many countries "is going to get worse before it gets better". But rather than being defeatist, he hopes his book will spur people to think harder about our responsibility in handing control to those least suited to it.

"Power is a relational thing, you can't be a leader if you don't have followers. So as much as we complain about the leaders we have, we have to acknowledge, at least in a democratic society, that we put them there."

"That's not about the bad people, that's not about systems. That's about us." ●

"Modern society has made positions of power seem unattractive to normal, decent human beings"



SUSTAIN. ABILITY.



JUPITER GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE EQUITIES FUND

Transformational businesses, with the right mindset and imagination, can lead the transition to a more sustainable world economy. With over three decades of combined ESG investment experience, our global sustainable equities team believes that companies that balance the interests of the planet, people and profit are the most sustainable in the long term. We have dedicated our careers to identifying businesses with a demonstrable commitment to supporting this transition to a brighter future. We call this human advantage 'the value of active minds'. Visit jupiteram.com

As with all investing, your capital is at risk.



This advert is for informational purposes only and is not investment advice. We recommend you discuss any investment decisions with a financial adviser, particularly if you are unsure whether an investment is suitable. The Key Investor Information Document, Supplementary Information Document and Scheme Particulars are available from Jupiter on request. Jupiter Unit Trust Managers Limited, registered address: The Zig Zag Building, 70 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6SQ is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. JAM001957-002-0421

STEPHEN BUSH



Politics

Can the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders unite to defeat the Conservatives?

In the early hours of 8 May 2015, a sombre Nick Clegg was waiting for news from his constituency count in Sheffield Hallam while, across the country, his fellow Liberal Democrat MPs were losing their seats in the general election. The mood of Labour activists was not much better as David Cameron's Conservatives were heading for an unexpected parliamentary majority. But shortly after 4am, a crowd of Labourites gathered around a television erupted in spontaneous applause. An unexpected gain on a night of losses? No. The cause of their celebration was the defeat of Vince Cable in Twickenham.

For Liberal Democrats this moment serves as a parable of Labour's self-defeating tribalism. Clegg believes that the rise of Jeremy Corbyn was the inevitable result of Ed Miliband's long campaign against the Liberal Democrats' participation in the Conservative-led coalition: half a decade spent denigrating the idea of compromise and moderation inevitably meant Labour's own compromisers were swept aside by the full-fat alternative.

One strange irony of the doomed Miliband era is that, behind the scenes, relations between the two so-called progressive parties remained in fairly good order. Jonny Oates, Clegg's chief of staff, remained in discreet but frequent contact with Stewart Wood, one of Miliband's closest aides. It took Corbyn's election as Labour leader in 2015 to sever communication between the two offices.

During the Liberal Democrat leadership election in 2020, allies of Layla Moran, Ed Davey's main rival, feared that Davey's

tenure as a high-profile member of the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition meant he would be unable to revive relations with Labour. But under Keir Starmer, the two leaders' offices are once again in regular conversation. Starmer concedes that, while Labour will stand a candidate in every constituency at the next election (excluding those in Northern Ireland), the party will campaign less aggressively in seats where the Lib Dems are the main Tory challenger.

Discreet cooperation between the two parties has already borne fruit: the low-key Liberal Democrat campaign in the Batley and Spen by-election helped Labour hold the seat in July 2021, while Labour was similarly hands-off in the Chesham and Amersham by-election a month earlier. Starmer did not even visit North Shropshire during the recent by-election, when one of the safest Tory seats was won by the Liberal Democrats.

Informal rather than formal ties suit both leaders well. Although Starmer and his party's ratings are on the rise, Liberal Democrat strategists believe that having too strong an association with Labour makes it harder to win over Conservative voters in the more affluent, largely pro-Remain constituencies they hope to take. For Starmer, a formal accord with the Liberal Democrats would open up

Discreet cooperation between the two parties is already bearing fruit

awkward questions about whether a similar deal might be reached with the SNP, before or after a general election.

While Starmer's standing has been transformed since the local elections in May last year, cooperation of any kind with the Liberal Democrats remains a bitterly divisive approach in the Labour Party. Although there is a formal "point person" in the offices of both Starmer and Davey, one of those involved in the cross-party talks told me that being named in print would "ruin their reputation". And for all that Liberal Democrats like to tell themselves that self-destructive tribalism flows in only one direction, neither side is immune to it. During the height of the Labour-Liberal Democrat love-in between Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown in the mid-1990s, Liberal Democrat activists wrote a song in protest, to the tune of "American Pie". The repeated refrain was "Tony Blair can f*** off and die". It is still sung at "glee club", one of the more rambunctious parts of Liberal Democrat conference.

Defenders of Ashdown say that his close working relationship with Blair resulted in a number of Liberal Democrat policies being implemented by New Labour; the two parties also governed together in coalition in Scotland and Wales. But Blair failed to bring in proportional representation at Westminster, a long-standing Liberal Democrat aspiration.

What unites Labour and Liberal Democrat critics of closer cooperation is the memory of betrayal. For Labour, the great betrayal came in 2010 when the Lib Dems entered a coalition with the Conservatives, enabling an era of austerity. For the Liberal Democrats, it was in 1999, when Blair stepped back from his efforts to rewrite the rules of the British constitution and entrench the two parties together in power.

It is the latter betrayal that is perhaps more relevant today. Starmer – who gave a major speech in Birmingham on 4 January promising that Labour would renew a "contract" with the British people – is able to take a back seat to the Liberal Democrats in some constituencies because he is politically strong enough to see off internal critics of the scheme. But if Labour continues to do well in the polls, Starmer may find that he has no need for Liberal Democrat support at the next election.

The paradox for the Lib Dems is that they want a Labour leader weak enough to require their support, but strong enough to force cooperation on the Labour Party. At present, Starmer ticks both boxes. But for how much longer? ●

4 times as many investors are concerned about climate change than executive pay packets*...

Opinion matters!

Research in Finance is an award winning market research company specialising in financial services.

Our research gathers opinions from thousands of consumers and professional investors to help inform companies about their views on issues such as climate change and responsible investing.



- ➔ If you'd like to know more about the research we do, contact us at info@researchinfinance.co.uk
- ➔ Your opinion matters - go to www.researchinfinance.co.uk and find out more about how your views can make difference.

CORRESPONDENCE

letters@newstatesman.co.uk



Letter of the week

The truth about Haavara



Your letter of the week (Correspondence, 10 December) made an excellent general point about the predicament facing refugees. One sentence, however, stands out like a sore thumb: “Zionists in Palestine agreed to accept wealthy Jews under the 1933 Haavara trade agreement with the Third Reich because they could share the economic spoils.” This is completely garbled. Palestine at the time was under British rule, not that of “Zionists”. The agreement presupposed British restrictions on the economic status of Jewish immigrants into Palestine. It followed a Nazi boycott of Jewish-owned businesses in Germany and it enabled around 60,000 German Jews, not all of them “wealthy”, to escape the approaching Holocaust. Even so, the agreement split Jews worldwide. In short, the topic is complex, the circumstances were dire in the extreme, and Zionists were deeply divided over negotiating with the devil. You do not have to be a Zionist to object to the distortions in this sentence, whose connotations, moreover, are toxic. *Brian Klug, emeritus fellow in philosophy, St Benet's Hall, University of Oxford*

Editor's note: in the 10 December issue of the New Statesman, the letter of the week contained an inaccurate reference to the 1933 Haavara agreement. We would like to apologise for the error and the offence caused.

Carry on doctor

When I finished Phil Whitaker's excellent article (“The last days of the family doctor”, 10 December) I cheered. His argument for continuity of GP care is irrefutable, well researched and made with a calm, compelling force. And it is so well crafted, the analysis interspersed with the moving story of Daniel. A good doctor indeed – both in his patient care and in his advocacy for effective policy and practice. *Bryan Merton, Leicester*

Phil Whitaker's emphasis on continuity of GP (or even clinician) care is important. Scotland's “new contract” asks GPs to be “expert medical generalists” (are we not that already?) dealing with complex care

needs, while nurses, physiotherapists, etc, examine “simpler” conditions. But how are young GPs supposed to become expert without seeing the “simple” cases that help them learn about the complex ones? This approach risks fracturing continuity and ignores the holism that makes good general practice. *Sandy Rough, GP, Aberdeenshire*

Lessons from tragedy

Your leader (“We should never forget Arthur”, 10 December) condemns the appalling case of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and identifies failures by government (to provide the required funding) and a variety

of local services (to communicate effectively and sensitively).

While all local services require substantial funding to employ sufficient numbers of experienced staff, attention also needs to be paid to their processes: the ways in which they engage with parents and children and with other professionals involved in ensuring safe care, health and education for children.

Dr Mike Davis, Blackpool

No dark age

Ian McEwan's essay (“Outside the whale”, 10 December) vividly depicts the dilemmas for writers confronted with the arenas of political struggle, and he rightly highlights George Orwell and Albert Camus as writers who saw through the totalitarianisms of their time.

It was a pity he slipped into stereotype in stating that “freedom of expression vanished in Christian medieval Europe for a thousand years”. In fact, scholars had considerable freedom in what they studied and wrote about, including non-Christian sources. Heresy trials were rare, with opportunities for repentance available. Would that today's “guardians of orthodoxy” were so benign.

Gordon West, London W1

About Kevin

It was wonderful to see Kevin Maguire restored to the Christmas special print edition (Commons Confidential, 10 December) after being online only.

David English, Cardiff

Special delivery

Richard Dawkins's notion (“On gods and monsters”, 10 December) that “a gentle little game of questioning” might reveal the truth about Santa Claus, eg, “How many chimneys would he have to reach, if he is to deliver presents to all the children in the world?” underestimates a child's sense of wonder and joyful acceptance of magic. When my eight-year-old niece was told that Santa was actually Mummy, she said: “Don't be silly, Mummy can't go round the world in time to give all the presents to the children!” *Helen Flanagan, via email*

We reserve the right to edit letters

When Éric Zemmour, a far-right polemicist, announced his bid for the French presidency in November last year, he did so into an old-fashioned radio microphone, reading not from an autocue but from loose sheets of paper on the desk before him. It was an obvious allusion to Charles de Gaulle's BBC broadcast to occupied France in 1940, one echoed in Zemmour's words: "We will not let ourselves be dominated, subjugated, conquered, colonised."

The pose was bizarre. France is not under occupation. It begins 2022 as perhaps the most influential state in Europe. And Zemmour is known for defending the collaborationist Vichy regime. But it does make a sort of twisted sense when you read his influential 2014 book *Le Suicide Français* (The French Suicide). This opens in 1970, and de Gaulle's death – the turning point after which, Zemmour argues, the old France of the liberation and resistance succumbed to a bottom-up "subjugation" by the forces of feminism, LGBT rights, Europeanisation, globalisation, and especially migration and Islamisation.

Influenced by the Great Replacement, a white-nationalist conspiracy theory, Zemmour sees migration from France's old colonies as a reverse invasion: "Subconsciously, and for some consciously, the conquest of territories on the old master's soil serves as revenge, as counter-colonisation." It is a dark vision of today's France to which the novelist (and Zemmour admirer) Michel Houellebecq gave life in his 2015 satire *Submission*, in which a Muslim party wins the 2022 French election and proceeds to introduce Sharia law.

Such fantasies are prevalent in world

politics as 2022 gets under way. In the US, the Republican Party is increasingly controlled by conspiracist extremists who consider the 2020 election stolen, style themselves as a resistance and see the violent storming of the Capitol last year as a first step in a national liberation struggle. "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country any more," Donald Trump told the crowd beforehand.

In Europe, Poland's Jarosław Kaczyński last month warned that the EU is becoming a "fourth reich". As Hungary's spring election nears, Viktor Orbán is presenting himself as a bastion against an imperialist EU and what he suggestively dubs the "Soros empire". In Russia, the self-pitying domination narrative works differently, but is also important: Vladimir Putin portrays Ukraine as a colony of a US-imperialist Nato, despite his troops occupying part of the country, with thousands more massed on its borders and threatening to invade.

What unifies these examples is their binary division of the world into the dominators and the dominated. As the journalist Fintan O'Toole writes in his book *Heroic Failure*: "In the imperial imagination, there are only two states: dominant and submissive, coloniser and colonised." He ascribes Brexiteer histrionics about the UK languishing in the EU's "shackles" to the distorted logic of: "If England is not an imperial power [any more] it must be the only other thing it can be: a colony." It was a narrative that allowed elite figures such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage to recast themselves as resistance leaders, marching with the people to overthrow a quisling pro-European establishment.

Elsewhere too, fever dreams of

occupation seem bound up with imperial experience. Zemmour's family history, like that of the Le Pen family, is tangled up in the violent twilight of France's own empire in Algeria. Putin's paranoia draws deeply on the pathologies of Russian imperialism. Orbán and Kaczyński grew up in vassal states of the Soviet Union.

But what is the appeal of such narratives? Surely people want to hear from their leaders that their countries are great and noble, not that they live under some sort of jackboot, oppressed, dominated and humiliated? Yet the truth is more complex.

For one thing, the language and imagery of resistance, or better still martyrdom, wield a powerful romantic appeal. Witness Enoch Powell, the most brilliant demagogue in recent British history, arguing in 1977 with regards to what was then the European Economic Community: "Patriotism is to have a nation to die for, and to be glad to die for it – all the days of one's life." (Or Zemmour: "The people is rebelling... It is struggling against the final destruction of its civilisation.") Such overtures are implicitly flattering: it is precisely because the country is so great and noble that its supposed subordination is such a crime. And to be told one is living through a time of occupation and struggle, battles between the oppressed and the oppressors, is much more thrilling than hearing that one's epoch means something more nuanced.

Then there is the psychology of domination itself. Its sexual dimension is beyond the scope of this column – though O'Toole draws an eye-catching comparison between the Brexiteer fantasies of vassalage and the huge success of the S&M thriller *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Even putting that to one side, it is obvious from history and our own times that a narrative of occupation and submission has a certain primordial appeal. It indulges the urges to luxuriate in the purity and fury of victimhood, to smash things, to defy power while giving oneself utterly to a prospective liberator. "The image of a brave man standing up against powerful foes is immensely appealing," writes Madeleine Albright in her 2018 book *Fascism: A Warning*.

In the year ahead, politicians of various shades, though especially on the nativist right, will seek to tap into these yearnings and impulses, however hallucinatory. Many will fail. For example, it is highly unlikely that Zemmour will emerge from April's election as France's next president. Yet if the recent years have taught us anything, it is that we dismiss such deeper, darker forces of human nature at our peril. ●

JEREMY CLIFFE



World View

We underestimate the appeal of nationalism's dark fantasies at our peril

LOUISE PERRY



Out of the Ordinary Epstein and Maxwell's crimes will be the stuff of Hollywood – and then forgotten

The entrance hall to Jeffrey Epstein's Manhattan townhouse was lined with glass eyeballs. These, he told visitors with relish, had been made for English soldiers wounded in battle. Each in their frame, the eyeballs watched the comings and goings of the rich men Epstein befriended, as well as the not-rich young women that he had brought to him.

If this were a detail in a novel, readers would scoff. No way, you would think: a real person would never be so ludicrously macabre. In many ways, Epstein seems like a character from a particularly trashy piece of fiction – a villain with no redeeming qualities, a two-dimensional figure interested only in money, sex and power.

His former long-term girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, convicted on 29 December for five sex trafficking-related offences, has the more textured backstory. The ninth and youngest child of Robert Maxwell, she was born in France and brought up in Oxford; in her 1990s prime, there were few people more embedded in the London-New York establishments – Maxwell's friends included politicians, Hollywood stars and a member of the royal family.

Now she faces up to 65 years in prison, a humiliating end for a woman accustomed to mansions and private jets. It is also, from the cynical perspective of a movie-maker, the most delicious character arc imaginable: from riches to rags, in a downfall of her own making. There will be TV series and films.

It's easy to write about Maxwell and Epstein as if they aren't real people because, for most of the media-consuming public, they aren't. They're bit players in a soap opera, complete with an all-star cast. Meanwhile, many other cases of grooming

and sexual abuse fail to attract the sustained public attention they should. In late December the *Times* reported that, nearly a decade after the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal broke, South Yorkshire police are still failing to properly collect data on perpetrators. It also found that Rotherham – where about 1,400 children were abused between the late 1990s and 2013 – is still seen as a “hot spot” for the sexual exploitation of children.

Like the girls targeted by the Rotherham gang, Epstein's victims were similar to one another. Slender, fair-skinned, brunette or dark blonde, aged between 14 and 18: Epstein had a type – and Maxwell could spot it. Her primary function in his life was to serve his insatiable sexual appetites. Initially she did so herself, and apparently with pride. In the 1990s Maxwell hosted a dinner party at which a dildo was left on every place setting and used to instruct guests on oral sex technique. In July 2020 *Vanity Fair* described this behaviour as “sexually self-assured”. Given what we now know, I find it troubling.

When she could no longer keep up with Epstein's demands, Maxwell looked elsewhere. In court in December, a witness identified as “Kate” testified that Maxwell had recruited her, and asked “if I knew anybody who could come and give Jeffrey a

blow job because it was a lot for her to do”. This is how Epstein and Maxwell regarded sex, it seems: as a service to be contracted out. Maxwell's role of “main girlfriend” morphed into that of pimp, as well as personal secretary, “lady of the house” and (as Epstein termed her) “best friend”. By the time of his arrest in 2019, Epstein had moved on to other “main girlfriends”; his final call from prison was to his Belarusian girlfriend, Katyna Shuliak, aged 30.

Maxwell was both a pathetic figure, then, and a terrible one. A former employee later reported that Epstein would request as many as three masseuses a day, and that young women would visit his Palm Beach property to perform this function. They have since testified to the devastating effects of that abuse.

Virginia Giuffre, the most outspoken of the couple's accusers, has described Maxwell as “more evil than Epstein”. Is Maxwell being punished for Epstein's crimes as well as her own? Of the large number of people believed to have been involved in his sex trafficking operation, there is an obvious irony in the fact that the only person convicted is a woman. But when Maxwell's defence team leant heavily on the idea that their client was being scapegoated, they tried to turn the powerful, “sexually self-assured” woman of the 1990s into a cowering victim – a plot twist the jury wouldn't accept.

Because for all her wealth and fame, Maxwell conforms to a criminological type, just as Epstein did. When women commit sex offences, this is typically how they do it – alongside male partners, and with murky motivations. Like Myra Hindley and Rose West, Maxwell has achieved greater infamy than the man she offended alongside.

What they both did, in the end, was no different from what was done in Rotherham. Epstein raped his victims in places of splendour, and in the company of the famous and the powerful; the Rotherham gangs raped their victims in cheap hotels, public parks and grubby flats. The long-term harm done was much the same. As Simone Weil put it, “imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring”.

But because the Epstein and Maxwell story has a spurious glamour, its fictionalised retellings will soon part company with real events: their crimes will be forgotten, as most sexual abuse is. Maxwell's was billed “the trial of the century” not because what she and Epstein did was entirely exceptional, but because of the thrilling narrative – those glitzy, novelistic details. With this last humiliation, Maxwell's chapter now seems complete. ●

Ghislaine Maxwell has
a textured backstory
and a delicious “riches
to rags” character arc

Boris Johnson's last chance

The Prime Minister is beset by crises — many of his own making. Is the great alchemist of British politics on his way out or can he transform his fortunes and repeat the old election-winning tricks?

By Tim Ross

A week after finally getting Brexit done, in a Christmas Eve trade deal with the European Union in 2020, Boris Johnson expressed his usual optimism. “We have our freedom in our hands and it is up to us to make the most of it,” he declared in his New Year’s message, 12 months ago. One year on, with a new variant of coronavirus surging again, that sense of freedom has largely dissipated. Johnson is beset by crises and assailed by critics on all sides, including many inside the parliamentary Conservative Party. His political allies worry he is wasting his chance to reshape the country after Brexit. His opponents gleefully attack him over a succession of scandals, senior resignations and lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street. Many voters who backed him in 2019 are now recoiling in disgust. The by-election in North Shropshire on 16 December, which would not have been necessary had he not tried to rewrite parliamentary ethics rules to help his old friend and then fellow MP Owen Paterson, cost the Tories an ultra-safe seat they had held for nearly 200 years.

As the spread of Omicron cases threatens to overwhelm the NHS again, the possibility of tighter pandemic restrictions looms over an economy already under strain from the effects of Brexit and the highest inflation in a decade. Consumers face soaring energy bills, as well as tax rises in April, and the scandal-hit Conservative Party is staring at possible humiliation in local elections in May.

Many of Johnson’s colleagues have already had enough. “The elastic has snapped,” a senior Tory warned. There is talk of a leadership contest in the months ahead. According to one minister, “Boris is definitely drinking in the last chance saloon.”

It is a dramatic descent for a Prime Minister who just two years ago demolished Labour’s Red Wall to win a majority of 80. How did things get so bad for Johnson? Is there anything he can do to turn his fortunes around? And if he fails, will the Tories remove the man who delivered the party’s biggest election victory since 1987?

Amid all the economic uncertainty of the pandemic, and a succession of headlines about sleaze, one issue has had the greatest impact on Johnson’s ratings: revelations that his senior aides held parties in Downing Street while the public was locked down. Johnson professed himself “sickened” when a video emerged of staff joking about one Christmas event in 2020 — a “party” his team insisted never happened.

For Johnson’s ministers and advisers, it is now alarmingly clear that these stories have damaged the government’s reputation. In a poll of nearly 25,000 adults by Focalddata ►



SÉBASTIEN THIBAUT

Cover Story

◀ for the *Sunday Times* published on Christmas Day, the Conservatives were trailing on 32 per cent, eight points behind Labour's 40 per cent.

As he prepared to welcome in the New Year, Johnson himself got a dose of cold water from his election team, who confirmed the bad news from their private polling. Isaac Levido, who masterminded the Tories' 2019 victory, and the pollster Michael Brooks told the Prime Minister the rows over sleaze and parties in Downing Street had caused serious damage. Voters are disappointed the government seems to be focused on helping itself rather than working for them and ministers need to get on with delivery, Johnson was told.

Findings from two investigations into sleaze in government are expected in early January. The first is into the facts surrounding the No 10 parties that allegedly broke lockdown rules. Sue Gray, a senior civil servant, is leading that investigation and has a reputation for shredding individuals who fall short of the high standards of ethical behaviour expected of public officials.

The second inquiry is Christopher Geidt's re-examination of Johnson's tortuous financing arrangements, via a Tory donor and party headquarters, for the refurbishment of his Downing Street flat. Again, the crucial question is whether the PM's conduct complied with standards of ethical behaviour for government ministers, and in particular whether he deliberately misled Geidt, his ethics adviser, about where the money came from. "Johnson is vulnerable," said Catherine Haddon, a senior fellow at the Institute for Government. "He has used up a lot of political capital – with his own party, but also with the British public – and he has wasted it, in effect, on small things."

Some premiers grow in popularity, usually when they start from a low base, as Margaret Thatcher did, and prove themselves in office. But once a popular leader loses public approval, "it is very hard to shift it back", Haddon said. Many observers think the Whitehall establishment will close ranks around the Prime Minister and his top officials, with the expectation being that, at most, "deputy heads will roll". That calculation could yet change if Kathryn Stone, the parliamentary standards watchdog whom Johnson's team tried, in effect, to force out, decides to look into any of the scandals swirling around him.

More difficult for Johnson in the short term will be limiting the damage from rapidly rising Covid infections while preventing his increasingly restless and restriction-averse MPs from rising up against him. The government is trying to avoid taking tougher action to contain the new variant but can't rule out further measures as record numbers of people test positive. For many Tories already dismayed by Johnson's record of blunders, tighter pandemic rules would be intolerable.

While Conservatives were willing to accept short-term emergency curbs on individual liberty at the start of the pandemic, their patience has now run out. A remarkable 99 Tory MPs voted against relatively mild Covid "Plan B" measures, including the mandatory wearing of face masks on public transport as well as guidance on working from home, and the Brexit minister, David Frost, quit in protest over the government's direction last month.

One well-placed Conservative estimated the true number of Tories who opposed Plan B to be "double or triple" the number who voted against it – meaning as many as 300 out of Johnson's 361 MPs do not support his pandemic strategy.

Ministers have already reintroduced mask wearing for secondary school pupils in England (the devolved UK administrations set their own rules) and will face intensifying calls for greater restrictions if the NHS is overwhelmed by new Covid admissions. Health officials see grave risks for vulnerable older people whose protection from booster jabs will begin wearing off in January and

February, combined with what could be a further upsurge in cases caused by households mixing over Christmas and New Year.

There are also fears that the number of health workers themselves falling ill to Covid risks compromising the viability of the NHS, which will lead medics to make invidious decisions on treatment. "At some point it becomes a question of which patients you leave out on the pavement," one said.

Johnson's critics will blame him if the pandemic causes a wave of worker absence that disrupts schooling, transport and supply chains. ScotRail was forced to cancel scores of services and announce temporary changes to its train timetable from 4 January due to hundreds of staff isolating. The government has had months to prepare but is only now ordering urgent contingency plans for worker shortages in critical sectors.

If Johnson does need to enact tighter rules for England, pressure will grow on the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, to add to the government's £400bn spent on emergency pandemic support. Vastly increasing state borrowing to prop up private enterprises and public services is another flashpoint issue for many Tories and has troubled relations between No 10 and the Treasury in the past.

Tensions between Sunak and Johnson are a good barometer of the Prime Minister's authority. When he bounced the Chancellor into approving a tax rise to finance increased funding for health and social care in September, Johnson was enjoying a decent poll lead over Labour following the vaccine roll-out



Watch your back: Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor

DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

and reopening of the economy. By contrast, Sunak's allies are now making it known that he's as unhappy with the idea of more spending on pandemic assistance as he is wary of imposing restrictions on individual liberty.

It is a struggle that could come to define the government – and dictate Johnson's fate – during 2022, as the Treasury and the Bank of England contend with rising inflation and what economists expect to be a cost-of-living squeeze for millions. Prices in shops have risen sharply in recent months. Inflation is 5.1 per cent – the highest in a decade – and the rate is expected to keep increasing. Tory MPs are already demanding the government cut VAT on energy bills to help families cope.

"It is quite extraordinary that we're talking about 6 per cent inflation," said Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies. "The big political problem is people feeling – and being – worse off." A new Covid support package from Sunak would risk driving inflation even higher, he said.

According to the Resolution Foundation think tank, a combination of rising energy prices when the cap on household bills is lifted and the new NHS and social care tax will cost families an extra £1,200 a year from April.

In May voters will go to the polls in local elections across the UK that analysts fully expect to be difficult for the Tories. If the results are as bad as some predict, and the wider political context has not improved, the Prime Minister could face a leadership challenge, which is triggered when 15 per cent of Conservative MPs demand a contest in formal letters to Graham Brady, chair of the 1922 Committee of backbenchers. Sunak, who remains generally popular with the public, and the Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, a libertarian and new darling of the party membership, would be in the front rank of candidates to replace him. Jeremy Hunt, the former foreign secretary, remains interested in leading the party as well.

In the words of one MP, the party's relationship with Johnson as leader has always been "very transactional" – they chose him because of his record of winning elections. This makes it more dangerous for Johnson, the MP said, to be disappointing both those Conservative libertarians who would be his natural supporters and Brexiteers who see their long-dreamt of opportunities being squandered.

Then there are the internal divisions between northern English Tories in former Labour seats, who want the government to spend on "levelling up" disadvantaged and neglected regions of the country, and those traditional, more ideological small-state Tories who cherish fiscal conservatism and believe Johnson is neglecting his party's south-

Tories can be brutal as well as pragmatic when it comes to removing failing leaders

ern base. Unlike Labour MPs, Tories can be brutal as well as pragmatic when it comes to removing failing leaders – as Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith discovered.

For much of his political career, Johnson has succeeded in part because he is such an adept shape-shifter. During the early phase of the UK's bitter divorce negotiations with the EU, he described his "policy on cake" as "pro having it and pro eating it". The cake-eating metaphor reflected a belief that he doesn't have to make difficult choices and can invent the rules of the game by which he plays.

Johnson's insouciance and self-belief infuriated Brussels, and his casual political style is now wearing thin with his own party. Governing is different from campaigning and the risk for Johnson is that if he doesn't soon choose what kind of government he wants to lead, his increasingly impatient colleagues may choose someone else to run it.

Johnson loyalists in the cabinet – such as Nadine Dorries, the Culture Secretary, and Oliver Dowden, the party co-chairman – are urging Tories to keep their troubles in perspective. "Everyone needs to calm down," one said. "We have three years to get through all this. We have a lot to deliver and have had to spend two years on Covid."

A relaunch of the government's agenda is due in January, with the Levelling Up Minister, Michael Gove, preparing to publish a delayed white paper fleshing out Johnson's nebulous plan to regenerate neglected regions. Truss is now taking charge of negotiations with the EU over trade rules for Northern Ireland.

The Christmas break afforded time for tempers to cool. As MPs return to Westminster, Johnson will be under pressure again, not least from a Labour Party that is regaining some confidence after years of infighting.

Is the Prime Minister losing his touch? Can he get a grip on a decadent and dysfunctional No 10 operation? Without a shake-up, Conservatives fear further pain from self-inflicted injuries such as Owen Paterson's breach of standards rules and the questionable Christmas parties. In the words of one of his ministers, Boris Johnson's first priority for 2022 is simple: "Stop screwing up." ●

THE NS

Prime Ministerial

A six-part series of special episodes from the New Statesman Podcast

Stephen Bush and Jonn Elledge look back on the tenure of six past prime ministers, from Theresa May to Margaret Thatcher, to ask: were they successful on their own terms?

Featuring interviews with former cabinet members, close advisers and commentators including former secretaries of state Peter Mandelson & Andrew Adonis, political economist Helen Thompson and former chief of staff Gavin Barwell.



**The NS
Podcast**

Listen on Apple Podcasts,
Spotify and Acast



How Peng Shuai exposed the limits of China's power

The sinister case of the Chinese tennis star who made sexual assault allegations against a former CCP official reveals the choice confronting Beijing: coercion at home, or soft power abroad?

By Katie Stallard

Peng Shuai's social media post vanished from the internet within minutes. It was a detailed account, published late in the evening on 2 November 2021, alleging that Zhang Gaoli, China's former vice-premier, had forced her to have sex with him around three years ago. Peng, one of the country's best-known tennis stars, described how scared she had been, how she had cried and said no, and how she knew it was hopeless to speak out. Zhang had served alongside the Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the top ranks of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Peng predicted she would be destroyed "like an egg cracking against a rock or a moth to the flame". But she said she was determined to make the truth known. Then she disappeared.

After top tennis players including Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka demanded to know where she was, Peng reappeared on 20 November in a series of apparently staged videos. She made another appearance on 19 December, giving what was clearly intended to look like an impromptu interview to a Beijing-friendly Singaporean newspaper in which she said she had never accused anyone of sexually assaulting her. But Peng's colleagues at the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) said they were still unable to reach her and remained unconvinced that she was either safe or free to speak openly. Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, wrote on Twitter that the video interview had only "deepen[ed] concerns about the pressure to which the Chinese government is subjecting her". In its handling of Peng's case, Beijing has laid bare the weakness of using brute force to crush dissent.

It might look like the political system prevailed. Peng's words were deleted. Her social media account was blocked. Internet searches for her name in China return only earlier posts about her sporting success. The WTA suspended its tournaments in China, but no other professional sports organisations followed suit. The men's tour – the ATP – expressed "serious concerns", but did not raise the possibility of moving its own tournaments out of the country. The International Tennis Federation, the sport's governing body, also voiced concerns, but told BBC Sport it planned to continue to run its events in China because "we don't want to punish a billion people".

Peng, who turns 36 in January, is a three-time Olympian, yet the International Olympic Committee (IOC) says it is focused on delivering the winter Games in Beijing in February 2022 as planned. The IOC president Thomas Bach has attracted strong criticism from human rights groups after holding two video calls with Peng, subsequently saying she was doing "fine" while avoiding any mention of the alleged sexual assault. ▶



ANTHONY GERACE

Reporter at Large

◀ Zhang Gaoli, who is 75 and retired from political life in 2018, hasn't commented on the accusations, but China's foreign ministry has dismissed them as "malicious hyping". The likelihood he will face the sort of independent investigation the WTA has demanded is remote. High-ranking officials are occasionally brought down in anti-corruption drives and for breaches of political discipline (the former domestic security chief Zhou Yongkang was given a life sentence for corruption and abuse of power in 2015). But the more common approach is to close ranks and protect the party leadership at all costs. This is especially true for someone as senior as Zhang.

China's powerful propaganda apparatus has, however, failed to make the case disappear altogether, veering between unconvincing denials and accusing foreigners of manipulating Peng to attack China. And while the WTA so far stands alone in its decision

to pull its business from China – at a cost estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of pounds – other major sports and international brands may yet find themselves considering the same choice.

"Everything has become so global now that your actions in one market are scrutinised around the world and you're judged based on that," Mark Dreyer, a Beijing-based sports analyst and the host of the *China Sports Insider* podcast, told me. He cited the NBA's handling of the 2019 controversy involving the Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey, who posted on social media in support of Hong Kong protesters, as a critical turning point. Morey's message caused outrage in Beijing and is thought to have cost the NBA up to £300m as Chinese broadcasters dropped coverage of basketball games. But the organisation also drew intense criticism in the US, including from the then president, Donald Trump, who accused NBA officials of pandering to China.

"For the first time, a global audience was really looking at how these companies were acting in China," Dreyer said. "The days when you could say different things in different markets are over, and increasingly we're getting to the point where people are going to have to choose which market matters more."

Since China began opening up to foreign investment in 1978, the Communist Party has essentially been making the same bet: that the lure of market access will overcome qualms about the country's human rights record.

"Westerners would forget," Deng Xiaoping assured officials ahead of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. Deng, who led China from 1978 to 1989, expected international sanctions, but believed that if he could restore domestic order, the economy would rebound and foreign firms would return. The bet paid off. Within a few years of the massacre – in which between 500 and 2,600 people are estimated to have died, with thousands more injured, according to a declassified US State Department cable – sanctions eased and foreign direct investment surged.

China's rapid economic recovery after the 2008 global financial crisis reinforced Bei-

jing's confidence that its state-led economic model was superior to the market-driven system in the US. That conviction has only strengthened in the years since, with the country's expanding middle class forming an increasingly valuable market for foreign brands and China predicted to overtake the US as the world's largest economy by 2028.

More recently, Xi Jinping has called the Chinese economy a "gravitational force", and despite the intensifying US-China rivalry and deteriorating EU-China relations, the allure of China's market remains strong. Research by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a US-based think tank, shows foreign investment in China accelerated in 2021, up more than 10 per cent on 2020. Despite the concerted action to crush civil society in Hong Kong and the allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity directed at the predominantly Muslim Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang region, the international investors keep coming. One quarter of all global foreign direct investment now goes to China.

But China doesn't want to be only a strong economic power. It wants to be a global cultural power and a respected international player, and that will take more than displays of strength.

Chinese officials have been pushing back against what they call "American-style democracy" in recent weeks, attempting to redefine the term to insist that China too is democratic, with its own approach to human rights and, in its case, "democracy that works". Ahead of the Biden administration's virtual "Summit for Democracy" in early December, China convened its own "International Forum on Democracy" in Beijing and released a white paper detailing the purported impediments to democracy and human rights that exist in the US. These include "entrenched racism," the "tragic mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic," and the "widening wealth gap".

Autocracies have often tried to brand themselves as democracies – see, for instance, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) or the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) – but there is an audience for Beijing's claims.

"While these views may not hold much ground in developed, advanced democracies like the US, many countries likely welcome China's alternative interpretations," said Bonny Lin, director of the China Power project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. "Given the growing number of countries that do not meet Western definitions of liberal democracy, these countries may be receptive to Chinese efforts to reinterpret what counts as democratic or acceptable forms of governance."

Beijing has long sought to promote the



China's bet is that market access will always trump qualms over its human rights record



Out in public: a video posted on a Chinese state media Twitter account appears to show Peng Shuai at a children's tennis tournament in Beijing, 21 November 2021

merits of its own development model, which prioritises central control and state intervention, and increasing Chinese soft power and cultural influence has been a stated goal of the CCP since at least 2007. Xi repeated that ambition in 2017, calling for renewed efforts to “tell China’s stories well” and “enhance our country’s soft power”. He has urged officials to “build our country into a socialist cultural superpower”, and has spent around £7.6bn annually on external propaganda and public diplomacy, according to one estimate.

Yet there is a growing tension between the CCP’s ambitions to achieve international prestige and respect and the instinct to flatten any perceived threats to its power. “China’s leaders clearly care about the country’s global image,” said Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who served as China director on the US National Security Council during the Obama administration. “The rub is that they care more about tightening control at home.”

The party’s response to Peng Shuai’s allegations is a case in point. Peng is one of China’s most successful athletes and a former world number one in women’s doubles. At a time when China faces a looming demographic crisis with a shrinking working-age population, worsening gender inequality and declining women’s participation in the labour force, this could have been an opportunity for China’s leadership to show that it takes women’s rights and accusations of sexual as-

sault seriously and supports its tennis star. But the desire to protect the party and enforce political control is stronger.

“When faced with hard choices between tightening control at home or burnishing a positive image abroad, China’s leaders have opted for control,” Hass told me. “As a consequence, China’s international image, at least in the developed world, is worse now than at any point since the wake of the Tiananmen tragedy in 1989.”

Global public opinion polling bears this out. A 2021 survey of policymakers and public intellectuals in south-east Asia found that while they overwhelmingly view China as the most influential regional power, more than 60 per cent said they would prefer to align themselves with the US than China, an increase of almost 10 per cent on the previous year. Sixty-two per cent expressed anxieties about China’s assertive actions and the militarisation of the South China Sea. The Sydney-based Lowy Institute similarly found in a 2021 poll that the majority of Australians see China as more of a security threat than an economic partner, a reversal of its findings 12 months earlier. And in the institute’s power index Beijing was found to have declined in measures of cultural and diplomatic influence in the region. In the US, the proportion of Americans who view China as their country’s greatest threat has more than doubled in the past year, while negative attitudes towards China in the UK have reached record highs in the past two years.

These attitudes could translate into tough action against China. Concerns about growing Chinese military strength have prompted South Korea, Japan and the Philippines to strengthen their relationships with the US. Beijing’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy has galvanised regional groupings such as “the Quad” – comprising the US, India, Australia and Japan – whose leaders held their first in-person summit in 2021 and vowed to recommit to the partnership. The US, UK and Australia, meanwhile, announced the new Aukus security pact in September last year.

The years of China hiding its strength and biding its time, as Deng once urged, are over. In Xi’s version of the story, the country stood up under Mao Zedong, got rich under Deng, and now, under his leadership, it has become strong. He claims to be leading the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, reclaiming China’s rightful place in the world and commanding respect, instead of the humiliation it suffered at the hands of foreign powers during the final century of imperial rule. As the party enshrined in a recent high-level document: “Constant concessions will only invite more bullying and humiliation.”

But this demand for strength on all fronts and at all times could also backfire. “Tactically, China used to mix toughness and concessions masterfully to de-escalate tensions and divide the West,” writes Minxin Pei, a scholar of Chinese elite politics, in Bloomberg Opinion. “But Beijing’s toolbox now appears to include hammers only.”

Instead of tact and diplomacy, or even acknowledging Peng Shuai’s allegations, Beijing has opted to silence the athlete and threaten her supporters. International brands and sports organisations will now be watching to see whether there is a market for the WTA’s principled stance in backing Peng and moving its tournaments elsewhere. “China is the biggest single market in the world, but it’s still smaller than the rest of world,” said Mark Dreyer. “So, if it’s them or us, or if it’s China versus the world, China is going to isolate itself. As someone who’s been [in China] a long time, that would be a massive shame, but I do think that’s the direction we’re heading in.”

With uncertainty surrounding the circumstances in which Peng Shuai made her recent remarks on camera, it’s worth returning to her original post. Nowhere did she call for the Communist Party to be overthrown or express the slightest hint of opposition to its rule. She didn’t invoke the #MeToo movement or demand systemic change. She simply said she wanted to tell the truth. But that was the one thing the party couldn’t allow. ●

Katie Stallard will be joining the New Statesman as Senior Editor (China and Global Affairs) on 17 January



Special offer for New Statesman readers

10% off membership plus a beautiful free tote!
Offer includes gift subscriptions.



Choose any subscription and
use code NSTOTE21 at checkout:
www.leftbookclub.com



THE NEW STATESMAN

Enjoy multi-user access to our new website

Unlock our independent, award-winning journalism for your staff, employees, members or students



Our multi-user licence includes:

- Unlimited multi-user access to newstatesman.com, including our data journalism and the NS online archive
- A dedicated account manager
- Exclusive subscriber-only offers

To find out more:

Contact Ian Appleby on +44 (0) 7729 347 681
or email ian.appleby@newstatesman.co.uk
For more subscription options and offers,
visit newstatesman.com/subscribe

PHILIP COLLINS



The Public Square Without a real plan to reform Britain, the Tories are at the mercy of Boris Johnson

Nearly 12 years since it came to power, and more than two years into its incarnation under Boris Johnson, what is this Conservative government for? The current administration, like the Cameron and May governments before it, seems likely to be remembered for what happened to it rather than what it made happen. Though the Labour Party has spent a decade levelling the charge of ideological vandalism against the Tories, the better accusation would be to say that they wanted nothing other than to occupy office.

There is, of course, a major exception to the critique of intellectual emptiness. Brexit will be one of the two things that anyone remembers from this decade-and-a-bit of Tory hegemony. Brexit is David Cameron's legacy and Theresa May's fate. For a long while, Brexit consumed the resources of proper administration. Now, the process is almost done. The withdrawal agreement gained royal assent on 23 January 2020, almost two years ago, and all nine of the Brexit-related bills that established the new dispensation have passed through parliament.

The other defining period of the past decade will, of course, be the pandemic. In the same month the Conservatives were re-elected in 2019, the first outbreak of Covid-19 was discovered. From that moment on, conventional public policy became an afterthought. Of all the government departments, the Treasury has the fairest claim to have been consumed by the pandemic, and the best case to make for its imaginative response. It will be intriguing to see if Rishi Sunak emerges this year to express his view of the

world in signature tax policy reforms. Perhaps it is time for the real Chancellor to stand up – somebody in this government needs to. A series of airy pledges about life outside the European Union being better than life inside it will not generate the gratitude needed to win again.

Conservatives of an older vintage wear their beliefs lightly. They are pragmatic and flexible, not rigidly ideological. There is plenty of wisdom in this disposition but it can easily tip over into inertia. The Johnson government has a distinctly non-conservative disdain for due process. In the bills to redraw parliamentary boundaries and introduce voter identification, it shows a stronger regard for its own survival than it does for good policy. But, on the bigger questions facing the country, this administration is more conventional than it looks, precisely because it wants so little.

Its defining mission is supposed to be levelling up. A £3.6bn Towns Fund was announced in 2019 but it is still not clear what it is for. Michael Gove, the only policy brain in town, is hunkered down in the new Levelling Up department with Andy Haldane, the former chief economist at the Bank of England, trying to make sense of the idea. The promised white paper is already late, which is a clue to how difficult it must be to draft. The inequality of

The levelling up white paper is late, which is a clue to how difficult it must be to draft

prosperity between regions in a globalised economy has such deep roots, grown over so long a period, that it is a fond hope to suppose it can be corrected by one white paper, even one authored by two such fertile brains.

But the levelling up work, when it comes, will at least be something rather than nothing. Elsewhere across Whitehall, there is very little going on. Nothing has happened in Gove's old bailiwick of education since he left in 2014. Some extra money is promised – £4.3bn more for schools in real terms – but there is no real sense of what it is meant to buy.

This pattern is repeated in healthcare, where Johnson's administration has become a cash machine. Frightened of appearing mean, the government is attaching no serious programme of reform to its spending commitments. It is, no doubt, a good thing that nurse maintenance bursaries were restored in December 2019 and that there has been a change to the pensions taper for clinicians, but this is so small-bore. In 2018 an extra £20.5bn in funding for NHS England by 2023-24 was announced, but no government could have avoided that commitment. It's necessary housekeeping, but far from the productivity revolution needed.

The same is partly true with respect to climate policy. The £5.2bn allocated to flood defences is something any government would have done; so, too, the drive to increase energy production from offshore wind. But this government has at least embraced the environmental mission with alacrity, strengthening legally binding targets on the route to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. It will be interesting to see if Johnson remains committed to his climate crusade now that the essay crisis of Glasgow's Cop26 summit has passed.

In welfare, however, the gothic folly of Universal Credit is acquiring more gargoyles. An extra £1bn has been allocated to social care, but whether the reform plan will survive dissent on the Tory benches is doubtful. More to the party's taste is the boilerplate right-wing nastiness of the Home Secretary, who claims it as a cachet that the points-based immigration system has made it harder to settle in Britain.

The sum of all these parts isn't much. This, in the end, is what underpins the fall in Johnson's ratings. He could more easily shrug off the Westminster lockdown parties if he was able to point to the ways his government is improving the nation. But he can't, and in the absence of policy, the Conservative Party becomes the prisoner of the Prime Minister's behaviour. That is a very uncomfortable position to be in. ●

The temptations of Christopher Hitchens

Why the crusading journalist failed to assume the mantle of George Orwell

By Ross Douthat

The *Financial Times* columnist Janan Ganesh recently expressed a sentiment I hear from time to time among connoisseurs of punditry: that our era – the age of Trumpism and woke-ness and Covid controversy – badly misses the words and wits of Christopher Hitchens, who was taken from the stage before his time. Ganesh offered a particularly interesting version of this take, because he went halfway to conceding something that Hitchens' critics (I was one of them) might say has become more palpable since his passing in 2011: that his great talents were expended on causes that have not exactly stood the test of time. But Ganesh framed this reality as an indictment of the somewhat empty – dare one say, decadent – times in which Hitchens lived:

The trouble is, the artist dwarfed his canvas. Hitchens had the misfortune to peak during one of world history's

blander interludes. If he overcommitted to the war on terror, it was because here, at last, was a worthier foe than a long-retired Henry Kissinger and the ghastliness of the Clintons. His atheism aged better (no, it is not "its own kind of religion") but the resort to a celestial target rather shows how thin the pickings were on Earth. He was made for our time, not his own. The great vacancy in today's public life is for an equal scourge of the censorious left and the feral right: a fanatical sceptic... The opportunities to impose himself, to speak for an unspoken-for mass, would have been greater now than in, say, 2005, when politics was so temperate that I forgot to vote.

I'm not convinced that the vacancy is really so vast as Ganesh suggests. Is there actually a desperate shortage of pundits willing to oppose "the censorious left and

the feral right" alike? I can think of various prominent thinkers at famous magazines, hallowed universities and notable Substacks who do exactly that. They are not carrying the day, but they are certainly making the arguments that Ganesh imagines Hitchens making. And if you find the journalist Anne Applebaum or the intellectual historian Mark Lilla too cautious in the volleys they aim leftward, or the gang at the *Dispatch* – a US centre-right magazine – too tempered in their attacks on the Trumpian right, might I suggest reading Andrew Sullivan, a British expat who dishes it with Hitchens-esque brio to both sides.

I'm not saying that Sullivan's contemporary work is interchangeable with what Hitchens might have turned out; for one thing there's the matter of Sullivan's complicated Catholic faith, which separates him from the purist scepticism to which Hitchens theoretically aspired. But as Ganesh backhandedly acknowledges ("that he himself never entirely threw off [dogmatism] only made him a more credible witness against it"), the official Hitchens scepticism was applied more in the breach than in the observance. The youthful Trotskyist became the fervent liberal hawk and still-more-fervent anti-theist, a man of passions and righteous hatreds to the end.

And in the misdirection of those passions, I think, you can see something that's similar to Ganesh's diagnosis, but subtly different – less a portrait of a man ill-served by the smallness of his times, and more of a man tempted by the smallness of his times into some serious intellectual mistakes. Hitchens wanted to be a second Orwell, a scourge of smelly orthodoxies no matter their origination – a fine aspiration! But it wasn't just that the targets for his critiques, from Thatcherism in his youth down to "Islamofascism" and religion writ large in late middle age, weren't ultimately the equivalent of National Socialism and Stalinism. It was also that in the process of inflating his enemies, he signed up for causes that were themselves simply bad – bad and irrelevant, in the case of late-Cold War Trotskyism, and then bad and actively destructive in the case of both Iraq hawkishness and the New Atheism.

Indeed, the idea that the US could bring democracy to the Middle East by force of arms, and the idea that the decline of Western monotheism would enlighten and radically improve late-modern civilisation were, in hindsight, two of the most erroneous ideas of the early- to mid-2000s. And not many people held to both of them at once, which meant that Hitchens effectively achieved what you might call the reverse Orwell: being so boldly independent of ideological faction that you get more important things terribly wrong than the more ordinary sort of scribbler.



A fanatical sceptic: Christopher Hitchens, photographed for the *New Statesman* by Muir Vidler in 2010

The aspect of Hitchens' career that Ganesh emphasises, the search for causes and enemies worthy of his romantic and crusading spirit, illustrates what in *The Decadent Society* I describe as the dangers of anti-decadence – the way the desire for a great enemy can supply a “cure” for stagnation that makes the world more interesting but also worse.

Here, there is a special irony that in the spring that the US invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein, Hitchens appeared in the *Atlantic* with a caustic essay on Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, which he dismissed (wrongly) as the place where Waugh's reactionary mood curdled and his gifts ran out. Because in an important way the Hitchens of the war-on-terror era quite resembles Waugh's protagonist in that Second World War saga, the English Catholic aristocrat Guy Crouchback, for whom the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact felt like a moment of grand opportunity

and purpose for an otherwise decaying civilisation: “The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms.” Coming from a different ideological vantage point, this was exactly the Hitchens reaction to 11 September: it filled him with “exhilaration” because it promised “a war to the finish between everything I love and everything I hate”.

At the end of Waugh's novels, Crouchback is disillusioned: he meets a Jewish refugee in the Balkans who speaks of the “will to war”

in 1930s Europe, the way that “even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war”. She asks him: “Were there none in England?”

“God help me,” Crouchback answers, “I was one of them.”

I've always liked that passage – in part because that's how I feel about myself, thinking back on some of my jejune writings (very) early in the war on terror, my own exhilaration that meaning was finally coming back.

I don't think Hitchens ever came around to that kind of regret, but I do think his most important work stands, for now at least, as a monument to a variation on the temptation that Waugh describes. He wanted to join a great battle to save his particular vision of liberal civilisation, but he chose his crucial causes poorly, winning pyrrhic victories that mostly deepened decadence, and left that same civilisation more unhappy, endangered and internally divided than before. ●

Hitchens was led by the smallness of his times into serious intellectual mistakes

I approached Christmas Day, as I imagine many *New Statesman* readers did, with my eyes smarting from a swab up my nose, and an imaginary two-metre force field around my 89-year-old Nana. It was a jollier, better-attended celebration than the inaugural St Scrooge's Day of 2020, but the build-up was laden with doom. Not only did the memory of the previous year's 11th-hour lockdown weigh heavy, but warnings of a Brexit/Covid mix of supply-chain bottlenecks, rising prices and food shortages "cancelling Christmas" haunted the headlines.

As a rush on petrol caused chaos, Boris Johnson promised the nation we would "get through to Christmas and beyond". It was a myopic approach to planning. Emergency visas for foreign lorry drivers and poultry workers ("truckers and pluckers") – vital for keeping shelves stocked and solving the poultry shortage that closed around 50 Nando's branches in the summer – were supposed to expire on Christmas Eve. (Eventually, they were extended until 28 February and New Year's Eve respectively.)

Urging the public to book their boosters to "save Christmas", the Prime Minister appeared to be fixated on staggering on until the big day – and not much further.

For the first time, I found myself looking forward to Armenian Christmas more than "English" Christmas. Armenians celebrate Christmas on 6 January. Until the fourth century, so did all Christians. When the Roman empire adopted Christianity, the date was changed to replace a pagan feast day on 25 December known as "Saturnalia", which marked "the birth of the sun" – the days growing longer. Armenia, the first country to adopt Christianity as its national religion (in AD 301), already had an established church calendar, so stuck to the original day.

All this really means for my family is more hoovering, as our Christmas tree stays up longer than everyone else's (alas – my sister and I never managed to wangle two sets of presents).

Although as a baby I was fully baptised as Armenian Orthodox (and they really dunk you in; home videos show my English relatives looking politely concerned amid the incense and chanting of St Sarkis church as I'm immersed, wailing, in holy water), our celebration of Armenian Christmas was always an improvised hotchpotch of tradition.

We'd pull leftover crackers, eat home-made Lebanese mezze, barbecue lamb and chicken kebabs – my dad brandishing tongs in the snow – and for pudding share *galette des rois*, a pastry cake

ANOOSH CHAKELIAN



Another Voice My Armenian Christmas reminds me how traditions are reinvented in times of crisis

served mainly in France for the Epiphany.

Even the language we use for the Armenian Christmas table is uniquely ours. Lamb *kofte* (spiced minced meat on a skewer) is "Armenian hamburger", *khobez* (classic Lebanese flatbread) is "Arabic bread". I describe *lahmajun* (a thin dough base topped with mincemeat, herbs and tomatoes) as "Armenian pizza", and nickname *loubia b'zeit* (green bean and tomato stew) "bean surprise". My dad's signature aubergine dish is "the priest who fainted" (more commonly known by its Ottoman name *imam bayildi*, it is so delicious it supposedly made the imam/priest – delete according to heritage – who first tasted it swoon).

On 6 January 2019, the first Armenian Christmas after my dad died, we scrambled to establish a new tradition: I would now host the meal at my flat in east London. I lack winter barbecuing skills but I've taught myself some dishes over the years. Our smoke alarm regularly sends my boyfriend racing into the kitchen to find me charring four aubergines on the open flames of our gas hob, feeling connected to my roots but apprehensive about how net zero will affect the depth of flavour in my *moutabal* (smoky aubergine dip).

We had to skip this nascent tradition in 2021 during the January lockdown, so I've been tentatively planning a feast to make up for it this year, which includes both staples and innovations. Vegetarian and vegan guests mean no meat kebabs, and a huge pot of "bean surprise" becoming the focal dish. Tahini for hummus and pomegranate molasses for *muhammara* (a walnut and red pepper dip) will double up as ingredients for dairy-free brownies. As a stereotypical

millennial observing Dry January, I'll be toasting with Middle Eastern mint lemonade instead of the customary *arak* (a fiendishly strong aniseed spirit). Armenian coffee remains Armenian coffee: strong, thick and, once drunk, tipped upside-down to read fortunes in the grounds.

An estimated 700,000 Brits isolated over Christmas in 2021, resulting in new festive routines (I know a house-share of 30-somethings who made Mexican food together for "fajismas"). British Muslims have had to adapt to celebrating Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha under restrictions, unable to break their fast with friends and family. Open-air prayer services established during lockdown continue in some local parks.

The "rule of six" in 2020 arrived days ahead of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), and some families attended an outdoor synagogue service, isolated in their cars, honking horns instead of the traditional blowing of the shofar (ram's horn). Diwali fell in the second lockdown of November 2020, leaving Hindus, Sikhs and Jains to celebrate virtually – even turning to TikTok to watch and share Bhangra dances. Some parents, still fearful after restrictions were lifted, sent parcels of homemade Indian sweets instead of hosting their children the following year.

Customs change as we move away from home, lose those we love, or, nowadays, bump up against public health restrictions. Yet the old impulse to make a virtue of necessity thrives across Britain's patchwork of communities. It is this spirit, every year, that saves Christmas, Eid, and maybe even Saturnalia, somewhere, too. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

THE CRITICS

Books From politics to science, and essays to fiction, the books to read in 2022. 34

Books Harry Eyres on what a great Spanish thinker can teach us about Brexit Britain. 38

Interview Kate Mossman meets the man who inspired Joni Mitchell's "Carey". 42

Art Michael Prodger on how Albrecht Dürer's travels shaped his remarkable art. 48

Film David Sexton on the pleasures of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Licorice Pizza*. 51

Television Rachel Cooke on *Four Lives* and the problem with serial killer dramas. 52

Books

Stories of crisis and solace for the year ahead

From Margaret Atwood to Francis Fukuyama – the *New Statesman*'s guide to what to read in 2022

Non-fiction

By Tom Gatti

We begin the year as we began the last one: fighting a virus that has transformed our way of life. In *Preventable* (Viking, May), Devi Sridhar examines the ways in which politics influences medicine and how we can protect ourselves from the next pandemic, while the historian Peter Hennessy looks to the 1942 Beveridge Report to seek lessons for the future in *A Duty of Care: Britain Before and After Covid* (Allen Lane, March). The NHS, created in the wake of William Beveridge's proposals for a welfare state, marks its 75th anniversary this year. *Fighting for Life* by Isabel Hardman (Viking, September) and *Life Support* by Michael Ashcroft and Isabel Oakeshott (Biteback, February) outline the enormous pressures it faces. There is some hope to be gleaned: from the disaster expert Lucy Easthope in her memoir *When the Dust Settles* (Hodder & Stoughton, March), which shows how we can rebuild after catastrophe; from Gavin Francis in *Recovery: The Lost Art of Convalescence* (Profile, January); and from Michael Ignatieff in *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times* (Picador, January).

Solace can seem in short supply in an era of multiple global crises. In *Disorder: Hard Times in the 21st Century* (OUP, February), the *New Statesman* columnist Helen Thompson examines the origins and consequences of



JULIA RENDLEMAN/REUTERS

History man: an image of George Floyd is projected on to the statue of Confederate general Robert E Lee in Richmond, Virginia, US

the political shocks of the past decade, while Phil Tinline goes further back in *The Death of Consensus: 100 Years of British Political Nightmares* (Hurst, June), an account of the “building and breaking of shared national outlooks”. National identity is at the heart of *Who Are We Now? Stories of Modern England* (Picador, March) by the NS editor-in-chief Jason Cowley, which is about how England and the English have changed over the last 25 years, from Blair to Brexit and Covid. It is told through a series of stories, merging the personal and the political – stories of conflict and division but also ultimately of hope. There could hardly be a less unifying personality than Nigel Farage, and yet he has been part of our national story too. In *One Party After Another* (Simon & Schuster, February), Michael Crick reveals how a fringe Eurosceptic became “one of the most influential British politicians of the 21st century”. In April, Century publishes Tina Brown’s *The Palace Papers: Inside the House of Windsor*. The timing – in a jubilee year, and in advance of a memoir from Prince Harry – already has readers of certain newspapers deeply exercised.

The Orwell Prize winner Darren McGarvey argues in *The Social Distance Between Us* (Ebury, May) that Britain’s inequalities stem from the gulf – geographical, economic, cultural – between those who make decisions and those affected by them. Thomas Piketty takes the long view in *A Brief History of Equality* (Belknap, April), a “surprisingly optimistic” account of progress towards a more equal society. Francis Fukuyama’s *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Profile, March) is a short, sharp defence of a doctrine that has come under attack from all sides. Changes in the world order are charted – via studies of Margaret Thatcher, Charles de Gaulle, Richard Nixon and others – by the veteran American diplomat Henry Kissinger in *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy* (Allen Lane, April).

Critical thinkers are in good supply this year. They include Ayishat Akanbi, who argues in *The Awakening* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, August) that “wokeness” has led to polarisation rather than progress; Susie Alegre, whose *Freedom to Think* (Atlantic, April) shows how Big Tech erodes our humanity; and the behavioural scientist Pragya Agarwal, who examines the gendering of emotions in *Hysterical* (Canongate, September). In *Control: The Dark History and Troubling Present of Eugenics* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, February), Adam Rutherford outlines how technology and politics have combined to allow the revival of a disturbing idea.

There is more science writing to look forward to in *The Book of Minds: How to Understand Ourselves and Other Beings* by Philip Ball (Picador, June), *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* by Ed Yong (Bodley Head, June) and Siddhartha Mukherjee’s *The Omniscient Cell* (Bodley Head, November) – the story of the base unit of life and its role in modern medicine. Among several books on the warming planet, *Fire and Flood: A People’s History of Climate Change* by Eugene Linden (Allen Lane, April) paints a full picture of how we got to the precipice. An intriguing corner of science and psychology is illuminated by Sam Knight in *The Premonitions Bureau* (Faber, May), about a group of “seers” – who predicted future disasters –

assembled by a British psychiatrist in the 1960s. If that sounds like a great TV series, Amazon Studios agrees: it snapped up the rights in 2019.

There’s the promise of gripping narrative, too, in Simon Parkin’s *The Island of Extraordinary Captives* (Sceptre, February), the story of a group of artists and academics – including a chess setter for the *New Statesman* – who became “enemy aliens” in a Second World War internment camp on the Isle of Man, and Philip Oltermann’s *The Stasi Poetry Circle* (Faber, February), an account of how the East German secret police “weaponised poetry in the struggle against the class enemy” in the 1980s. On the heels of Sathnam Sanghera’s bestselling *Empireland* come new books tackling Britain’s colonial past. The profits and losses are explored in *Uncommon Wealth: Britain and the Aftermath of Empire* by Kojo Koram (John Murray, February) and *White Debt: The Demerara Uprising and Britain’s Legacy of Slavery* by Thomas Harding (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, January). Turning to the present, Oliver Bullough dissects “Global Britain” in *Butler to the World* (Profile, March). Hannah Rose Woods interrogates national myth-making in *Rule, Nostalgia* (WH Allen, May), while the conservative writer Douglas Murray sees Western nations taking an unfair amount of blame for the sins of the past in *The War on the West: How to Prevail in the Age of Unreason* (HarperCollins, April). Sabrina Mahfouz offers a personal take on imperial legacies in *These Bodies of Water: Notes on the British Empire, the Middle East and Where We Meet* (Tinder, May).

The relationship between the Middle East and the West continues to shape the world. It’s tackled in different ways in *False Prophets: British Leaders’ Fateful Fascination with the Middle East from Suez to Syria* by Nigel Ashton (Atlantic, March), *The Making of the Modern Middle East* by Jeremy Bowen (Picador, September) and *The Fate of Abraham: Why the West is Wrong about Islam* by Peter Osborne (Simon & Schuster, April). A pivotal moment for Britain and China is revisited 25 years on, in *Diplomacy Ends at Midnight: The Long Return of Hong Kong to China* by Dalena Wright, and Chris Patten’s *The Hong Kong Diaries* (both Allen Lane, June).

The turbulent politics of the US is explored in Stephen Marche’s speculative *The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future* (Simon & Schuster, March), Anthony Barnett’s *Taking Control! Humanity and America After Trump and the Pandemic* (Repeater, March), and in *His Name is George Floyd* by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa (Bantam Press, May), the biography of the man whose death in 2020 caused a global wave of Black Lives Matter protests. Racial inequality is explored from a British point of view in *The Race to the Top: Structural Racism and How to Fight It* by Nazir Afzal (HarperNorth, September), Colin Grant’s *I’m Black So You Don’t Have to Be* (Jonathan Cape, October), and in *I Heard What You Said* (Picador, June), Jeffrey Boakye’s account of being a black pupil and teacher in an education system that is default white. These are joined by essays from the novelists Tsitsi Dangarembga – *Black and Female* (Faber, August) – and Esi Edugyan, in *Out of The Sun* (Serpent’s Tail, February). ▶

Changes in the world order are charted by Henry Kissinger in *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy*

◀ There are essay collections, too, from Margaret Atwood (*Burning Questions*, Chatto & Windus, March), Elena Ferrante (*In the Margins*, Europa, March) and Geoff Dyer (*The Last Days of Roger Federer: A Book About Endings*, Canongate, June). Haruki Murakami and Howard Jacobson look “under the hood” in, respectively, *Novelist as a Vocation* (Harvill Secker, November) and the memoir *Mother’s Boy* (Jonathan Cape, March). On the centenary of modernism’s year zero, there is a “landmark” new edition of *Ulysses* (Cambridge University Press, July) and a revealing collection of Mary Trevelyan’s diaries and letters charting her friendship with TS Eliot, edited by Erica Wagner (*Mary and Mr Eliot*, Faber, October).

Finally, four music books to soundtrack 2022. Jude Rogers shows how song shapes our lives, through 12 tracks, in *The Sound of Being Human* (White Rabbit, April). Bob Stanley provides a prequel to *Yeah Yeah Yeah*, his brilliant history of modern pop, with *Let’s Do It: The Birth of Pop* (Faber, May). Jonathan Cape publishes Jarvis Cocker’s memorabilia-inspired memoir *Good Pop, Bad Pop* in May. And Kate Molleson introduces ten unorthodox figures who altered the course of musical history in *Sound Within Sound* (Faber, July).

Fiction

By Leo Robson

Over the past two years the spread of a pandemic, against a backdrop of environmental disaster, during a Donald Trump presidency and a Boris Johnson premiership, may have confirmed the age-old fear that reality was outstripping the minds of even the wildest practitioner of satire or science fiction. Still, novelists are the cockroaches of the human species, ploughing valiantly on, whether inhabiting a more or less sequestered social world or doing their darnedest to size up the present.

A number of authors are publishing the successors to notable hits. Kamila Shamsie follows *Home Fire* with *Best of Friends* (Bloomsbury, September). Mohsin Hamid is publishing his successor to *Exit West* with *The Last White Man* (Hamish Hamilton, August). Nick Drnaso, the first graphic novelist to be recognised by the Booker Prize, has produced *Acting Class* (Granta, August). In *Booth* (Serpent’s Tail, March), Karen Joy Fowler, the author of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, tells a story of six siblings, one of whom proceeded to kill a president; Hanya Yanagihara, author of *A Little Life*, has written *To Paradise* (Picador, January), which considers the idea of the United States in three sections and across three centuries; and Douglas Stuart, who won the Booker in 2020 with *Shuggie Bain*, is offering a star-crossed love story set in sectarian Glasgow, *Young Mungo* (Picador, April).

The highest expectations may be heaped on Ali Smith, the title of whose latest novel, *Companion Piece* (Hamish Hamilton, April), may be hinting at its relationship to her seasonal quartet. Monica Ali is resurfacing after a decade-long break with her fifth

novel *Love Marriage* (Virago, February), which revisits the family territory of her debut *Brick Lane*; Pankaj Mishra, now better-known as a polemical essayist, went twice as long before producing his story of emigration from India, *Run and Hide* (Hutchinson Heinemann, February).

Among the year’s most anticipated debut novels are Louise Kennedy’s *Trespasses* (Bloomsbury, April), a tale of ordinary lives in Northern Ireland during the Troubles; *My Name Is Yip* (Doubleday, May) by Paddy Crewe, set in small-town Georgia in the early 19th century; Jo Browning Wroe’s *A Terrible Kindness* (Faber, January), about the 1966 Aberfan disaster; and *When We Were Birds* by Ayanna Lloyd Banwo (Hamish Hamilton, February), a love story set in contemporary Trinidad.

Short stories continued to be viewed as both a commercial dead end and a testing ground for the future novelist. The themed collection seems a sensible compromise, as represented by Jem Calder’s portrait of a precarious generation, *Reward System* (Faber, May); Jane Campbell’s *Cat Brushing* (Quercus, July), which explores the lives of 13 older women; and Gurnaik Johal’s *We Move* (Serpent’s Tail, April), set in the south Asian community of Southall, in west London.

A number of titans and titans-in-the-making are looking backwards, from Anne Tyler in *French Braid* (Chatto & Windus, March), a family story beginning in 1959; Orhan Pamuk in the Ottoman empire-set *Nights of Plague* (Faber, September); Julian Barnes in a “loving tribute to philosophy”, *Elizabeth Finch* (Jonathan Cape, April); and Andrew Miller in *The Slowworm’s Song* (Sceptre, March); to Jenny Erpenbeck in *Kairos* (Granta, October), Benjamin Myers in *The Perfect Golden Circle* (Bloomsbury, May), Ottessa Moshfegh in *Lapvona* (Jonathan Cape, June), Elif Batuman in *Either/Or* (Jonathan Cape, May) and Sheila Heti in *Pure Colour* (Harvill Secker, February) – a “contemporary bible” about art, ageing and grief.

Many of the biggest titles are reflecting on our times. Jonathan Coe, author of the Brexit novel *Middle England*, returns with *Bournville* (Viking, November), which follows a Birmingham family from VE Day to the Covid pandemic. Ned Beauman imagines a world after ecological collapse in *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Sceptre, July), as does Joy Williams in *Harrow* (Tuskar Rock, January), while Jennifer Egan explores biotech in *The Candy House* (Corsair, April) – a “sibling” to *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. AM Homes, in *Phoenix: The Unfolding* (Granta, September), offers a state-of-the-union novel, while Honorée Fanonne Jeffers considers American race in *The Love Songs of WEB Du Bois* (Fourth Estate, January). Commercial hopes are high for the music-industry thriller *Run Rose Run* (Century, March), a collaboration between James Patterson and Dolly Parton, who makes her adult-fiction debut at the age of 76.

And then there’s the third instalment of Richard Osman’s *Thursday Murder Club* series (Viking, September), the success of which indicates that despite what many of his new novelist-colleagues may believe, readers are really looking for a spot of escapism. ●

Publication dates are subject to change

Jonathan Coe returns with *Bournville*, which follows a Birmingham family from VE Day to the Covid pandemic



When the mighty fall

Labour's decline – after its desertion of working people – is a cautionary tale for the Tories

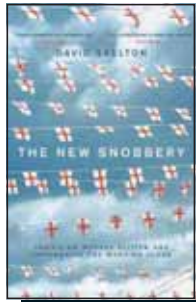
By Robert Halfon

It was the 2001 general election. I had been selected as the Tory candidate for Harlow 18 months earlier, and Tony Blair was coming to town. I parked my battle van in a disabled bay in the town centre, my blue badge fully on display, to make it much harder for the Blair battle bus to park up.

However, upon seeing the response to Blair and Alastair Campbell as they walked into a business centre, my small gesture of defiance seemed unimportant. My Labour opponent held a majority of nearly 11,000 and Blair's Labour Party appeared impregnable.

Roll forward to the 2019 election, and the Harlow Conservatives, who gained the seat from Labour in 2010, had won again with a majority of more than 14,000 and 64 per cent of the vote. Moreover, in May 2021, for only the second time in the town's history, the Tories took control of the council.

What had happened over two decades that transformed Labour from an election-winning powerhouse into a party all but deserted by blue-collar voters from Harlow to Huddersfield? As the MP for Harlow, I'd like to think my successive victories are partly down to my campaigning and hard work for the constituency. But as David Skelton's book makes clear, the reasons go much deeper than the efforts of an



The New Snobbery

David Skelton
Biteback, 320pp,
£16.99

individual. He argues that Labour's move from Blairite moderation to Corbynism did not just take the party ever further to the left, but allowed its attitude towards working people to be perceived as inverted snobbery.

This move, Skelton writes, led to the party's desertion of the working class and the rise of identity politics, here disparagingly termed "metro-politics". To many voters, Labour had forgotten the fundamental rule that what people care about most are the cost of living, housing and access to decent public services.

The New Snobbery takes readers through the key societal, educational and economic elements of metro-politics. Whether it was Emily Thornberry's 2014 Rochester tweet – a picture of a house flying St George's flags and a white van parked outside – the "gammon" label attached to middle-aged men, or the cult of "woke", these served to alienate working people further.

Skelton also draws attention to the Remain campaign as a classic example of this new snobbery. Remainers would constantly appear on television alongside an alphabet spaghetti of acronym organisations, such as the OECD or IMF, predicting the end of the world as we knew it if people voted to leave the EU. In reality, many people knew little about these organisations and had low trust in "predictions". Life was tough enough already, and disillusionment grew in the years after the Brexit referendum as people felt politicians were doing everything to frustrate their vote.

Where Skelton misses a trick is in failing to see environmentalist activism as part of this new snobbery. While of course we must cherish and conserve our natural environment and tackle climate change, this activism can feel like rich elites telling working people what cars to drive and what heating pumps to use. In short, there is a danger that environmental measures are being loaded on the backs of working people without appreciating the impact this will have on the cost of living for those just about managing.

Ironically, I think this book is more of a warning to the Tories than a description of where the left went wrong. Reflecting on the failures of modern capitalism, Skelton argues that people don't want a libertarian free-for-all when basic living standards are unobtainable, taxes continue to rise and it is difficult to access decent public services. Moreover, executive pay continues to race ahead despite no link to actual performance: the average FTSE 100 chief executive is paid 119 times as much as the average UK worker. If the Tories don't deal with this inequality, then I believe Skelton's next book will be about Conservative decline.

Although Skelton does offer solutions to solve this particular problem, some of them come over as technocratic (he suggests, for example, placing workers on company boards). Really, the way to empower working people is to cut taxes, lower utility bills and provide affordable housing and quality public services.

Perhaps, if there is to be a sequel, Skelton could focus more on policy solutions. Nevertheless, I hope readers from across the political spectrum pick up this book. It has lessons for us all. ●

Robert Halfon is the Conservative MP for Harlow

Why nations fall apart

A century ago the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset observed a Spain fractured by separatisms. What does his prescient polemic reveal about the UK today?

By Harry Eyres



Diagnosing decline: the Spanish intellectual José Ortega y Gasset

Just over 100 years ago a short book appeared, hardly more than a provocative essay, whose prophetic power would become apparent a decade and a half later when the once-great nation it anatomised in scathing detail descended into civil war. José Ortega y Gasset's *Invertebrate Spain* (1921) is an indictment of a country that had been in decline for centuries, and was disintegrating into mutually uncomprehending factions and separatist nationalisms.

In Ortega's telling, Spain's fragmentation is a dark reversal of its earlier process of integration into a nation state and empire – which Ortega defines, following the great German historian of ancient Rome Theodor Mommsen, not as the expansion of an initial nucleus but as a dynamic process of incorporation of entities that retain individuality in the larger whole. What drives this incorporation is not simply greed or military conquest, as most modern interpretations would have it, but a “project of a life in common”. When that project decays, the empire, and then the nation, falls apart.

Ortega y Gasset, founder of the pre-civil war periodical *Revista de Occidente* and widely regarded as Spain's greatest 20th-century philosopher and leading public intellectual, was writing not long after the humiliating loss of Spain's last outposts of empire (Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Guam) in the Spanish-American war of 1898. Separatist pressures were growing in the proudly independent-minded regions of Catalonia and the Basque country. A Basque nationalist party, the EAJ-PNV, had been established in 1895, and Catalonia's first pro-independence political party, Francesc Macià's Estat Català, was being founded as Ortega wrote his book. Ten years later, on 14 April 1931, Macià would stand on the balcony of the Generalitat in Barcelona to proclaim a Catalan republic.

Ortega explained the rise of separatist movements less in terms of their inherent strength than of the weakness and carelessness of the central power. The government in Madrid was not attentive to the wishes of the peripheral “nations”, but above all had ceased to offer the inducement of a convincing “project of a life in common” that might override petty grievances.

Separatist nationalisms for Ortega were symptoms of a deeper and more pervasive malaise, which he called “particularism” – the increasing inability of different segments, factions or classes of the body politic to take one another into account. These parts or factions included the monarchy (entirely self-centred, as Ortega charged in a well-known article entitled “Delenda est monarchia”, published not long before the abdication of King Alfonso XIII in April 1931), the Church (ditto), the military and the workers.

What can we, in another of Europe's former imperial powers and “multi-national” nations, now apparently disintegrating, learn from Ortega's premonitory broadside? Perhaps the most suggestive lesson stems from Ortega's central insight into nation-building and its opposite. Great nations come about by facing outwards, not inwards. So it was in Spain – first with the consolidation of Castile and then

with the unification of Spain under Isabella I of Castile and her husband Ferdinand II of Aragon, who won over traditionally independent Peninsular peoples not accustomed to vassalage, by raising, as Machiavelli observed from Florence, “great expectation”. This extroversion and expectation culminated in the extraordinary feat – suspending, for a moment, moral judgement – of the colonisation of a large part of the Americas in the space of 80 or so years.

Something comparable happened with the creation and expansion of the British empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, initially powered more by commerce than religion (or the naked desire for conquest) – an “expectation” of advantage no less felt by the Scots, Irish and Welsh than by the English. The Acts of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 did not represent a subjugation of the latter by the former. A deal was done whereby the Scots accepted the Hanoverian succession and in return gained access to English and colonial markets, but retained its own established church and legal system. Scotland prospered (relatively) as a result: touring the Western Isles in 1773, Samuel Johnson observed “a nation of which the commerce is hourly extending, and the wealth increasing”. (He was a little early to witness the effect of the Highland Clearances.)

Reuniting a disintegrating nation presumably requires the discovery of a new project of a life in common. The irony of the UK’s current situation is that the country embarked on such a project when it joined the European Economic Community, the precursor to the European Union, in 1973 – but then chose to abandon it in 2016. The EU was never presented to the British people as a genuinely inspiring enterprise, offering “great expectations” that transcended mere economic opportunities to embrace a new kind of fraternal “living together” (the Spanish word *convivencia* expresses it best) with our closest neighbours.

The case was very different in Spain, whose enthusiasm for the EU has hardly waned since its accession in 1986. In a 2018 survey by the Pew Research Center looking at how favourable people in EU member states felt towards the EU, Spain (67 per cent favourable) came second behind Poland. There are various possible reasons for the EU’s comparative popularity in Spain, among them the widespread feeling that joining the EU was a way of cementing the country’s (re)nascent post-Franco democracy, and that Spain has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of EU structural funds and the biggest recipient of Cohesion Policy funds in absolute terms, totalling €200bn between 1989 and 2020. The transformation of the country’s infrastructure over the past 30 years, largely funded by EU subvention, has been remarkable to behold.

None of this would have surprised Ortega, who pronounced that “Spain is the problem, Europe is the solution”. Ortega was an early supporter of the Pan-European Union founded in 1923. Like Winston Churchill, Ortega argued for a “United States of

Europe”. He hoped for a federalist middle-ground between a homogenised European state that eradicated national differences – a prospect he regarded with horror – and the smorgasbord of nationalisms that had led to two world wars.

Invertebrate Spain does not end on a hopeful note. Ortega thought Spain doomed, barring an improbable conversion of the Spanish soul, to continue on its path of decomposition. Particularism seemed entrenched and likely to intensify. He was briefly inspired by the prospects of the Second Republic that was established in 1931, and, as the leader of a group of luminaries known as the Agrupación al Servicio de la República, was elected deputy in the Constituent Assembly for the province of León in the parliamentary elections in June 1931.

In speeches to parliament, Ortega delineated a vision of a Spain made up of autonomous regions under the aegis of a sovereign state, rather than a federal Spain of “mini-states”. What he outlined was not far from what came to pass under the democratic post-Franco Constitution of 1978. With a subtlety that might have helped pacify recent bitter disputes, he called the Catalan question one that could not be resolved but rather had to be lived with.

Disillusionment quickly followed. Ortega expressed disquiet at what he saw as the new republic’s increasing extremism. He resigned from his parliamentary seat and in October 1932 announced the dissolution of the Agrupación. Many have wondered whether history might have taken a different course if Ortega’s views had gained a wider hearing and he had enjoyed a less antagonistic relationship with Manuel Azaña, the leader of the Popular Front and last president of the republic.

If one were to take bets on the survival of Spain and the United Kingdom as political entities for another 20 years, I’d guess the odds would favour Spain, but not by much. Catalan independence, despite the constitutional crisis of 2017-18, when the Catalan authorities attempted to hold an independence referendum deemed illegal by Madrid, still seems a more distant prospect than a breakaway Scotland.

Those in the UK who voted to leave the EU no doubt regard Brexit as exactly the kind of “project of a life in common” praised by Ortega. But it’s a project that faces inwards, seeking a chimerical national essence compounded of myths and fantasies, and operates by exclusions (all too literally, as the EU citizens held in detention centres would attest) rather than inclusions.

The UK Internal Market Act, a by-product of Brexit passed despite the opposition of the Scottish and Welsh administrations in late 2020, has had the effect, according to Stephen Weatherill, professor of European law at Oxford, of shifting the UK’s governance from a consensual model to “an involuntary Union held together only by the force of laws imposed by English votes with little regard for the aspirations of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland”. It looks likely to hasten the sad unravelling of a United Kingdom whose name rings increasingly hollow. ●

If one were to take bets on the survival of Spain and the UK, I’d guess the odds would favour Spain, but not by much



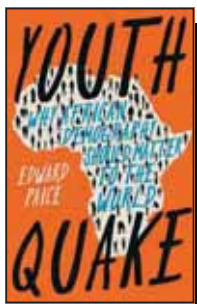
The people and the planet

What impact will Africa's young and fast-growing population have on the world?

By Philippa Nuttall

Population is an emotive and contentious subject, often discussed in alarmist or Panglossian terms, or batted away as an irrelevance. In *Youthquake*, Edward Paice, a historian and director of the London-based Africa Research Institute, analyses the data in order to alert global policymakers of Africa's surging and youthful population, and the implications of this demographic trend for the continent and the rest of the globe – particularly the impact it could have on the climate.

Population predictions vary. A study published in the *Lancet* in July 2020 anticipates that the global population will peak in 2064 at 9.73 billion people, before declining to 8.79 billion by the end of the century. The UN forecasts that the number of humans on the planet will top the extraordinary figure of 11 billion by 2100. Yet in parts of the world, including Europe, people are having fewer children and populations are ageing. Paice's interest is in Africa's bucking of this trend. "While the rate of global population growth has slowed to 1 per cent a year, the number of African citizens is growing at 2.5 per cent a year" and "that rate will not fall below 2 per cent until mid-century". According to Paice, Africa is expected to account for 40 per cent of the global



**Youthquake:
Why African
Demography
Should Matter to
the World**

Edward Paice
Head of Zeus,
432pp, £25

population by 2100, while virtually all of the 3.2 billion increase between 2020 and 2100 will be attributable to the continent. This population will continue to be comparatively young: "Since the 1960s, children under the age of 15 have accounted for at least 40 per cent of all Africans; they will still make up one-third in 2050."

The demographic shift is, in Paice's telling, cause for neither celebration nor doom. He refutes the Kenyan businessman Jimi Wanjigi's simplistic assertion that bigger populations equal greater economic strength, citing the experiences of India and China in the second half of the 20th century, when these populous countries "were among the poorest in the world". But Paice also rejects the apocalyptic thesis of *The Population Bomb*. The 1968 bestseller by the evolutionary biologist Paul Ehrlich posited that "the planet was so overpopulated and overconsumption so extreme, that it was only a matter of time before it was engulfed by mass starvation and environmental collapse". "I would take even money that England will not exist in the year 2000," Ehrlich wrote.

Today's environmentalists tend to take less extreme positions on population. Some do not see it as a major issue for climate change, insisting that growth is slowing and everybody simply needs to lead more sustainable lives. But a softened Malthusianism persists. "All our environmental problems become easier to solve with fewer people, and harder – and ultimately impossible – to solve with ever more people," says David Attenborough. The UK naturalist and broadcaster is a patron of Population Matters, one of the few environmental organisations to overtly claim that the world's growing population is unsustainable. Every additional person increases carbon emissions, it argues – although the group acknowledges that the rich have a greater impact on the environment than the poor.

Paice emphasises the relationship between income and consumption, too: "Population growth is concentrated in regions and countries that contribute the least to carbon emissions... so stopping growth of their populations – even if such a thing were possible, which in the short term it is not – would arguably make little difference over the next few decades to climate change." To "stabilise" the world's population in the longer term would be a fraught endeavour, laden, Paice notes, with "suspicion of racist undertones, and a danger of coercive or harmful implementation".

Paice's attempt to end the hysteria and ignorance surrounding demographic trends, and to remind us that how we respond to them is above all a political question, will increase understanding of the possibilities and challenges facing the world. Most importantly, "it is very important we understand Africa better, treat it better and stop marginalising it", Paice told the *New Statesman*. He sees both Cop26 and the Covid pandemic as recent examples of Africa's marginalisation: the continent's leaders were not at the centre of global decision-making despite being significantly impacted by the issues at stake. Cop27 in Egypt next November would seem the ideal moment to start putting Africa at the centre of climate politics. ●

Reviewed in short

Notes From Deep Time: A Journey Through Our Past and Future Worlds by Helen Gordon

Profile Books, 336pp, £20

To read Helen Gordon's account of Earth's geology is to undergo a metamorphism. First, one's sense of the importance of the here-and-now is crushed beyond all recognition by her examination of the vastness of "deep time". Then the urgency of the present is pushed back to the surface via the reminder that our daily actions are leaving their own indelible mark.

The result is a sparkling book that humanises the pre-human era. In her journey from the Earth's molten Hadean beginnings to our Holocene age, Gordon delivers stratigraphic revelations through the stories of the intriguing individuals who have brought their mysteries to light. Volcanoes erupt, earthquakes shatter, meteorites (threaten to) strike – and patient scientists monitor their impact. But while the inhabitants of Campi Flegrei's volcanic hillsides may go about their lives giving little thought to the catastrophe looming over them, when it comes to the man-made climate crisis, the world cannot afford to do likewise. Gordon's message to us? Beware the story told by the fossils of the future.

By India Bourke

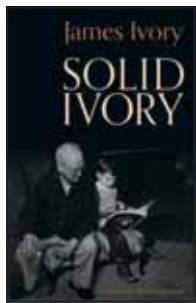
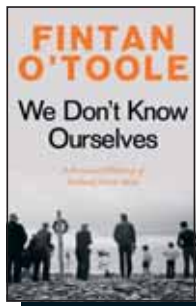
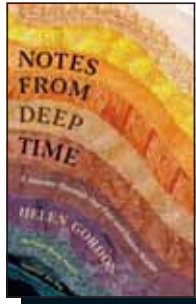
Solid Ivory by James Ivory (ed. Peter Cameron)

Corsair, 416pp, £20

Solid Ivory is a carefully constructed scrapbook. In his first memoir, the film director James Ivory pulls together anecdotes and discloses secrets from the sets of his most celebrated movies, including *Howards End* and *Maurice*. The book begins as a chronological retelling of Ivory's childhood in Klamath Falls, Oregon. He writes with a cinematic distance that fans of his films will recognise. Many of the details he shares act as breadcrumbs laid for those familiar with his work, which, like the book, is filled with awkward sexual encounters. Soon, the narrative is interrupted by extracts from journals, photographs and letters from old friends and former lovers.

Ivory's storytelling is explicit but never exposing, fractured yet intentionally arranged. He is aware of how much of himself he is revealing. So it is frustrating that he withholds details about his most intimate relationship: his partnership with Ismail Merchant. Before his death in 2005, Merchant was Ivory's partner in both the professional and personal sense. They worked together for more than 40 years, producing 40 films. Yet Merchant appears like a shadow in Ivory's memoir, a background figure whom Ivory holds just out of the public's reach.

By Ellys Woodhouse



We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958 by Fintan O'Toole

Apollo, 616pp, £25

A seasoned columnist and critic, Fintan O'Toole has in recent years devoted his significant polemical powers to chronicling Brexit. Here he turns back to his home country of Ireland, and provides a compelling account of its history during his lifetime.

O'Toole begins in 1958 with the publication of a quietly radical plan to open up Ireland's failing economy. But for decades the country remains "stuck between a still potent idea of its past and a still elusive idea of its future". O'Toole identifies a "permanent state of contradiction", for example in attitudes to the Catholic Church, which people continued to defer to despite their liberal instincts and despite evidence of horrific abuse. But he ranges, too, across the culture, explaining how Gay Byrne's *The Late Late Show* shaped the national identity, or how the hippy aesthetic engendered a Celtic Revival in O'Toole's youth in the early 1970s. Having suffered the financial meltdown of 2008 and celebrated the votes for gay marriage (2015) and abortion (2018), Ireland has found, he argues, an ability to "live with uncertainties" – and in that he finds hope.

By Tom Gatti

Sour Grapes by Dan Rhodes

Lightning, 200pp, £14.99

The publishing "biz" – with which Dan Rhodes has had his share of rancorous collisions – is the butt of this deeply silly, frequently juvenile satire about the setting up of a literary festival in a village called Green Bottom. But the main target of Rhodes's lampoon, monopolising his ridicule, is the tall, cadaverous "Wilberforce Selfram", whose "true identity" Rhodes vows to "never reveal". The "mid-profile restaurant critic, current affairs pundit and occasional novelist" who is the inspiration for Selfram's odious character apparently offended Rhodes several years ago. Selfram speaks with supercilious verbosity in a droning monotone and refers to himself as "one" ("one despairs", "do excuse one"). At one point he ingests a thesaurus in order to refresh his superfluous vocabulary: "One shall henceforth be able once again to pepper one's speech with extraordinary wordage."

Rhodes, selected as one of *Granta's* Best Young British Novelists in 2003, has been brewing his revenge for some time – this, his tenth book, is his first in seven years and, he writes, "a ludicrous folly that should never have been written". Will Self, for his part, seems unfazed by his portrayal: "I've been written about before... I was represented in *Ratatouille*, for fuck's sake."

By Lola Seaton

The Kate Mossman Interview

I was Joni Mitchell's "Carey"

For 50 years, the “mean old daddy” immortalised in song has been an enigma. Now he tells his side of the story

The wall of limestone caves in the Cretan fishing village of Matala is now a protected site. In Roman times, the caves were burial crypts; when the hippies arrived in the late Sixties, they became free bunkhouses. Joni Mitchell, fresh from Los Angeles, and newly separated from the singer-songwriter Graham Nash, lived in one of these caves for two months in 1970. It was during this period that she wrote material for her 1971 album, *Blue*, and here that she first performed one of her best-loved songs, “Carey”, dedicated to the man with whom she shared that cave.

Mitchell's description of her muse is impressionistic, dispatched in two or three lines – “Oh, Carey get out your cane”; “Oh, you're a mean old daddy/But I like you” – yet he remains one of the most charismatic figures ever to appear in song. And, unlike the lovers who came before and after (Nash and James Taylor), we know almost nothing about him.

In Matala, the hippies wove reeds to make doors (“The wind is in from Africa/Last night I couldn't sleep”). There were stoves and lanterns and kelim rugs, passed on each time a cave changed hands. For beds, there was the crypt itself: a stone shelf a few feet wide. If you know that Mitchell was sleeping on funerary architecture when she wrote “Carey”, it brings new meaning to the lines, “I miss my clean white linen/And my fancy French cologne.”

Today, Matala is still raked over in travel blogs by tourists smitten with the romance of the song. Like “Woodstock”, which Mitchell wrote without having been to the festival, it epitomised a hippie dream that lay out of reach for most and sounded like paradise.

Most people listening to *Blue* on its release hadn't been to Greece or Amsterdam, or anywhere much: who could afford it?

In fact, Mitchell was having what she later referred to as a shamanic experience – and what others might call a breakdown. When she arrived in Crete in 1970, she was on the cusp of fame, trying to figure out whether celebrity and art could co-exist. In Matala she was free, but not invulnerable. This was the moment that Cary Raditz entered her life.

As a child, I assumed “Carey” (the spelling mistake was Mitchell's) was some kind of ancient lover, a sugar daddy, albeit one too tight to buy the drinks. For those of us who heard Mitchell's songs via our parents in the Eighties and Nineties, their love story was part of an emerging sense of the sparks that occur between the sexes: “Let's go down to the Mermaid Café/And I will buy you a bottle of wine/And we'll laugh and toast to nothing/And smash our empty glasses down.” For men of Carey's generation, he was a handy archetype for the age of Aquarius: a friend's father – a raconteur who'd done the Ibiza circuit in the Sixties – told me the real Carey was a guy he'd known in Formentera. He was wrong, but wouldn't believe any other story.

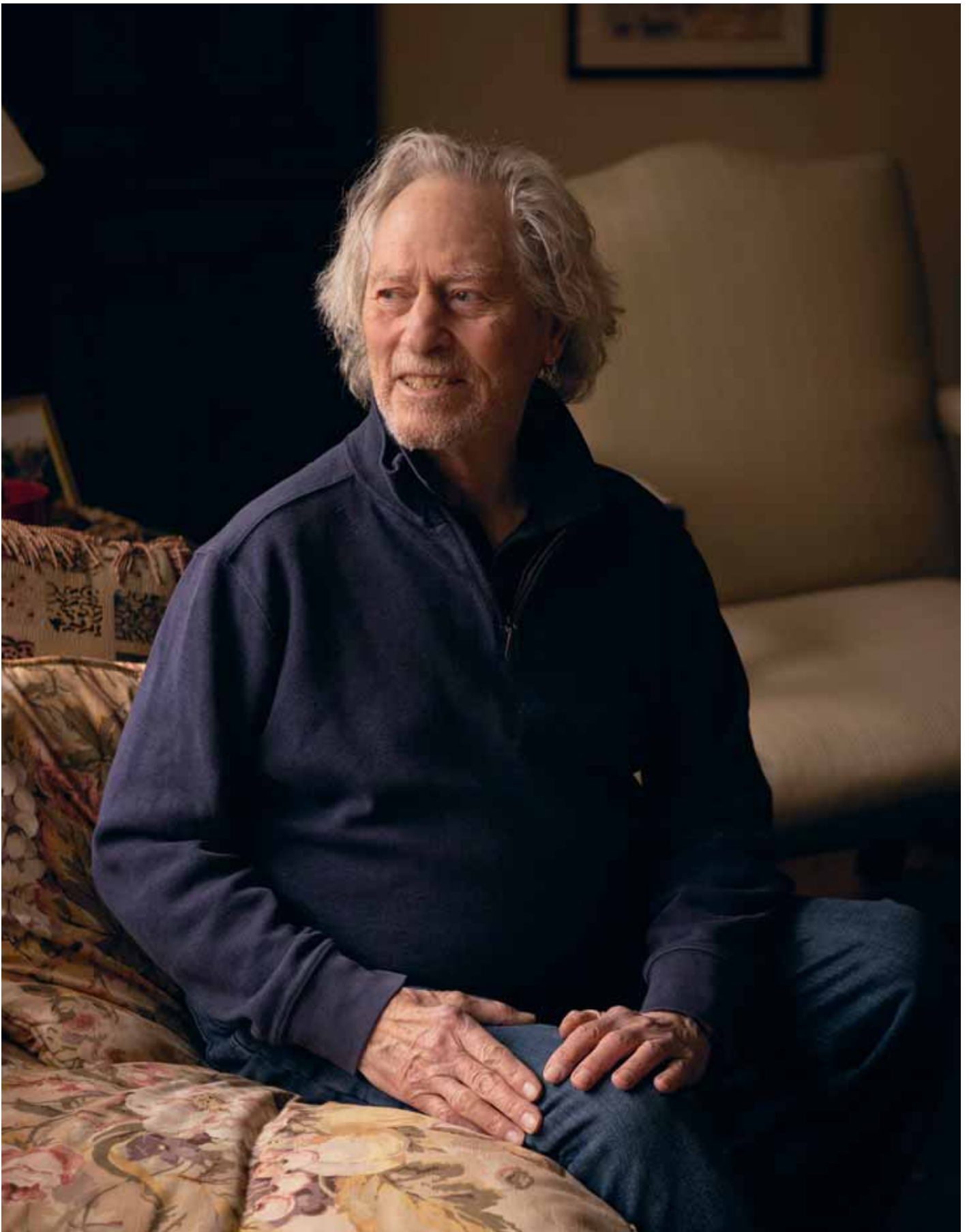
In many ways, the song is surprisingly literal. Yes, there was a Mermaid Café, five minutes' walk across the bay. And yes, Carey carried a cane: a shepherd's crook, hooked at the top but smashed off half-mast. If we have an unusually strong impression of him, it's because he also appears in the other single released from *Blue* – “California”:

I met a redneck on a Grecian Isle
Who did the goat dance very well,
He gave me back my smile
But he kept my camera to sell.
Oh that rogue, that red red rogue,
He cooked good omelettes and stews
And I might have stayed on with him
But my heart cried out for you, California.

Over the years, Mitchell has introduced live versions of “Carey” with stories that enhanced this rogue. She recalled their first meeting: he was a chef at the Delphini Taverna; she approached him with some rubbish, in an attempt to clean up. He threw it on the floor. “I latched myself on to Cary because he was fierce and kept the crowd off my back,” she told the *Wall Street Journal* in 2014. “He was always detached and sometimes even disrespectful – either trying to belittle me or make me feel afraid. I think at the time he felt greatly superior to women, which is why I refer to him in the lyrics as ‘a mean old daddy.’”

It's a very small club, ordinary people who have inspired immortal songs. Suzanne, Marianne, Sharona, Peggy Sue. You will spend your whole life trapped in one, but you may never get the chance to tell your side of the story. In 50 years, Cary Raditz has barely spoken about his time in Crete with Joni Mitchell, and has never told the story of what happened next. Each time I asked he turned me down, saying he was working on a book, or promising we

Right:
Cary Raditz,
photographed at
his home in Silver
Spring, Maryland
for the New
Statesman by
Julia Rendleman



◀ would meet another time. Then, after *Blue* turned 50 in 2021, he got in touch: he'd changed his mind.

We meet on a warm day in late October, at a bistro near the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Raditz has been visiting friends all over France with his wife, Ann, whom he copied into our emails.

Through the plastic window of the outdoor marquee, with his long grey hair and a gold hoop in his left ear, Raditz looks like a retired pirate, his nose in a book. He seems slightly self-conscious, as though wondering if he is already being watched, which he is.

"And what a small, insignificant person he turned out to be!" he announces, standing.

Raditz is 75, his voice hoarse and liltingly southern. He was put out when Mitchell called him a redneck in "California". His mother was a Southern belle who could prove direct descent from the patriot fathers. His grandfather, a bank president, died when she was young, "leaving my grandmother with a nice portfolio which turned to mush". His mother was an English teacher. "She read to me poetry when we would take our naps in the afternoon. She was very dramatic, and certainly I received the most potent narcissistic genes from her." Raditz's father was the son of a concert pianist and a portrait painter – and said, of himself, "I don't have a bone of talent in my whole body."

"So from him I received nothing – because I don't have a bone of talent in my own body! Pretty funny, huh!" Raditz laughs.

After college, Raditz wrote advertising copy for an agency selling hosiery. When a girlfriend in Munich sent him a \$100 bill, he flew to Luxembourg and hitchhiked to Germany, where they lived in an abandoned factory, making money as TV extras (they played "hippies", with floppy hats, for 50 deutschmark a day).

In autumn 1969, they decided to head somewhere warmer. At a fork on the autobahn, they opened it to fate. If the first car was travelling south-east, they'd end up in Greece. South-west, they'd go to Spain – and Raditz and I would not be talking. At this point, the girlfriend seems to melt away from the story. He was 23.

After settling into a Matala cave on Halloween, Raditz started work at the Delphini Taverna. Greek omelettes were his speciality: potatoes and onions spooned into a hot pan and flipped with a jerk of the handle. "She came into my taverna mid-morning," he says. "I don't know what I was doing, cooking, cleaning up." He was rattled by the buzz around Mitchell in a way that still resonates. She brought him the rubbish; he threw it on the floor.

Did he know her music?

"Yeah, but I didn't give a shit. Quite frankly, I didn't know anything about her," he says. "I just saw that she was coming into town. And these friends of mine, who I thought were pretty good drinking buddies, were now turning into the idiots that I didn't like – the love and peace hippies, the nonsense involving all sorts of belief systems."

Raditz wore salwar kameez trousers in those days, his red hair in a turban. Mitchell said that she saw him propelled from the door of the Delphini one day by a propane explosion. He tells me that nursing his seared face a few days later, he got wind that she was in the Roman baths on the other side of the hill: these were rectangular troughs that filled with sea water at high tide and warmed into "hot tubs". He saw Mitchell there in a yellow bathing suit; most people were naked. She approached him with a piece of driftwood, saying, "Look, it looks just like a mermaid!" He took it and replied, "Looks like a piece of driftwood to me."

"Do you know what a mystical experience is?" he says. Raditz explains that when he arrived in Crete, he was "coming off one". Then he just calls it a bad trip – the lingering ghost of a drug experience a year earlier in San Francisco.

Raditz's behaviour – his "flaming red personality", as she once put it – drew Mitchell to him. "I think this had something to do, psychologically or spiritually, with my relationship with Joni, in that we were both going through dark nights of the soul," he says.

Did he know, at the time, that he was going through a "dark night of the soul"?

"No, I thought I was crazy." For a moment, he doesn't look comfortable.

Mitchell painted a picture of a wild man, a joker; how did he see himself? "I felt I might be criminally insane. I had a really bad temper. I felt I had come-and-go powers of insight. I felt somewhat like a chameleon. I felt tremendously passionate. A lust for things, for women, that was overpowering."

There was an evening ritual in Matala: watching the sun go down over the islands. The sun would appear to set, and then reappear in some trick of the light. Raditz was watching from Delphini's when Mitchell approached him. "Alone without anybody trailing around her, she came and sat down next to me." He claims to have recited Shelley's "To Night", which sounds entirely probable. "And after that, the only logical thing to say was, do you want to go and get a drink?"

The Mermaid Café smelled of coffee, apple pie, sautéing onions and stale beer. That night, it was full of shepherds and soldiers drinking raki. A soldier offered Mitchell a box of cigarettes. She already had a lit cigarette in her mouth, having smoked since she was nine. But she didn't know how to refuse.

"And she's going, 'No, thank you!'" Raditz says. "And I think, this is getting to be hilarious, because in Crete, when you give someone an affirmation, it's like this [he tips his head forward], and a no is like this [a vigorous backwards]. So she's doing this mixed signal, and she says, 'What can I do?'"

"I said, 'Knock them out of his hand!' So she goes like that" – he brings his flat palm upward through the air – "cigarettes explode all over the place, and the taverna becomes silent. And then she just opens up with this incredible laugh from the depths of her womb or some other cavity, and I think, if you ask me

"She opened up with this incredible laugh from the depths of her womb or some other cavity. I fell in love then"



if I fell in love – I fell in love then. I fell in love with that laugh and where the laugh was coming from.”

Mitchell woke up in the cave after her first night with Raditz with the heel of her shoe broken. She moved her things from the hut she was renting nearby. There wasn’t room to sleep together, he recalls: they took turns in the tomb, the other sleeping on the floor. People stopped following Mitchell around, Raditz says: “No one would come into my cave uninvited.”

Mitchell remembered her Crete period in a 1979 interview with *Rolling Stone*: “I had no personal defences,” she said. “I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes. I felt like I had absolutely no secrets from the world and I couldn’t pretend in my life to be strong. Or to be happy. But the advantage of it in the music was that there were no defences there either.” Raditz thinks: “To her, I think I played the role of tempter, challenging her to think boldly. To bite the apple.”

When she wasn’t writing or playing her dulcimer, Raditz tells me, Mitchell knitted. She made a sweater

The musician’s muse: Joni Mitchell with Cary Raditz, 1970

for herself that stretched right to the knees, and Raditz describes how she incorporated bits of beach grass, tiny shells and bleached fish bones, spinning tufts of green yarn into the tan background. The “ecosystem sweater of Matala”, he calls it.

One day they drove Mitchell’s rented VW to Iraklion, where they had boots made – hers in tan and his in darker leather; she is wearing them on the cover of *For the Roses*, the album that followed *Blue*. They commissioned matching gold earrings, a swoop of thin metal falling under the lobe.

Raditz recalls a trip to Athens that told him it was ending. One night at dinner, Mitchell was approached by journalists. “I felt a moment of jealousy. I was ready to beat them with the cane. But she gave me the bad eye, and just asked them to come and sit down and talk. And I guess that’s where I realised that the world had now intruded – that there was a shift.”

A shift that she was now ready to take? “That was the change in her whole life, you see,” he says. “After this time of weeks had gone by, this is when she really changed her whole life – from being somewhat at the effect of other people, to becoming the cause herself.”

At points Raditz seems to have a grasp of Mitchell’s inner life, then undercuts it. I ask him what he thought of her comment that he felt superior to women. He recalls how she would sink into depressions, “dark, self-deprecating spaces”, to which he would respond, “Buck up, Joan, stop whining.” (Mitchell told her biographer David Yaffe that her mother reacted in much the same terms.)

On the night of Raditz’s 24th birthday in April 1970, with half a dozen others present, Mitchell played the song that told him she was leaving. Raditz talks about the smell of the cave and the taste of the ouzo that night; what did he think of the song?

“I thought it was an endearing little ditty.”

And being called a “mean old daddy”?

“I wasn’t thrilled. I deserved it for my grumpiness, my unsolicited advice, talking down to her, and for my bad temper and general nastiness.”

How has it felt, being frozen in a song for his whole life?

“It is eerie,” he concedes. “For 50 years, having this song pop up in the most unusual kind of places, in taxis, as muzak in an elevator, in a bar in the Hilton hotel in Abu Dhabi, being played on stage by the band. People who didn’t know it was about me would sing it at me when they realised Cary was my name.”

Was it hard to take, everyone thinking that Joni Mitchell dumped him?

“Oh, she dumped me!” he cries. “She dumped me and then she picked me back up! What do we call people who go into dumpsters and pull out trash and use it again?”

The relationship did not end with “Carey” or “California”, which Mitchell wrote in Paris shortly after leaving him. A few weeks later, around June 1970, Raditz says he received a telex, sent courtesy of the Mermaid Café: “Join me Hollywood. Stop. Pick up ticket American Express, ►

◀ Athens. Stop. Telephone. Stop. XXX Joni." Mitchell had returned to Laurel Canyon to continue working on *Blue*: her sessions featured a supergroup of David Crosby, Stephen Stills, Graham Nash and James Taylor.

In Athens, he called Mitchell. A ticket was waiting at the Trans World Airlines office, she said: she would meet him in San Francisco. He took his shepherd's crook and boarded first class.

Raditz pushes aside his empty ice cream bowl as though he's getting to the good stuff. "When we were living together in Hollywood, I was totally out of place," he says. "Bewildered and angry that I had even persuaded myself that this was a good thing to do."

He drank so much champagne on the flight that he arrived inarticulate, an "idiot drunkard". Mitchell met him wearing her Matala eco-sweater. Raditz was glad he had brushed his teeth.

What happened during their month together? "It was very difficult. She was very sweet. We would go up to David Geffen's to swim," he says, of the media mogul who managed Joni's label and later set up DreamWorks with Steven Spielberg. "And she would introduce me to her friends, like Jackson Browne. They would come by the house to look at the gorilla she had just freed from the zoo." He imitates her celebrity friends, aghast: "What is she doing! Is she in her right mind? Is there something we can do to protect her? My God, he carries a knife! Joni used to tell me, 'Geffen is really afraid of you...'"

Why did he feel so out of place? "All of a sudden I was this kept man. I don't mind being a kept man, but I want to be a kept man with some kind of mission and purpose."

Raditz recalls Crosby, Stills and Nash sitting opposite him like "three brass monkeys". Though he and Mitchell were a couple, he suspects he may also have been a foil.

"I protected her from unwanted attention in Matala, and now I am running interference to shield her from the unwanted attention of her ex-lover and his buddies in California," he suggests.

Mitchell's manager Elliot Roberts, who died in 2019, took Raditz to Disneyland and the Hollywood Bowl. "But it was all clearly falling apart. She was into her Joni Mitchell thing. Which is a semi-trance state – for hours she would be there at the piano." What would the gorilla do while the mystic was at work?

"Read. Watch her. Wouldn't fuck with her. She was really a different kind of being. And I didn't have anything to do. I collapsed into my own angst and spent most of the day reading philosophy and worrying."

Did Raditz leave Mitchell, or did Mitchell leave him? "She didn't actually use her foot to kick me out of the car when she took me to the airport, but she was close to it. I'm not sure we were actually talking by that point," Raditz says, grinning broadly. But he left the cane behind.

Raditz headed to England, where he worked on a dairy farm. A few weeks later, during a trip to London,

he walked into an American Express office to cash a cheque and found a letter from Mitchell's manager: she wanted him at the Isle of Wight Festival on 29 August 1970. Raditz can be seen fleetingly in backstage footage in the recent film, *Joni Mitchell: Both Sides Now*, with flaming hair and stunned expression.

The documentary captures the chaos of the crowd, notoriously on the verge of riot. Mitchell, with her "feminine cooperative streak" (her words), agreed to go out early, at 3pm, and only got through it by appealing for the crowd's respect. It was like "looking out over the armies of Caesar before the invasion", Raditz recalls. He got very drunk and entered Donovan's trailer demanding drugs: he says Mitchell put him to bed.

Was their relationship a friendship by this point?

"We don't quite know what to call it," he says. "I like Joan. She's good company unless she's in one of her states. Then she's not."

And why does he think their love affair didn't work out? "It did work out."

Were you in love with each other? "The way we behaved toward each other from time to time is, we were very close, we cared about each other's interests. And we cared about each other's feelings, and we were, I think, mutually attracted..."

So why did it end? "I think that was all played out in LA," he says. "I mean, if you were going to ask Graham Nash, he would say he was deeply in love with her. Certainly, I expressed love to her. He was clingy, and that's what I think freaked her out."

A few weeks after Isle of Wight, Raditz tells me he was again summoned to London: Mitchell requested his company at the London Palladium, on 23 October, where James Taylor was playing. He arrived early and drank heavily. She talked to him before the show. "She wanted to tell me in person that she was in love with James Taylor."

After the show, he stayed with Taylor and Mitchell in Knightsbridge. After this, in one of the strangest twists in Raditz's story, there was a platonic threesome for several weeks – at their request, he swears. Mitchell can be heard giving a shout-out to her "friend from Matala, London and Los Angeles and North Carolina" at the Paris Theatre on Regent Street, six days after Taylor's Palladium show. "This was not any Jules et Jim *ménage à trois* hell," Raditz says now. "I don't know what it was, other than this kind of friendship. I didn't have any kind of lingering jealousy."

Still, he is unable to explain quite why he was there. He would go to pubs with Taylor, and drink copious amounts of the Italian liqueur Strega. He was afraid to ask Taylor why they were hanging out so much, he says, "in case it stopped". The three travelled back to the US, and settled in the Albert Hotel in New York. "It was all a puzzle," Raditz says. "I had a separate room, always. I was never interested in watching them copulate."

They visited Raditz's grandmother, the concert pianist, and Taylor and Mitchell played for her. "Then we moved up to Martha's Vineyard, and I had my own room in a motel. James was building his house: it had

"I wasn't thrilled to be called a 'mean old daddy'. I deserved it for my grumpiness, talking down to her"

a roof on, and the walls were open inside, with table saws and carpentry equipment.”

Around Thanksgiving 1970, Elliot Roberts appears to have got rid of Raditz. Raditz tells me Roberts said that the pair felt crowded, which he contested, pointing out that he had always been invited. He wonders again whether he was “some kind of buffer” to deflect publicity over the new celebrity relationship (“Joni has a Machiavellian streak”). Roberts gave him a job overseeing his farm, but he was soon fired for mismanagement. Mitchell and Taylor did not return his calls.

Raditz joined the American Peace Corps and built pump stations in Mauritania: “I wanted something that gave me the nomadic lifestyle – but with medical back-up and stuff like that.”

Mitchell called him in 1978, after she had travelled to Mexico with a dying Charles Mingus. “She talked through that, and how thrilled she was to have worked with him. She’s still kind of working through that, I think. I just imagine, in her instincts, that in the great hall of jazz, there’s an empty podium there that her statue should be on!” Raditz says sarcastically. “That’s the arena of her fame, she should be there, not in folk singing or rock ‘n’ roll.”

He studied banking and became an economic development consultant in Zambia. As the Eighties began, he became a Park Avenue banker, working for the Middle East and Africa division of Chemical Bank in New York. In Greece, he had lived “as though I had taken a vow of poverty”. Chemical Bank settled the first asset claims with Iran in 1983, and Raditz still has the braces he bought to celebrate, printed with dollar signs.

Mitchell wrote about financiers in her 1985 album *Dog Eat Dog*, which was critical of Reagan-era economics: “Some are treated well/In these games of buy and sell/And some like poor beasts/Are burdened

“For many years, I wished the song had never been written. I didn’t want anyone to know it was me”

down to breaking”. During this time, she would meet Raditz for lunch in New York. Her “poor and untalented ex-boyfriend” (his words) had made something of himself.

They are still in touch. He flew to see her for his 72nd birthday, and showed her pages from the book he is writing. Her assistant is generally present – a “gatekeeper”, he says: Mitchell has had three strokes. “It is difficult to talk to her these days.” Mitchell’s interviews, rarer than comets, take place with carefully selected writers, and I did not contact her myself. She has told the story of “Carey” before – her way.

You get the feeling that Raditz is not sure quite what he is in Joni Mitchell’s story. Muse? Security guard? Buffer? Lover? Hanger-on? Or was their continued connection really a link back to a pivotal moment in their freewheeling past: less about love, more about some portal to who and what they were?

Mitchell gave him an identity at 24: it may not have been the real one, but it was so evocative that millions of people have wondered about him since. He will live out that fictional identity for the rest of his life, and far beyond it.

Did he ever wish “Carey” had never been written? “Yes,” he says. “For many years. I didn’t want anyone to know it was me. Because all they wanted to talk about was my relationship with her.”

Raditz experienced the real Joni Mitchell, too – in the most intense and tumultuous era of her life, when it’s almost impossible to say who she was in love with and what she was writing; the chronologies blur with each passing year. Raditz met her vulnerability, and he met the steeliness beneath it. Who knows why she wanted him around as her career progressed, unless he represented some kind of audacity she wanted to keep in touch with. Maybe on some level she felt she owed him for the songs. Maybe she really liked him.

“I was just there, you know?” Raditz concludes. “I can’t get into this counterfactual stuff.” He is not very self-analytical.

Why is he talking to me, after 50 years? “Well, I spent a lot of my time in Buddhist retreats,” he grins. “And I’ve spent many years trying to free myself from the confines of my ego, and lately I’ve realised there isn’t much beyond my ego. I’ve come down to: what’s the amusement value? I would tell the story to musicians who would have an appreciation of it. But I dislike being pinned down.”

How does he feel now when he hears the song? “I’ve become distanced somewhat from this character ‘Carey’. Carey can live out his variant forms in the minds of people without bothering me too much. And maybe it’s a way of self-protecting, but this idea of self is really very delusional.”

Oh, and he didn’t steal Mitchell’s camera, as you’re led to believe in “California”. She gave it to him when she left Greece. He said he’d probably have to sell it. She shrugged and said, go ahead. ●

A longer version of this article appears on newstatesman.com



JULIA RENDLEMAN

No Grecian isle: Raditz outside his home in Silver Spring, Maryland

The wonders of Dürer's world

The Renaissance artist and inveterate traveller journeyed in a permanent state of fascination

By Michael Prodger

In 1520 Albrecht Dürer was in Brussels when the contents of a treasure ship sent back from the Americas by Hernán Cortés were put on display to celebrate the coronation of Charles V. The cache contained, among other items, obsidian weapons, jaguar pelts, feathered shields, gemstones and mosaic pieces, and gold wrought in innumerable inventive ways. Dürer, the son of a Nuremberg goldsmith, was flabbergasted. "All the days of my life I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart so much as these things," he wrote, "for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art." But then, for him, everything was a work of art – either God-made or man-made. His well-known watercolours of a piece of turf and the iridescent wing of a blue roller bird are themselves marvels of creation that show marvels of creation.

For Dürer, even more than for most artists, the world was a place of wonder. If Leonardo da Vinci, his senior by 19 years, looked longest and deepest at natural phenomena – from the flow of water to the action of veins and sinews – Dürer (1471-1528) was in thrall to materiality, where sight became an extension of touch.

Dürer's visual omnivorousness is on display everywhere in the National Gallery's "Dürer's Journeys: Travels of a Renaissance Artist", an exhibition that traces the four main trips undertaken by the artist during the course of his life. He was a wide-eyed traveller along the Rhine, to Venice twice and to the Low Countries, and what he saw along the way inevitably emerges in his art.

Almost everything he encountered was a novelty and nothing was beneath his notice. A tumbled mountain hut that gave him respite during his crossing of the Alps is recorded in a small watercolour, each stone and fallen

Dürer's Journeys: Travels of a Renaissance Artist

National Gallery, London WC2, until 27 February

rafter carefully differentiated. The dizzying heights of mountain passes are there in his etching *Nemesis*, depicting the Greek goddess, which is manic with tiny details of pine tree, crags and villages far below on the valley floor. The outfits worn by Netherlandish women are carefully recorded, down to the smallest fold and nap of fur. The animals he saw in the royal menagerie in Brussels – lion, lynx, baboon – are shown dozy or indolent (he had depicted lions for years before he ever saw a real one, and gave them near-human faces). Even an enema syringe is recorded, peeking out from the folds of the seated angel's robe in his celebrated *Melencolia I* etching: its meaning, like so much about the print, is unknown, but he did record that he had an Antwerp apothecary's wife administer a purge while he was visiting the city.

Of course, his travels were about people too, and the exhibition is also a record of friendships made. In 1492 he headed to Colmar to meet and learn from the printmaker Martin Schongauer, but by the time he arrived Schongauer had just died. He had better luck on his two journeys to Venice, in 1494-95 and 1505-07, where he met numerous painters, growing close to Giovanni Bellini and corresponding with Leonardo and Raphael. "I was amazed by the subtle ingeniousness of people in foreign lands," he wrote, and said of Bellini that "he is very old yet still the best at painting". The Venetian returned the admiration in a jokey homage by painting the cropped rump of a cow in his *The Assassination of St Peter Martyr*, circa 1505-07 (from upstairs in the National Gallery), which he lifted from Dürer's engraving of *The Prodigal Son*, circa 1496. Jan Gossaert would do something similar by taking one of the hunting dogs in Dürer's *St Eustace* engraving (1500-01) and relocating it to the foreground of his *Adoration of the Kings* (again in the National's collection) of 1510-15.

Not that Dürer always felt at home on his travels. One reason for his second trip to Venice may have been to deal with the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi, who had established a lucrative line in counterfeiting Dürer's prints, complete with the "AD" monogram. And when, in 1506, Dürer won a commission to paint an altarpiece for the republic's German community, he filled it with colour as a riposte to local artists ("to shut their mouths") who felt he could only, albeit brilliantly, work in black and white. Nevertheless, he won acceptance and wrote home: "O, how cold I will be away from the sun; here I am a gentleman, at home a parasite."

The best-documented of his journeys is the tour of the Low Countries he carried out in 1520-21 in an attempt to petition the new Holy Roman Emperor for a continuation of the stipend he had been paid by the previous emperor, Maximilian I. He travelled with his wife Agnes, their maid Susanna, and a sheaf of prints to gift or barter, and he kept a journal of the trip in which he also recorded their expenses (13 porpoise bristle brushes, two parrots in a cage, an ivory skull...). He was feted along the way and the exhibition contains a fabulous selection of the 140 drawings – 47 of them in charcoal – he made on the trip of people he met, including his Antwerp innkeeper. Many of the sitters' names have been lost, and not all of them paid: "Item:



Hunt for inspiration: Dürer's *St Eustace* engraving, circa 1500-01. Dürer found novelty everywhere in foreign landscapes

Six people have given me nothing for doing their portraits in Brussels," he noted. They are nevertheless vivid memorials, with their heads and shoulders set off against dark backgrounds and the handling varying in finesse, from fine to broad, within the same image.

Two portraits in particular demonstrate his preternatural facility. One is a silverpoint (made using a metal stylus on chemically treated paper – a technique that did not allow for corrections), possibly of the painter Jan Provoost. It is a drawing of the utmost delicacy, composed of hatchings and a seemingly infinite number of lines – flicked, curled, extended, barely there. The other, a painting lent by the Prado in Madrid, shows a stern, middle-aged man with a fur collar and large hat. It has a degree of meticulous detail – downy chin, eyebrow hairs, highlighted curls – that declares how aware Dürer was of the earlier Van Eyckian tradition of Low Countries art and his keenness to show that he too was a master of this miniaturist manner. Both sitters are treated as material as well as men, with their skin and hair offering him fresh textures to add to those of their apparel.

For Dürer everything seemed to be a work of art, either God-made or man-made

Among these faces, and the many portraits included from artists in his circle such as Quinten Massys, Bernaert van Orley and Lucas van Leyden, the physiognomy that is missing is Dürer's own. He was one of the most prolific and daring of self-portraitists, depicting himself at least 13 times in different media – one of which, according to Giorgio Vasari, was "painted in watercolour on very fine linen, so that it showed equally on both sides" and was sent as a gift to Raphael. Not one of these is in the exhibition to show what this man, so proud of his golden hair and his abilities ("Why has God given me such magnificent talent? It is a curse as well as a great blessing"), looked like as he criss-crossed Europe. His face would have moored a narrative that sometimes loses focus.

When Dürer returned to Nuremberg in 1521 he brought back something else alongside the gewgaws he had purchased. Somewhere in the Low Countries he contracted an illness, probably malaria, that was to stay with him and that contributed to his death in 1528, at 56. For the inveterate traveller and chronicler of tangible things, it was an invisible but fatal souvenir. ●

You can support Afghanistan. Today, and for years to come.

EMERGENCY has worked in Afghanistan for 22 years. Building hospitals and clinics, training Afghans to be medics, and treating over 7 million people.

We have never stopped, even in the most challenging moments. Our facilities across the country remain open and we are committed to supporting the Afghan people.

Will you help us provide free, high-quality healthcare?

EMERGENCY provides free, high-quality healthcare to victims of war, poverty and landmines, alongside building hospitals and training local medical staff. We have a long-term, sustainable approach to humanitarian healthcare everywhere we work, and have treated 11 million patients in 19 countries since 1994.



donate.emergencyuk.org/newstatesman

Scan here to learn more about
our charity and how you can help.

Charity number: 1148818
info@emergencyuk.org

Registered with



EMERGENCY
MEDICINE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

Film

Instant gratification

Paul Thomas Anderson's *Licorice Pizza* is an utterly delectable coming-of-age movie

By David Sexton

You know how to make a romcom, don't you? You take a couple who obviously should be together, and then you keep them apart right until the end, by whatever means necessary. Missed opportunities, misunderstandings. The world's general obstructiveness. It's simple but it works, whatever other weight you bring to the story. You can't help investing. Just look at Sally Rooney's novels.

Licorice Pizza is the surprising new film from Paul Thomas Anderson, the director of that terminally extreme masterpiece *There Will Be Blood* (2007), and subsequently of *The Master* (2012), *Inherent Vice* (2014), and *Phantom Thread* (2017). These are highly wrought, rewarding but tough movies – all of them I enjoyed much more second time around. *Licorice Pizza*, in contrast, is immediate pleasure.

It's set in the prelapsarian, analogue early Seventies in the San Fernando Valley, where Anderson himself grew up – and it's the story of the eccentric relationship that develops between pudgy chancer Gary Valentine, 15, and sassy Alana Kane, 25. They meet when she comes to his high school for yearbook picture day, working as a photographer's assistant – and he's straight away alongside her, walking, talking. The film has lovely movement throughout.

Chatting her up, he's unstoppable, even though she tells him he's about 12 and she can be his friend but not his girlfriend. "So, Alana, what are your plans? What ►



Almost famous: Alana Haim, of the band Haim, and Cooper Hoffman, son of Philip Seymour Hoffman, are the debut leads in *Licorice Pizza*

◀ does your future look like?" he asks. She doesn't have an answer, whereas he already knows he's a showman. On their first non-date he tells her: "I'm not going to forget you, just like you're not going to forget me."

Having previously elicited dominant performances from big names, notably Daniel Day-Lewis, Anderson here has flipped the other way entirely, choosing unknown debut actors for his leads. Gary is played by Cooper Hoffman, the teenage son of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman – and he's captivating, full of chutzpah and with such a good, imperfect, real face. In *The Many Saints of Newark*, casting Michael Gandolfini in his father's actual role in playing the young Tony Soprano was much too close to the knuckle. But, despite being a physical ringer, the ebullient Cooper Hoffman is far from the tormented loser his father excelled in projecting for Anderson.

Alana is played by the musician Alana Haim – and her sisters by the sisters in her band, Haim, and their parents by their parents too, her dad fabulously irascible. She's brilliantly brave and uncertain, fierce and convincingly bad-tempered.

Anderson's work in the past has repeatedly surveyed the entire tragic arcs of protagonists who fulfil their difficult destinies and destroy themselves in the process. *Licorice Pizza* is about not knowing yet which way to go, all the possibilities of the future still there: nothing lost, no harm absorbed, not yet.

The film skitters around the film industry. Alana accompanies Gary to New York as a chaperone for his ambitions as a child actor – but he falls foul of a fabulously bad-tempered Lucille Ball lookalike (Christine Ebersole). Coached by Gary, Alana auditions to be an actor too, before a monstrous agent (Harriet Sansom Harris). Ever on the make, Gary sets up a business selling hideous waterbeds and, despite the age difference, Alana becomes his employee there.

As they racket around, they encounter a series of Hollywood grotesques, all cameos from big names. Sean Penn plays a gravel-voiced veteran actor, Jack Holden, who tries to seduce Alana and then runs into an even crazier pal, Rex Blau, a swaggering mogul stunningly played by Tom Waits, who talks him into performing a daft motorcycle stunt there and then. Bradley Cooper is extraordinary as perverted producer, celebrity hairdresser, Barbra Streisand boyfriend and waterbed purchaser Jon Peters. He tells Gary: "You know how much tail I get? All of it. It's all mine." And then hits on Alana.

Harm looms but never arrives. There's always a feeling that a smash-up or a lurking madman might be around the corner. But *Licorice Pizza* is joyfully harmless, and perhaps some kind of response to the pretensions of *Once Upon a Time... In Hollywood*. It's so deliciously loose and easy, running along to a great soundtrack (*Licorice Pizza*, ie LP, was the name of a vinyl record chain in LA back in the day). A tonic for the dark days. Paul Thomas Anderson-lite? The most instantly delectable film of one of our best directors, anyway. ●

"Licorice Pizza" is in cinemas from 7 January

Television

Monsters on parade

By Rachel Cooke

Four Lives
BBC One, aired
3 January, 9pm;
now on catch-up

The broadcast of *Four Lives*, a three-part drama about the crimes committed by Stephen Port in Barking, Greater London, between June 2014 and September 2015, was delayed by around a year by the inquest into his victims' deaths; the coroner having appointed a jury, its transmission would have put the BBC in contempt of court. But while one gathers that this was frustrating for the true-crime dream team behind it – the writer Neil McKay (*Appropriate Adult*, *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*) and producer Jeff Pope (*Hatton Garden*, *The Moorside*) had already moved on to their forthcoming Jimmy Savile drama – I wonder whether it mightn't have been a good idea to wait a bit longer. As I write, I'm all reluctant: my hands are slow and heavy, my mind desperate to turn to happier things. What a way to begin the new year.

That the inquest, which finally reported in December 2021, found that police failures had "probably" helped to enable Port's later killings (he drugged, raped and murdered four men, and assaulted several others) must have been no surprise to McKay. His script, clearly



Reality TV: Sheridan Smith as Sarah Sak in *Four Lives*

BBC/ITV STUDIOS/BEN BLACKALL/MATT BURLEM

well-researched, bears witness to a perilously atomised and under-funded operation.

But there is something even more important at play in his version of events. By his telling, the Metropolitan Police is a force in which strict budgets, rigid processes and chilly acronyms have elbowed out not only the instinct for investigation, but also all empathy, kindness and respect. When the body of Port's first victim, the 23-year-old Anthony Walgate, is found, his mother, Sarah Sak (Sheridan Smith) is told that a family liaison officer (FLO) has been appointed to the case. Can she get hold of this man on the phone? Mostly, she cannot. When she does, having first mispronounced her son's name, he meets her distress with low-level irritation; it is as though he is working in a call centre, and she is a customer complaining of a lost Sim card. "No, but I've done the training," the FLO tells her, when she demands to know whether he has played this role before.

The director, David Blair, has coaxed pleasingly understated performances from his actors. Life is rarely as histrionic as television would have us believe, and in *Four Lives* the shocked are subdued – dumbstruck, almost – rather than tearful. Proper attention is given to Port's victims, to Walgate (Tim Preston), Gabriel Kovari (Jakub Svec), Daniel Whitworth (Leo Flanagan) and Jack Taylor (Paddy Rowan), their lives made vivid and real. McKay's script is quietly eloquent on such matters as couch-surfing and hook-up sites, urban loneliness and exploitation. The men Port killed were deeply loved, but there's no escape from the fact that modern life also had its way with them. Social media was the first of Port's weapons, if not the last; it was his bait (he met the men online) and, for a time, his cloak.

But in the end, nothing can quite dim my anxiety over the popularity of this kind of drama with commissioning editors. That the families of Port's victims have lent their support to McKay does not change the reality that this is entertainment, with "scary" music playing as bodies are found, just in case we aren't horrified enough already. Those who make such shows push away talk of prurience, preferring instead the notion of greater "understanding". But who really feels, after watching a series like this, that they're in possession of some profound new insight? The inquest has already informed us of the police's failures. As for serial killers, they're beyond comprehension, and always will be.

Like David Tennant's impersonation of Dennis Nilsen in 2020, Stephen Merchant's performance as Port is careful, detailed, pernickety. Though he looks a bit weird – think Lurch of *The Addams Family* in a Burton anorak – what the actor mostly wants to convey is the sheer banality of Port's evil. But as the producers know perfectly well, Merchant's casting is in itself a freak-show exhortation to tune in. Roll up, roll up! Rub your eyes in amazement as the funny and adorable co-creator of *The Office* turns into a monster! Not, of course, that they, or anyone else, is likely to listen to me. *The Reckoning*, in which Steve Coogan will star as the paedophile broadcaster Savile, will be right along in just a few months' time. ●

Radio

How to stop worrying

By Rachel Cunliffe

Desperately Seeking Wisdom
Podcasts/Spotify

Five and half years ago, Craig Oliver was David Cameron's chief spinner and was running the Remain campaign. A Brexit vote, two elections and a pandemic later, he's launched a podcast "for people who want to change their lives, but aren't sure how". The introduction feels like a riff on Hugh Grant's monologue from *Love Actually*, right down to the uplifting backing music. "I felt I'd done all the things I was supposed to do to create a happy life, but it hadn't worked," Oliver tells us, his tone poignant. But life isn't something to be slogged through with gritted teeth, so now he's on a mission to absorb as much wisdom as he can from people who have "managed to change or had change thrust upon them".

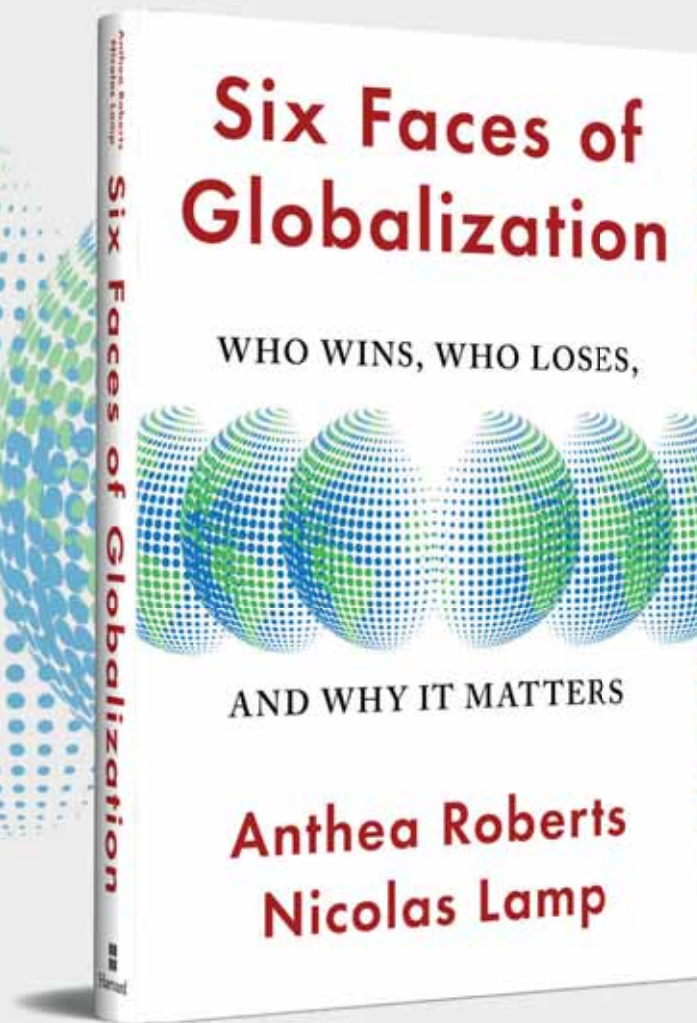
First up is the BBC journalist George Alagiah, who was diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer in 2014, aged 58. Having survived an extra seven years and 17 rounds of chemotherapy, Alagiah has come to a place of acceptance – and with it, enlightenment. He recounts how during treatment he informed his doctor: "I'm not going to worry. You're going to have to do all the worrying for me." He had decided his job as both a patient and a human was simply to be happy.

It sounds clichéd: two middle-aged men sharing their tips for fulfilment and decrying the relentless frenzy – of journalism, politics and modern life – that leaves so little time for taking stock. Surely we've read this before on a fridge magnet? And yet I listened to episode one in between Covid press conferences, with updates about Omicron clogging up my Twitter feed, and wondered how it would feel to be like Alagiah and just shrug off anxiety, angst and existential dread.

It's hard to predict where the series will go from here (future guests include the Scottish Conservative superstar Ruth Davidson and – fittingly – the film-maker Richard Curtis). I hope it's not all about terminal illness. And yet, it is stirring to hear someone talk so frankly about the freedom that comes from facing up to death. In any case, I'm happy to join Oliver and to try to learn something. ●

I wondered how it would feel to just shrug off anxiety, angst and existential dread

A Financial Times best book of the year



“A very smart book. Highly recommended.”

—Anne-Marie Slaughter, CEO, New America



Harvard University Press

hup.harvard.edu

THE BACK PAGES

Nature



John Burnside

Nature is a state of grace
that can be experienced by
anyone, anywhere

When I was six, I was given the task of fetching in the coal at the start of each day. Foolishly, I saw this as a chore, at least to begin with. It was only later, when I'd become more adept at negotiating the icy path that led from our back steps to the vast darkness beyond, that I realised what a privilege I had been given.

We lived in a run-down prefab at the darkest edge of a small mining town and, when there was no moon to guide me, I had to navigate that darkness by a mix of guesswork and memory, one of my father's old jumpers pulled loosely over my pyjamas, a thick, ►



◀ knitted balaclava muffling my ears. Around me, the dark hovered like a live presence: a deep, almost tangible blackness in the lilac bush just feet away from the kitchen door; a colder, wider mystery haunting the path ahead, as I edged ever further from the dim house light. No surprise, then, that I initially approached this task hurriedly, flapping out to the bin like a drunken penguin in my oversized wellingtons, then staggering back with the newly charged scuttle to get inside and warm again as soon as I could. It took a few inevitable slips – hard, stone-slapping falls that left me bruised and more shaken than I ever admitted – to start taking things more slowly.

And that was when it began. As taking it slowly progressed to stopping on the way and momentarily being still and attentive to the night, I became aware of something I had missed before in my hurry to be done. To name it was beyond my vocabulary then (and even now, I cannot say that I know what it was) but after a while I had the sense, every time I went out, that something was there. It was something felt rather than seen, something intuited, even, but it was real. It was present, as I was present – and yet, as I looked around, it was nowhere to be found. Or rather, it was so everywhere that it seemed to be nowhere at all.

To a well-trained Christian child, of course, there is only one phenomenon that is everywhere at once, but I must confess that the idea of God never once entered my head. Instead what occurred to me, if only in the vaguest terms, was that this everywhere-and-nowhere thing was what most people meant when they talked about “nature”.

At school we had a nature table, a dim shrine in

the corner of the classroom to which we brought autumn leaves, feathers and the occasional mouse or songbird skull, but I had already begun to divine, as through a glass darkly, that these were totems, tangible signifiers of something that was both intangible and beyond signification. That “nature” I sensed all around me – elemental, exhilarating, mysterious, pagan in the full sense and, so, occasionally frightening – was not an assembly of objects, mere fetishes and relics, like the paraphernalia of a moribund religion, nor could it be rendered in purely rational terms, like a mathematical function or a chemical reaction.

It could, however, be *apprehended* – that is, we could know it on the same basis that Richard Flanagan says we know love: “We apprehend it, we feel it, and we think we know it, yet we cannot say what we mean by it.” None of this is language that I could have used then, of course, but this is how apprehension works. Less exact and nowhere near as definitive as rational knowing, it allows us to bring feeling, intuition, instinct and imagination into the making of a subtler and more fluid response to the world.

So it was that, standing outside our prefab on those cold, dark mornings 60 years ago, I was being offered a privilege that has lasted decades – the privilege of ordinary wonder. It is a state of grace that can happen to anybody, anywhere. It may well be crucial to our survival as a culture, because without it we are in danger of thinking that “nature” is elsewhere, in the woods or the safari park or on some eco-resort in Central America, rather than here and everywhere, and dependent, for its safe keeping, on our sense of wonder. ●

This England

Each printed entry receives a £5 book token. Entries to comp@newstatesman.co.uk or on a postcard to This England.

This column – which, though named after a line in Shakespeare’s “Richard II”, refers to the whole of Britain – has run in the NS since 1934.

Expensive taste

A picky pet hamster has developed a taste for Waitrose Essential Extra Mature British Cheddar, strength six, turning his nose up at all other cheeses.

The hamster’s owner Jo Le Page, from Guernsey, said: “I know hamsters aren’t supposed to eat much dairy, but a little now and again is

fine. But after he had some from Waitrose, he turned up his nose at Iceland and Co-op cheese. It was amusing. He clearly knew and he walked away from it.

“People find it hilarious when I tell them.”
Daily Mirror (Amanda Welles)

Nerves of steel

A pensioner who has raised £250,000 for charity by balancing heavy objects on his head aims to notch up his 100th world record by his 75th birthday next year.

John Evans, from Ilkeston, Derbyshire, has won 98 medals for bearing loads – including a 30-stone stack of bricks and a Mini Cooper car, despite being diabetic, blind in one eye and an angina sufferer. He said: “I’ve never failed at anything yet.”
Metro (Daragh Brady)

Room for improvement

The UK hospitality company Travelodge has revealed its strangest requests from hotel guests in 2021 – including staff being asked where the Welsh rarebit lives and to arrange an afternoon tea with pandas.

One guest asked what time they would be able to see the snake on the Snake Pass in Derbyshire, Travelodge said. And another guest staying in York asked a member of staff to sing next door to check that they had a quiet room.
Sky News (Steve Morley)



ALEX BRECHLEY

Health Matters



Dr Phil Whitaker

Below poor diet, inactivity and smoking lurks an absence of hope

One by-product of the pandemic has been a deepening public understanding of certain aspects of medical science. Two years ago, for example, I would never have anticipated presenters on BBC Radio 4's *Today* cheerfully discussing T cell-mediated immunity. What we hear far less about are the social determinants of health. As the now disbanded Public Health England laid out in its November 2020 report, those living in the most deprived areas are more likely to contract Covid and have double the risk of dying should they do so.

The pandemic has starkly exposed what has been plain since the late 1970s, when Douglas Black conducted his inquiry into health inequality: that poverty causes poor health and measurably shortens life expectancy. The Black Report was commissioned in 1977 by James Callaghan's Labour government but was only completed after Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. It was quietly published on an August bank holiday in 1980 and its recommendations immediately dismissed as both unaffordable (an estimated £8bn a year in today's money) and of questionable effectiveness. The real issue was the notion that the state has both the ability and the responsibility to improve public health. This clashed diametrically with the Thatcherite free market, individualist ideology.

The Black Report may have landed on stony ground in Britain but it became influential internationally, leading institutions such as the World Health Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to conduct their own assessments of health inequalities, and ushering in the concept of the social determinants of health. And it formed the foundations for two subsequent inquiries

in the UK. The influence of the Acheson Report, commissioned shortly after Tony Blair won the 1997 New Labour landslide, could be seen in the 1999 white paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation", in which there was explicit recognition that government had an important role to play across a wide range of policy areas including in education, housing and transport.

New Labour made some progress in its early years but increasingly its focus sharpened on community and individual factors rather than governmental ones. So an issue such as smoking cessation, for example, became all about the provision of services locally and the adaptation of environments to discourage smoking, ceasing to be about the alienation felt by poverty-stricken individuals in left-behind communities that might underpin these kinds of injurious behaviours.

These "psychosocial" aspects of health inequality – the ways in which economic and social adversity manifest themselves in the individual – gained greater prominence in the Marmot Review, commissioned in 2008 by New Labour's Alan Johnson. For its chair, Michael Marmot, diet, exercise and smoking are highly complex issues rather than mere lifestyle choices. They are the visible part of an iceberg. Below the surface lurks the great mass of contributory causes: economic insecurity, lack of control, obscene wealth disparity, absence of hope, decade upon decade of adversity often dating back to an individual's childhood. These are areas only amenable to government policy.

In an eerie echo of the Black Report, the Marmot Review was published in 2010, just three months before the advent of a Conservative-led government. Its recommendations were ignored during the decade of austerity that followed, austerity that further compounded inequality and set the stage for the starkly differing impacts of Covid across our society.

The Johnson government avows its intent to level up. That won't be achieved by shiny transport improvements and ad hoc cash thrown at local initiatives, though. The blueprint for a fairer, more equal society – and the better health we would all enjoy – has been set out and refined in no fewer than three expert reports over the past 40 years. Only when these concepts become part of wider public discourse might we finally get a government to act. ●

Covid exposed what has been plain since the 1970s: poverty measurably shortens life expectancy



Down and Out



Nicholas Lezard

In my post-festive season
loneliness, I wonder if
I have gone feral

Children
seem to like
me. They
recognise,
intuitively,
an ongoing
war against
adulthood

The melancholy journey back from the family home on Boxing Day – after I'd cooked the goose, played endless and increasingly slogged games of Articulate, rewatched the first part of the Beatles documentary with the children (who understand the point of them so well it almost makes me cry) – was made a little less melancholy thanks to their gift of a bottle of Lagavulin, from which I sipped as the train went from London Bridge to Brighton. I sipped, note, not swigged, which makes me classy.

But once again, as after every family Christmas since 2008, the tradition of my cooking dinner despite separation, living for a couple of days back in the house where two of my children were born, brings my own current solitary condition into sharp relief. On the one hand, I get strong “What might have been” vibes: look at this happy family sitting cosily round the fire! On the other, I realise how far I have moved away from conventional domesticity. Would I have gone mad with boredom at having had to continue doing this kind of thing week in, week out, for the rest of my life?

Not for the first time, I wonder if I have gone feral. Here is a somewhat coarse metaphor: the lighting in the downstairs loo of the family home is configured in such a way that every stray drop becomes glaringly obvious. More time is spent wiping than actually peeing. At my flat, though, the collateral effects are invisible. I curse my loneliness but every time I think about living with someone else I wonder if it's a non-starter. Who would tolerate my lifestyle? I was up until three in the morning last night, reading and sipping bourbon in bed (sipping again, note; and I'm saving the rest of the Lagavulin for as long as I can). I had stayed in bed all day, except for trips to the khazi

and to the kitchen to make myself snacks. I woke up at seven in the morning for a bit and then slept until half past one in the afternoon. I can think of few ex-girlfriends who would put up with that kind of thing. They always want to Get On and Do Things, and if there's nothing in particular to do, then go for long walks. (Those taken in the countryside I have fond memories of – even if, at the time, the rain was lashing at me horizontally, with the force of whips, and I was cursing the outside world loudly and fiercely.)

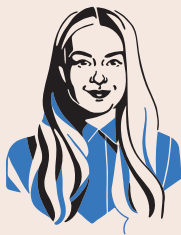
I am resigned to loneliness. Character, as they say, is destiny; and not just in novels, but in real life. In the sudden silence after days with, at times, six other talkative people, one has a lot of time to examine oneself, there being no one else around to examine. And while I have no doubt, except in my darkest moments, that I am fundamentally a decent person, I am also fundamentally useless, feckless and immature. Left to my own devices, I am incredibly selfish.

I suppose this is part of what explains one of the things I have been surprised by over the years: that, without making any effort, in fact sometimes deliberately going some way in the other direction, children seem to like me, even gravitate to me. They recognise in me, intuitively, an ongoing war against adulthood and its responsibilities. I have been noticing this ever since I started having friends who had children around them, for whatever reason. This has been going on for longer than you might think. One nine-year-old called me “Mr History” because I could answer most of his history-related questions, and he went on, I think, to teach the subject. Another, a 15-year-old made grumpy not only by adolescence, but family circumstance and an incredibly painful skin condition, called me the most interesting adult he'd ever met, or the least boring – I forget which – and all I'd been doing, I thought, was sitting around talking.

There are other examples, the main one being that my own children seem to like me too, even though there are disturbing signs that they are becoming maturer than me, and beginning to see the reality behind the curtain. That said, they've always been able to do that. I remember, about 12 years ago, I appeared on breakfast TV for some reason or other; my eldest son, who can't have been older than 12, said: “Dad, anyone can get on breakfast TV,” and he had a point.

So here I am, on my own again, in the weird, timeless zone between Christmas and New Year, which makes one feel even more alone if one is alone in the first place, staring at the sea – which as it happens is the title of the Cure's first singles collection, and now I can see why those progenitors of goth chose it. But at least there are the children. The eldest of whom is going to be 27 in a few days' time. Twenty-seven! By that age, I was three years into my relationship with their mother. But then in those days housing was much more affordable, and we didn't have student loans to pay off. (I shudder to think of how profoundly I would have not coped with a student loan.) Meanwhile, another year looms. I wonder what it's got up its sleeve. As the late John Peel said of the Fall (another favourite band of mine): always different, always the same. ●

Deleted Scenes



Pippa Bailey

I have compiled a new playlist for 2022 – “Songs you can’t feel sad to”

I genuinely intended for this column to be a more cheerful place in 2022, but Omicron had other ideas. “Happy Covid Christmas number two,” as my youngest brother wrote in my Christmas card.

I’ve received a lot of advice over the past six months, but the best was throwaway and wholly unpretentious (and came courtesy of my esteemed colleague Rachel Cunliffe): you can’t feel sad while dancing to Pulp’s “Common People”. Well, lately I have followed her counsel with such vigour as to require a high-impact sports bra.

It held me up through the news that my grandparents, whom I have not seen for two years, would remain safely ensconced up north, rather than travel to London for Christmas. And then after my eldest brother discovered, on Christmas Eve, that there’s only so long you can avoid coronavirus for when you spend every night in the pub.

High on my playlist of songs you can’t feel sad to – a compilation I arrogantly view as some kind of public service – is David Bowie’s “Heroes”, which would be my answer to “What’s your theme tune?” in the *NSQ&A*. It would also be my first-dance song, if only I could find someone to marry – and a cut that isn’t six minutes long.

Then there’s Beck’s “Nicotine & Gravy”, which is oozing and unctuous and weird, and to which my body moves unbidden. Lou Reed’s “Perfect Day” reminds me that there have been perfect days, and will be again. Public Access TV’s “End of an Era” has the kind of *Back to the Future* prom vibes with which “Johnny B Goode” fills dancefloors at weddings.

The Darkness’s “Friday Night” is perhaps an unlikely entry, but they were one of my very first gigs, at London’s Alexandra Palace, and now my 12-year-old

brother listens to nothing else; their riffs link generations of Baileys. That night at Ally Pally, Justin Hawkins flew in on a pair of giant inflatable boobs, and at one point I could have sworn he winked at me (he almost certainly didn’t); I lived on this trick of my mind for weeks. I once watched an interview in which he said he learned to play guitar so people would sleep with him; I never mastered barre chords, and perhaps that’s where I’ve been going wrong.

Thin Lizzy’s *Jailbreak* was one of a handful of albums my family painstakingly transferred from CD to tape in the Nineties, simultaneously pressing play and record and then scurrying from the room, so we could listen to it in the car on the long drive up to Scotland each summer. The opening bars of “Running Back” make me think of driving in that romantic, full-of-possibility way that’s far removed from the reality of car sickness and cramped limbs and stale McDonald’s air.

Also held in high enough regard to make the hard-won transition to tape was Cornershop’s *When I Was Born for the 7th Time* – an album it is genuinely impossible not to smile to (as no doubt my father did as his small children sang “everybody needs a bosom for a pillow” in the back seat). If you want to feel lightly, blissfully stoned without the use of any actual substances, I recommend “Good Shit”.

The Clash’s “Lost in the Supermarket” reminds me of Reading Festival, two-thousand-and-something, when we played it from a phone propped in a mug, and I kissed a girl for the first time, and one of our group “befriended” a boy who wore a rug around his waist – and nothing else. Also taking me back to those muddy, Kate Moss Topshop days is the Libertines’ “What Katie Did”. At Reading 2010, a friend and I danced through their entire set with such abandon that a wary circle formed around us.

These aren’t aggressively upbeat songs that try to distract from sadness with “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”-type lyrics. Rather, they seem to say, “Yes, and...”; to acknowledge that joy is a profound sense of gratitude made possible by having known pain. They propel me onwards and promise that there are happier days ahead, just out of sight. I like to imagine them as a soundtrack, selected for me by a film-maker who knows where my character is heading, and that it will be good. ●

Justin Hawkins flew in on a pair of giant inflatable boobs, and I could have sworn he winked at me



MY DEATH, MY DECISION 

9 IN 10

People support legalising
assisted dying.

But the law will only
change if politicians act.
Help back a compassionate
change in the law today.



Scan the QR code to learn more about
our campaign, or visit:
www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk

Dawn Voice-Cooper, a former mental health worker, had an assisted death in Switzerland last month to end her unbearable suffering. Her final plea was for politicians to change the law on assisted dying. Help take up her fight by joining My Death, My Decision



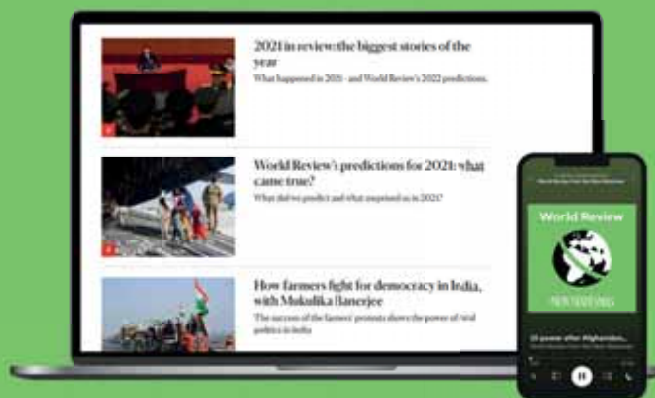
THE NEW STATESMAN

World Review

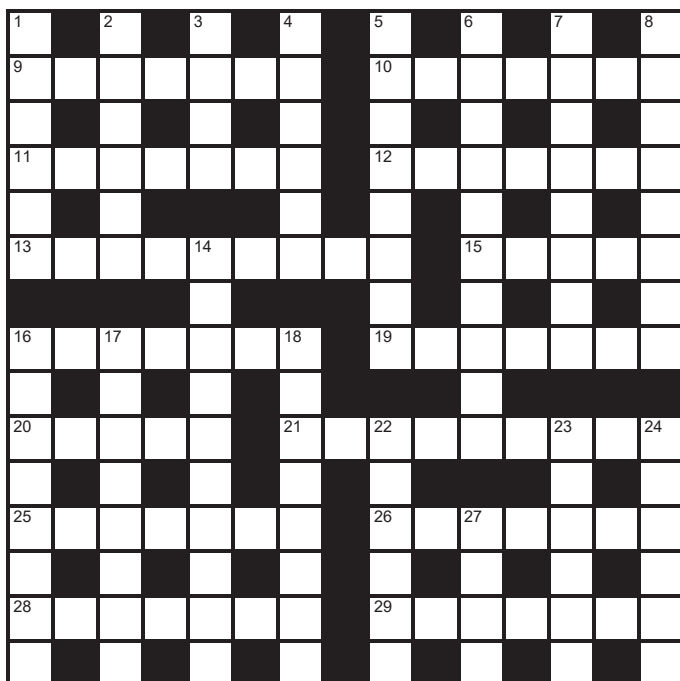
The global affairs podcast

Join the international team every Monday
for interviews with top international
thinkers and experts and every Thursday
for a review of the week's global events.

Listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Acast or at
newstatesman.com/podcasts



The NS Cryptic Crossword 566: by Cullen



Across

- 9 First-class runs – quick to dismiss heart attack (3-4)
- 10 Desert folk struggle to succeed (3-4)
- 11 Being serious, set out to support merit (7)
- 12 No test's ordered for hat (7)
- 13 I train as a doctor, here? (9)
- 15 Guy in river, so it's said (5)
- 16 Arrive carrying favourite for contest (7)
- 19 Among duty personnel, see one swagger (7)
- 20 An aim, or an obsession? (5)
- 21 Good to acquire operable refurbished propeller (9)
- 25 Endurance refitting mast in Antarctica, primarily (7)
- 26 Cold, paler teller (7)
- 28 Criterion in London, say, for scene of operations? (7)
- 29 Recluse, old before time sadly (7)

Down

- 1 Hesitates, as husband, to maintain son (6)
- 2 Boring extra rehearsal (3,3)
- 3 Celebrity girlfriend left out (4)
- 4 Magazine chief, when poorly treated, rioted (6)
- 5 New song that's good for inspiration (5,3)
- 6 Wily setter, cooking with sage (10)
- 7 In the morning, mum in fact damaged part of engine (8)
- 8 Bridle expensive, we hear, for an animal (8)
- 14 Healers and believers absorbing criticism (10)
- 16 Holiday spot where guys are responsible for hold-ups (8)
- 17 Vamp with long hair has dad losing his head (8)
- 18 Adopted breed Mac bred (8)
- 22 Scam employed in court (6)
- 23 Of this deity, nothing but a title exists (6)
- 24 Educated, lost head but made money (6)
- 27 Slough – potter's home? (4)

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

Answers to the Cryptic Crossword of 10 December 2021: grids on newstatesman.com
Place name solutions A) Aberdeen B) Berkhamsted C) Carlisle D) Derby E) Edgbaston F) Fakenham G) Gorseinon H) Horsham I) Inverness J) Jemima K) Kylesku L) Lincoln M) Melton Mowbray N) Neston O) Old Colwyn P) Par Q) Quorn R) Rogart S) Sissinghurst T) Tredegar U) Ugley V) Ventnor W) Willesden X) Halifax Y) Yeovil Z) Zennor **Cryptic solutions** A) Aldebaran B) Ambridge C) As usual D) Chorus E) Cleansers F) Creasing G) Dramas H) Embosom I) Henhouse J) Hierarchical K) Jeunesse dorée L) Lake Lucerne M) League N) Nut P) Pound note Q) Quint R) Red hair S) Rounds T) Solar energy U) Thane V) Urban W) Vagaries X) Waist Y) Xylem Z) Zoo

Subscriber of the Week: Brian Jones

What do you do?

Semi-retired lecturer and trustee of Anheddau Cyf.

Where do you live?

Near Caernarfon, north Wales.

Do you vote?

Always, but not always the same way.

How long have you been a subscriber?

Since around 1982.

What made you start?

Reading references to the NS in the Guardian.

Is the NS bug in the family?

Only my wife! As in "Have you seen my copy...?"

What pages do you flick to first?

A quick skim, then the critics.

How do you read yours?

Bit by bit over the week.

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

Welsh independence.

Who are your favourite NS writers?

Rowan Williams, John Gray, Jeremy Cliffe.

Who would you put on the cover of the NS?

Thomas Paine in discussion with Montesquieu.

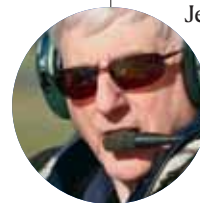
With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?

Andrew RT Davies.

All-time favourite NS article?

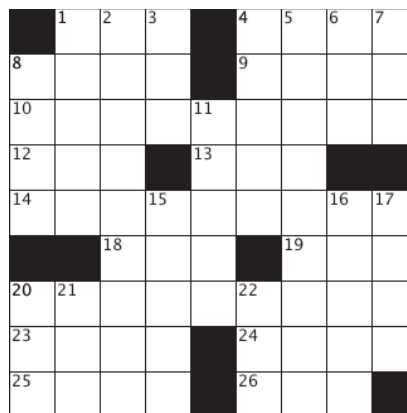
A critique of our constitution by Tom Nairn in the late 1980s.

The New Statesman is...
an education in itself.



Please email ellys.woodhouse@newstatesman.co.uk if you would like to be featured

The NS Crossword In Brief 15: by Miriam Estrin



Answers to crossword 14 of 10 December 2021

Across 1) Rob 4) Dian 8) Any 9) On tap 11) Pepperoni 13) Arsenal 14) HSE 15) He's 16) West Ham 18) Elizabeth 21) Diner 22) Nob 23) Ogle 24) Two Down 1) Rap 2) One 3) Bypassing 4) Does 5) In rehab 6) Atonement 7) Nanas 10) PIL 12) Pretzel 14) Hélio 16) Wed 17) Hare 19) Tow 20) HBO

Across

- 1 Wily and MIA, eg
- 4 Bird under royal prerogative
- 8 Painfully sensitive
- 9 Word with company or spare
- 10 *Bake Off* judge
- 12 Bottom of America?
- 13 They, in Marseille
- 14 It gets in hot water
- 18 Excavated
- 19 Simpering
- 20 Hen do party?
- 23 "Yikes!"
- 24 Experiment sites
- 25 Boxers, eg
- 26 Pigen

Down

- 1 ---
- 2 Vigorously campaigning
- 3 View
- 4 Said "W-H-A-T", eg
- 5 Gareth Southgate vest
- 6 "But is it ___?"
- 7 Maths degree
- 8 Expecterated
- 11 Feudal lord
- 15 "Job well done"
- 16 Petition an MP
- 17 Checks out
- 20 Odd ___
- 21 Symbol of density
- 22 Book review, for one

The NS Q&A

“I’m still alive because I’m a serial series binger”

Steven Pinker, psychologist



Steven Pinker was born in Montreal in 1954 and is the Johnstone professor of psychology at Harvard University. He conducts research into visual cognition, psycholinguistics and social relations.

What’s your earliest memory?

It’s highly sensory and from the age of two: the soles of the feet of my pyjamas, with raised azure rubber dots.

Who are your heroes?

I’ve never had heroes. I appreciate people’s accomplishments while accepting them as human.

What book last changed your thinking?

Jonathan Rauch’s *The Constitution of Knowledge* softened my scepticism that social media fosters modern irrationality.

Which political figure do you look up to?

Eleanor Roosevelt, for shepherding along the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I also admire Mikhail Gorbachev for what he didn’t do: send in the tanks to preserve the Soviet empire at a cost of prolonging totalitarianism.

What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?

Photography. It engages my aesthetics, my interest in visual cognition and my love of gadgets.

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

New York City in the 1950s. That was the heyday of hard bop jazz, witty Broadway plays, the great American songbook, abstract expressionism, modernist

architecture such as the UN headquarters, and the Greenwich Village beat scene.

What TV show could you not live without?

I’m still alive because I’m a serial series binger: *The Sopranos*, *Veep*, *Silicon Valley*, *Shetland*, *Shtisel*, *Call My Agent*, *Babylon Berlin*, *Family Business*, *Rake*.

Who would paint your portrait?

Annie Leibovitz would shoot it.

What’s your theme tune?

For 25 years I’ve played “Journey to the Center of the Mind”, the only hit by the Amboy Dukes, at the start of my introductory psychology course. Musically superior are two songs called “Think”, one by Aretha Franklin, one by James Brown.

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

Before I wrote *The Language Instinct*, an editor told me that most academics fail to reach a general audience because they treat readers as unintellectual simpletons. She advised me to think of them as intelligent and curious peers who happen not to know certain things that I know.

What’s currently bugging you?

The stupidification of academia in pursuit of dubious “social justice”: logical and statistical fallacies, primitive word magic, character assassination, censoring and memory-holing controversial articles, rhetorical dirty tricks such as straw men and guilt by association.

What single thing would make your life better?
Happiness in the people I love.

When were you happiest?

Given my good fortune, singling out any time but “right now” would be cosmic ingratitude.

In another life, what job might you have chosen?

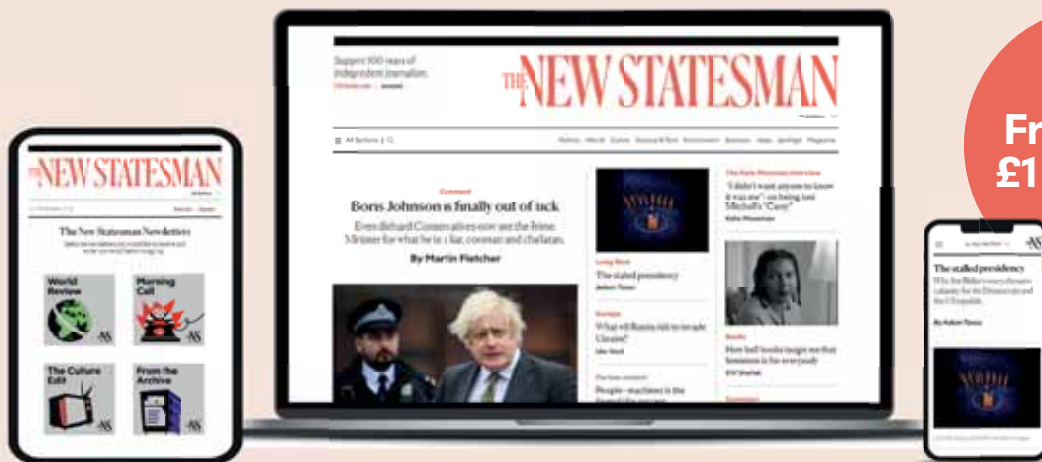
A constitutional lawyer, paid to engage in conceptual and moral argumentation.

Are we all doomed?

In the long run, yes. Biologists say that to an excellent first approximation (99.9 per cent), all species that have ever lived are extinct; we’re unlikely to be the one that cheats death forever. But in the next century, almost certainly not. ●

“Rationality: What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, Why It Matters” by Steven Pinker is published by Allen Lane

New Year New Ideas New Statesman



From just
£1 a week*

Enjoy independent, award-winning journalism and the best political and cultural writing every day.

How to get this offer:

-  Go to newstatesman.com/subscribe
-  Email us at subscriptions@newstatesman.co.uk
-  Call us free on 0808 284 9422

As a digital subscriber you will enjoy:

- Full online access to our brand new website
- Our award-winning cover stories
- Extended international and environmental coverage
- Access to our growing online archive
- Early access to ad-free podcasts from the NS team

* 12 week digital subscription for £12, followed by £29.99 each quarter. Available to new subscribers only.

For more offers visit newstatesman.com/subscribe



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.

DSWF registered Charity No:1106893



**Christopher
Ward**

Ingeniously English.
Unsurprisingly Swiss.

christopherward.com