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Darkness Falls

A special issue on the Russia-Ukraine crisis



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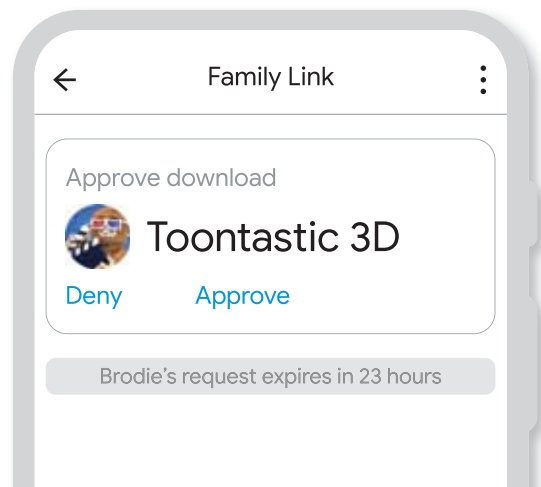
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The West must stand up to Putin

For too long, the West believed that Vladimir Putin was a man with whom it could do business, as Margaret Thatcher said of Mikhail Gorbachev. George W Bush looked into the Russian president's eyes and "found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy". Barack Obama sought to "reset" US relations with Russia. Donald Trump openly admired Mr Putin as a fellow ethnic nationalist and strongman.

Any notion that Mr Putin can be treated as a normal leader has now been dispelled, however. It was eight years ago that Russia annexed Crimea and occupied much of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region (at the cost of some 14,000 lives to date). These were acts of aggression that should have made him a pariah.

In his rambling speech on 21 February, Mr Putin went further by recognising the self-proclaimed people's republics in Donetsk and Luhansk – an unashamed violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. But more than this, the Russian president rejected the entire basis of Ukrainian independent statehood, declaring that the country had been invented by Lenin's Bolsheviks, and chillingly remarked that it had been a "mistake" to allow the former Soviet republics to become independent. Mr Putin may have described the fall of the USSR as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century, but his nostalgia is for Russian power, not Soviet ideology. His ambition is to forge a new empire with himself as tsar, surrounded by a web of protectorates. The task facing the democratic world is to thwart him.

At the start of the Ukraine crisis, the West appeared divided and weak. Joe Biden, the US president, blundered when he remarked that he would be prepared to tolerate "a minor incursion" that leads to "a fight about what to do and what not to do". The new German government was split between the more cautious, sceptical Greens and the more Russophile Social Democrats. And Emmanuel Macron's lofty ambition of European "strategic autonomy" collided with the reality of a largely impotent EU that has no coherent foreign policy.

But at this grave hour, there are finally signs that some states are adjusting to a changed world. In the immediate wake of Mr Putin's speech, the new German chancellor,



Mr Putin's ambition is to forge a new empire with himself as tsar, surrounded by a web of protectorates

Olaf Scholz, announced the suspension of the approval process for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia. This unexpectedly bold move marked a welcome break with the Social Democrats' recent past (the former chancellor Gerhard Schröder is close to Putin and chairs the shareholders' committee of Nord Stream). Mr Scholz also announced that Germany would review its energy supply in view of a "fundamentally changed" situation (Russia supplies 65 per cent of the country's natural gas).

By contrast, the UK's response was feeble. Boris Johnson announced sanctions against just five Russian banks and three billionaires, action that Mr Putin and his entourage will regard as comically soft. As Tom Tugendhat, the Conservative chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, observed: "Sanctions matter only if they make the Kremlin think again. These are a repetition of US sanctions. We need to do more if they're to count."

Mr Johnson was a poor foreign secretary and his inertia now suggests that he remains fatally compromised by his party's ties to Russian plutocrats in the UK. As the *Sunday Times* revealed, the Conservatives' "advisory board" includes Lubov Chernukhin, the wife of Mr Putin's former deputy finance minister. And in London, until the Conservative government cleanses the City's Augean stables by banishing dirty money, it will have no right to lecture others on Russian influence.

The blame for this crisis lies with Mr Putin, but the West should not spare itself from criticism. At the end of the Cold War, amid a mood of liberal triumphalism, it did too little to reassure Russia as Nato expanded eastwards. No US president would accept the extension of a rival defence alliance to their country's own border.

But that was then. Today Mr Putin is an agent of chaos. His autocratic rule depends on crushing the threat of a democratic alternative – whether at home or in Russia's "near abroad". As his popularity in a country of elite private affluence and public squalor wanes, Mr Putin's greatest fear is not encirclement by Nato but by his own people. The West's duty is to stand with democrats in Russia and Ukraine, and to stop appeasing Vladimir Putin and the stooges around him. ●



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Newsmaker

Why Facebook's future depends on Nick Clegg

By Will Dunn

Shortly after the 2015 general election, Nick Clegg went for dinner with a friend. He knew, after the Liberal Democrats' humiliating defeat (the party lost all but eight of its 57 seats), that his time as leader was coming to an end, but he had no intention of fading into obscurity: he had, he said, things he wanted to do in the world.

In coalition, the Lib Dems had acted as an internal opposition, a check on some of the Tories' more aggressive policies, but in the public eye they simply shared the blame for austerity, triple-strength tuition fees and the privatisation of Royal Mail. As David Cameron enjoyed his new majority, it looked as if Clegg had been too eager to participate in power to see how he was being used by it. When Clegg went to work for Facebook in October 2018, it was reasonable to ask whether he thought this time would be any different.

If Clegg was outmanoeuvred by the Conservatives in government, his career in business has been very different. Cameron's attempts to tug the old school ►

◀ tie for Greensill Capital ended in disgrace; Clegg has just been made president of global affairs at Meta (or Facebook, as it's still broadly known), a position which the company's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, described as "a senior leader at the level of myself" and which puts Clegg among the most powerful business people in the world.

Clegg is now in charge of the political positions and interactions of the social giant, which employs more than 70,000 people and is used, on at least one of its platforms, by more than a third of the world's population. Clegg's promotion is a recognition that Facebook – which Zuckerberg described in 2018 as "more like a government than a traditional company" – now depends on astute political engagement for its survival.

A friend of Clegg's describes him as an arch-centrist, an explainer, someone who avoids rhetoric, pursues the best information and is impartial almost to a fault. These might seem odd things to value in a company that monetises emotion and disinformation, but this is the point: Clegg is a master of the balancing act.

The most important of these is the balance between what Facebook wants to do – which might crudely be summed up as "replace the internet" – with what regulators and governments will allow. Clegg, who speaks five languages, established a reputation for formidable competence in the UK and EU as an MP, MEP and a lobbyist; he is one of the most qualified people to navigate these waters. A few months before he joined Facebook he spoke at length on his podcast with the regulator the platform fears most, the EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager.

Nick Clegg's promotion is a recognition that Facebook now depends on astute political engagement for its survival

After joining the company Clegg championed its oversight board, which is co-chaired by his friend (and the former Danish prime minister) Helle Thorning-Schmidt. The board is an ostensibly independent organisation designed to hold Meta to account, although its staff happen to include senior figures in policy, development and implementation who were previously employed by Facebook, and its head of communications spent four years working as Zuckerberg's speechwriter.

Regulation is so important to Facebook because it is still a company focused on rapid growth. In the past decade it has produced \$177bn in earnings, but its market value grew to a peak last year of more than a trillion dollars. All this investment is drawn by the promise of scale, that revenue will continue to climb – as it has for the past decade by an average of 45 per cent per year. Zuckerberg's main job is to develop or buy the new products and services that will keep supplying this growth; Clegg's job is to make sure he's allowed to.

As Microsoft found previously, this will become more difficult to do the bigger Facebook gets. Like many large companies, Facebook buys more innovation than it generates. Its 2013 smartphone was a flop, its smart glasses have been treated with suspicion and its Portal telecreens have been slow to gain market share. The company's lucrative additions – Instagram, WhatsApp and the virtual reality company Oculus – were all bought rather than invented.

Facebook could do well if the coming years contain a slump or even a market crash. The company sits on a mountain of cash – \$48bn, according to its latest earnings – and in the event of a serious correction, it will still have enough to invest for years, while smaller, innovative companies will be going cheap. It will only be able to do this, however, if it is allowed to go shopping, and Facebook's near-monopoly on social media (it owns four of the top five social platforms) makes it a target for competition regulators.

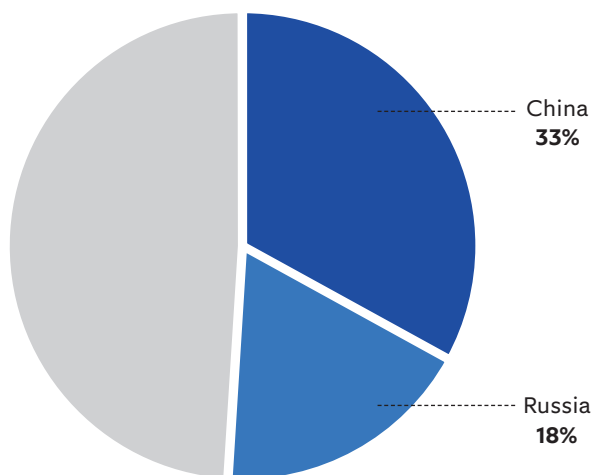
In November 2021 Facebook was ordered by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to sell the animated Gif website Giphy, which it acquired in 2020 for a reported \$400m. Giphy claims an audience of more than 700 million users and is the source for a significant portion of the animated Gifs that are found across all social platforms. The CMA found that Facebook's acquisition of the site "removed a potential challenger in the display advertising market".

At the same time, competition regulators could be Meta's best hope against Google and Apple, which are implementing new privacy standards. Clegg's balancing act will be to claim – perhaps with the help of a digital competition bill which is anticipated by the CMA – that such practices are anti-competitive, while maintaining that Facebook is not abusing its position in the market.

Yet there is a more fundamental balance to achieve. As an advertising company, Facebook has to persuade its millions of customers that it can change human behaviour in a measurable way. As a political entity, it has to persuade governments and their voters that this is nothing to worry about. This is a task that may confound even the ultimate centrist. ●

Chart of the Week

More than half of all UK "golden visas" went to Russian and Chinese investors
Percentage of Tier 1 investor visas per applicant country (2008-2021)



Source: Home Office

The Diary

Leaving Radio 2, the Queen's favourite show, and why Gorbachev apologised to me

By Phil Jones

As I leave Radio 2 I wonder if 26 years editing the same BBC programme is a record. I depart with a reputation as a maverick and a rule-breaker, as even the director-general, Tim Davie, acknowledged (albeit in a rather affectionate tone). When I became a manager I believed my duty was to protect my staff from management. I'm also conscious of sounding like many of my predecessors, who were made famous by the BBC, only to spend their retirement mercilessly slagging it off. So I hereby make a solemn promise not to join them. There are lots of things wrong with the corporation but, right now, it needs every friend it has to save it from the barbarians ready to destroy the greatest cultural institution this country has.

Journalistic bias

If anyone can save the Beeb, Tim Davie can, and I have always enjoyed his outings at parliamentary select committees, where he takes no prisoners. Despite my best efforts over lunch, Tim didn't reveal any of his plans (such as how he will cut millions of pounds? And who will replace Laura Kuenssberg?). What I can exclusively reveal, though, is that most weekends Tim can be seen running the footpaths and bridleways of the Chiltern Hills. For the next political editor, I suggested Ash Sarkar, who is exceptionally bright. Colleagues have countered that she's too left-wing to be impartial. Don't you just love the prejudice that right-wing journalists can be impartial in their work but left-wing ones don't have that capacity?

The head of state at No 42

I'm certain that one person who does support the BBC is the Queen, even if her loyalty has been greatly



Challenging authority and injustice is what the BBC still does at its best, and why it's worth fighting for

tested. (Remember when the BBC had to apologise after admitting it had implied she stormed out of a photo shoot with Annie Leibovitz?) So where is my evidence that the Queen loves the Beeb?

Well, I've kept this exclusive story secret for 21 years after I was told by a BBC executive that, on pain of death, journalists should never reveal their conversations with the monarch. In 2001 I was invited to a media function at Buckingham Palace. The first thing the Queen said was how much she loved Terry Wogan. No surprise there. We all knew the Queen was a Radio 2 listener. We chatted for ages, which I can tell you is rather surreal. My brain kept saying, "Bloody hell I'm talking to the Queen and I can't think of a single thing to say!" In the end I alighted on, "What's your favourite programme?" Straightaway, she said, "*The Kumars at No 42*" and, even more astonishingly, proceeded to recite some of the one-liners from the grandma character, played by the brilliant Meera Syal.

But why was I really surprised? Her favourite programme was about a family of Asian immigrants settled in the UK. Maybe the Queen genuinely supports multiculturalism, loves BBC sitcoms and has a wicked sense of humour. All of which leaves me a little torn because, putting it delicately, I'm not the world's greatest royalist. You can now count me among that growing group of republicans who don't like the monarchy much but suspect the Queen is a good egg. We can only wish her a speedy recovery from Covid.

Saying sorry to Alfred

I was always suspicious of the authoritarian types who rang my Radio 2 show during civil liberties debates and declared, "If you've done nothing wrong then you've got nothing to worry about." Try telling that to my Czech grandfather, Alfred, who was arrested for doing absolutely nothing and spent a year in jail, dying prematurely. When I met Mikhail Gorbachev I told him: "Both our grandparents were arrested by the Stalinist police." He seemed intrigued and when I said that Grandad died as a result of that injustice, he said: "On behalf of the Russian people, I am truly sorry." You could say it was a little too late, but I'll take it nonetheless. All of which reminds me why, as an idealistic young man, I became a journalist: to challenge authority, injustice and the misuse of power. That's what the BBC at its best still does, and why it's worth fighting for.

Second childhood

Will I miss the job? I'm sure I will, a little. I'm bound to grieve the loss of something I've loved so much. But I'm lucky because I will always enjoy hiking up a mountain more. And having extra time with friends and family. A colleague asked me what one thing I would do if I could go back in time. "That's easy," I replied. "I'd spend a day with my children, when they were five and seven, and enjoy reliving every second of it." I love my children, now 26 and 28, but spending a day again with them as children would be heaven. ●

Phil Jones was editor of "The Jeremy Vine Show" on BBC Radio 2 and is currently writing his memoirs



Encounter

“I’ve faced my biggest fear.
So why worry?”

Wendy Mitchell on
recording her life with
young-onset dementia

By Anoosh Chakelian

One recent sunny afternoon, Wendy Mitchell saw her father in her back garden, smiling at her through the wide windowpanes of her conservatory. His black hair was Brylcreem-ed into a quiff, his fingers stained yellow with nicotine; he was comfy in the green cardigan he always wore for pottering around. But he had been dead for 20 years. There was no one there.

Mitchell, a 65-year-old who was diagnosed with young-onset dementia at 58, stood smiling back at him. For how long, she didn’t know. It could have been minutes or hours, she writes in her new, bestselling book: *What I Wish People Knew About Dementia*. “I didn’t dare blink because I didn’t want him to disappear. It was like he was back again. It was lovely,” she said from her armchair, gazing out at the empty spot on her immaculate lawn bordered with flower-shaped bird-feeders. “I call this a gift of dementia. If you don’t see the positives then something like that can disturb you.”

Dementia is not just about forgetting. Far from fading, memories can be vivid, visceral. This is one of many surprising aspects of the disease she told me about when we settled in her conservatory to chat. Eyes crinkled by her pixie-like grin, Mitchell rested one foot on the coffee table, which was decorated with photos of childhood holidays with her two now-adult

FABIO DE PAOLA

daughters, Sarah and Gemma. Retro posters of heritage brands such as Marmite, Cadbury and Bisto decorated the exposed brick wall behind her.

Born in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, in 1956, Mitchell spent six years as a child sweeping the floorboards of her parents' pub, the Railway Hotel, picking up pennies to spend on sweets. Later, her mother became a secretary for Hay's Lemonade and her father worked in a steel factory. When Mitchell received her diagnosis, she had been working for 20 years as a senior NHS administrator, rostering nursing shifts. She was known in her office as the "guru" for her power of recall. It was only when she began falling over while jogging that she realised something was wrong, and it took nearly two years to find out what.

On the day we met, she wore a green fleece and black trousers – fresh from an early morning walk in the countryside surrounding her home in the Yorkshire village of Walkington. Arriving at the top of a nearby hill just before dawn, she had watched as, one by one, deer surrounded her. She took photos for her blog, "Which Me Am I Today?", which she updates daily and doubles as her short-term memory.

"My fingers can type as though dementia never entered my world; they type quicker than I can think and speak the words," she said. "Like a string of fairy lights, each fairy light represents a different function of the brain. Different fairy lights flicker and fail for each of us. That's why I can type and others can't."

Before the pandemic, Mitchell's schedule had become busier than her pre-dementia working life, filled with campaigning work, speeches and research trials as she challenged societal perceptions of dementia. She advised on Julianne Moore's Oscar-winning performance of early-onset dementia in the 2014 film *Still Alice*, and wrote her first memoir, *Somebody I Used to Know*, in 2018 (she writes in collaboration with the ghostwriter Anna Wharton, "otherwise I'd write the same thing on every page!"). In her most recent book, she quotes a network of friends who live full lives with dementia, whom she calls "playmates", and she did a sky-dive at the age of 63 to raise money for a young-onset dementia charity (her GP simply rolled her eyes and signed the medical waiver).

Society overlooks so much of the disease, Mitchell says. Smell hallucinations, which send her flitting around the house as she looks for a non-existent source of burning. No longer feeling hunger or thirst (she writes with sorrow about losing the pleasure of a cup of Yorkshire Tea). The struggle to make out contrast and tone, leading her to paint strips of luminous yellow on to the edges of her front doorsteps to guide her way.

There are practical tricks for "outwitting this cruel visitor" in her home. Photos on cupboard doors signify the contents within – you can see the kitchen foil is stored in the cabinet under the sink, for example. Royal-blue paint borders her light switches, so that they don't blend into the wall. Tiles either side of her front door remind her which among the row of houses is hers; they are patterned with forget-me-nots.

Dementia is an "unwanted guest in the house that came one day and has now fully unpacked its bags and decided to stay, and I can't get rid of it". Yet Mitchell lives alone, independently, refusing to allow her daughters – whom she raised as a single mother – to be her carers. When they began helping her zip up her coat, she soon forgot how to do it herself, so she told them to stop and slowly relearned.

"For the kindest of reasons, people wrap us up in cotton wool, and it's the worst thing you can do for us," she told me. "There's nothing so comforting with dementia as sitting, doing nothing, with your eyes closed, totally relaxed – but that's dementia's cruel way of making you feel at ease with it, and taking over." Care homes that leave residents in front of the television with no stimulation, and the inactivity brought about by the pandemic, make Mitchell despair.

"So many of my friends died during lockdown," she said, recounting stories of people left alone in the later stages of dementia. "Why should you ignore the person who's been there all your life, even if they've lost the power of speech? Our emotions never leave us, because that's a totally different part of our brain. How someone makes us feel stays with us far longer than words they speak." As an example, Mitchell explained she couldn't remember our conversation, though the sensation lingered that she had enjoyed it. She had set "umpteenth reminders" throughout the morning for our interview (a former luddite, Mitchell has learned how to use technology – such as Amazon's virtual assistant programme, Alexa – since being diagnosed).

Yet for all her positivity, she emphasises how hard life can be. "Some moments, dementia just takes hold," she said. When this happens, she goes to her "memory room" – a spare room hung with photos of people and places, half of which she no longer recalls but knows are special. During bad spells, she speaks to the woman she once was. "I ask my old self: 'What should I do?' She was intensely organised, very practical, and some of her has rubbed off on me. But I'm totally different from the person I was."

Her children describe her now as a "gregarious alien". Their mother, who was once very private, rarely attending work functions, is now a memoirist. Previously afraid of the dark and all animals, crossing the street when she saw a cat on the corner, she now delights in photographing wildlife, and fears nothing. "I've faced my biggest fear with dementia," she said. "What is there to worry about?"

Dementia leads her to live day-to-day, or even second-to-second – a perspective that means her writing addresses not just navigating a confounding disease, but life in general. "People with dementia can teach those without it so much about enjoying their life!" she laughed. "I was as guilty as anyone when I was working: I wished for the weekend, I wished for the end of the day, I wished for the next holiday. You're wishing your life away. The only certainty we have in this life is this moment, no one knows what the next moment will bring. So enjoy it." ●

"I can type as though dementia never entered my world, quicker than I can think and speak the words"

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Inside Politics

Ed Miliband's linguistic legacy and other stories from our politics team

Labour's old tricks

It's 2013 all over again at the shadow cabinet table, as Labour's top team disagrees over whether to use the phrase "cost-of-living crisis" – the attack line chosen by the party when Ed Miliband was leader. The slogan is "nonsense" language, according to one shadow cabinet minister, who says it's "not a phrase that anyone outside Westminster uses or that makes immediate sense to people".

Labour's team has been reluctant to abandon the phrase, however, as it is now being "reflected back" to the party through widespread media use. It also crops up in focus groups, but sceptics fear this is only because it is one of the party's headings and that participants are "directed to it". And while there are signs that the shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, is distancing herself from the slogan, it is still sneaking into some of Labour's press releases.

Anoosh Chakelian, Britain editor

China watch

The Foreign Affairs Committee, chaired by the Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat, was due to visit Taiwan from 20 February, but was forced to cancel the trip after several committee members tested positive for Covid-19. Tugendhat – a bold critic of the Chinese Communist Party – told the *New Statesman* that China is watching events in Europe closely. His fear is that Western toleration of borders being changed by force, "which is what we're seeing in Europe today", means that "at some point, we're going to see borders changed by force around the world". The implication for the security of Taiwan is obvious.

Tugendhat has said he will stand in the next Conservative leadership election. Does he believe Boris Johnson has responded well to the crisis in Ukraine? "I think various elements of the British state have responded well," he said.

Freddie Hayward, political reporter



The cost-of-living crisis is "nonsense" language according to one shadow cabinet minister

Bad news for the Good Law Project

The legal whacking the Good Law Project (GLP) suffered in February is big political news and ought to be treated as such. In recent years the GLP has been among the most innovative and the most infuriating groups for Conservative ministers.

In mid-February, in a case the GLP brought jointly with race-equality think tank the Runnymede Trust, it was successfully established that two ministerial appointments – that of Dido Harding as interim chair of the National Institute for Health Protection and Mike Coupe as director of testing at NHS Test and Trace – were in breach of the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act.

What follows from that isn't clear. But in the same judgment the two senior, respected judges, Lord Justice Singh and Mr Justice Swift, attacked the GLP's right to have brought the case in the first place. It could not be right, they said, that an organisation had drafted its objectives so widely "that just about any conceivable public law error by any public authority falls within its remit... The claim by the Good Law Project fails in its entirety."

This dismissal caused an explosion of relief in Tory circles. Matt Hancock, who was health secretary at the time of the appointments, tweeted his delight and denounced Jolyon Maugham, the controversial barrister who directs the group.

If this finally scuppers the GLP, that would be significant. The group currently has 25 full-time staff, a total expected to rise to 40 by the end of the year, around 30,000 people donate every month to it and its budget is £4m-£6m a year.

So, is it over? Maugham told the *New Statesman* that the GLP had often chosen partners with whom to act, sometimes working through them, and sometimes acts alone, and insisted that only the "mix" might be changed by the ruling.

Andrew Marr, political editor

Coventry united

Keir Starmer faced calls to apologise after he was accused of "sneering" at the city of Coventry when asked about action by bin men, who are striking in an industrial dispute with the area's Labour-run council. The trade union Unite has threatened to withdraw funding from Labour unless Starmer backs the strike, potentially deepening the party's reported financial troubles.

Labour's uneasy relationship with unions continued on 18 February after the shadow trade minister Bill Esterson accidentally crossed a picket line at Sheffield University, where lecturers are striking over precarious pay and conditions as part of the UK-wide University and College Union (UCU) action. Jo Grady, the UCU general secretary, tweeted: "Let's hope this is a misunderstanding." Oliver Coppard, Labour's candidate for South Yorkshire mayor, who joined Esterson that day, issued an extensive apology for crossing the picket line in error. The Labour press office, however, told Esterson to stay silent.

Ailbhe Rea, political correspondent

ANDREW MARR



Politics

London's response to the threat of "great man" politics is pathetically inadequate

God rot great men. Vladimir Putin, by any reasonable historical measurement, is a great man. He rose from the ruins of the Soviet system, and the scale of his ambition to rewrite world power politics is still not fully appreciated by Westerners.

If he succeeds, as he may well, all of Europe will be changed. First the devouring of eastern Ukrainian statelets; next, Kyiv; and beyond that, look to the Balkans, the Baltics and much more. Yes, the risks are huge. This may well involve, as Boris Johnson put it, the biggest war in Europe since 1945.

But the prize! Countries and cultures we have learned to treat as near neighbours – the Baltics, Poland, Romania as well as Ukraine – would eventually be tugged into the choke of Muscovite authoritarianism. Westerners still can't quite believe this because the scale of Putin's ambition is beyond our cautious, sceptical, postmodern understanding. Putin is a Napoleonic figure, a giant from our pasts.

So, God rot him. Like the Corsican, he'd reshape his world using, for fuel, the blood of decent folk going about ordinary lives.

On television we've seen them, talking and laughing in their familiar anoraks and bobble-hats, pushing prams, lugging shopping or with children balanced on their shoulders. For them, Putin has prepared a world of grief, disappointment and loneliness; he is a great man.

After our meeting, eight years ago in Sochi, it isn't the ice-blue stare that I most remember. It is the way bureaucrats preparing for his arrival started to twist their mouths, frown and shake, a good 20 minutes before his helicopter landed.

They seemed deeply scared, as if some local god was arriving. He recently publicly humiliated his head of foreign intelligence, who is in a similar state.

Even for those of us lucky enough to live beyond his immediate reach, Putin's influence will be unavoidable. We will do things and think about things we would not otherwise have done. We will take in new refugees, fund and vote for more horrible weapons systems. As economic warfare ricochets in both directions, our online world, and its economy, will become fragile. There may be no post-Covid recovery.

Putin's vision is not absurd. Long before Soviet times, Tsarist Russia thought of itself as a political force straddling Asia and Europe, a socially reactionary superpower with a mighty army. During the 19th and much of the 20th century, in the arts, in the quality of its writing, architecture, music and theatre, Russia had the pre-eminent European culture, even as it struggled to be taken seriously. Putin taps into deep Russia – witness his restoration of the Russian Orthodox Church to the centre of public life.

He is serious about a great reshaping. In a long, rambling speech on 21 February he insisted Ukrainian statehood was a fiction. Remember, then, his words to the Russian parliament in 2005: "The demise of the

The Prime Minister has pledged to clean up "Londongrad". Can he deliver?

Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century... As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory."

Catastrophe. Genuine tragedy. These are the phrases of a man who will not be easy to deflect. And when Putin complains that the West has reneged on promises not to push Nato to Russia's borders after the Soviet collapse, he is not, after all, wrong.

He complains of being fooled, lied to, belittled. Again, not entirely wrong. But none of this – not the long history, nor the behaviour of arrogant Westerners in the 1990s – justifies the appalling project he seems to be embarking upon.

That's a "great man" for you. In the West we now believe in a different leadership model – the gentler, more cautious, rule-bound suits of the European Union and indeed Nato. Some of us are now led by women, with liberal and environmental agendas. European political culture has become, with some obvious exceptions, risk-averse and apologetic. Inevitably, we find it hard to understand Vladimir Putin.

An obvious exception is Boris Johnson, another leader with a touch of the "great man" obsession. Reading biographies of him, it isn't the dysfunctional upbringing or the various deceits and misdemeanours that strike me so much as his long-standing admiration for the heroes of classical Greece and Rome. That's worrying. Great men break the rules made for little people. What answer would Julius Caesar have given to Sue Gray? Or Pericles to the Metropolitan Police? The Conservative Party, still half-hypnotised by its leader, may not fully understand the trap it is now in. Even as Johnson promises to stem the flow of corrupt Russian money into London, it turns out that Lubov Chernukhin, the wife of one of Putin's former ministers, has been giving his government secret advice.

In an excellent scoop, the *Sunday Times* has revealed the Tory "advisory board" of multimillionaire donors clustered around the government's top team, telling ministers to wind down the pandemic and lobbying against higher taxes.

But the network of influential Russians digging deep into British public life goes far beyond Tory advisory boards. A study of Home Office data by the *New Statesman* shows that, since 2008, nearly a fifth of the "golden visas", which allow the super-rich to buy their way to Britain, went to Russians.

In a recent debate on the use of aggressive "lawfare" to silence journalists,

the Conservative MP David Davis cited both Roman Abramovich and the Russia-connected Mohamed Amersi – who also sits on the secret Tory advisory body of big donors. (By the way, the Home Secretary Priti Patel's announcement on 17 February about ending golden visas gives the lie to the claim that back-bench MPs no longer matter, and that ministers don't listen to what happens in the Commons.)

New Statesman readers know the Ukraine crisis may, in the short term, preserve Johnson's leadership. He speaks of his pride in democracy. But modern democracies are based on laws, rules, norms and the separation of powers; they are a bad architectural fit for would-be great men. The pandemic exposed a side of the Prime Minister's character that the country didn't like. But will uprooting Kremlin-connected money from the Conservative establishment be, for him, any easier a task than dealing with the Covid crisis?

Johnson now says that he is going to "open up the matryoshka dolls of Russian-owned companies..." as part of a clean-up of "Londongrad". It is, as we'd expect of him, a compelling image. But given the way power and money works in today's London, can we trust him to deliver?

London's political centre is now, inescapably, a Johnson property. His character, his instincts, touch everything. Conservative MPs must now decide what they think about this. Many are scared to act to remove him as leader, which is unsurprising. Even democratic politics is an earthy, sweaty, animalistic affair (there's one for the English teachers). Johnson is not like Putin, of course, except in seeing himself as the "big dog" for whom all lesser, scurrying creatures must make way.

Thanks to Putin, those backbenchers backing away, looking for any excuse to do nothing, now have another excellent excuse. But they, and the ministers deluding themselves that they will not be personally affected by what's been happening in No 10, will one day have to go to the country as Johnsonites, not as conventional Tories. That's what big dog politics does.

Meanwhile, the opening tranche of UK sanctions announced by Johnson have been seen as pathetically inadequate. Keir Starmer has been restrained but suggested a much tougher approach. Around Westminster, there has been bafflement at the choice of just five industrial banks and three individuals to be sanctioned. There should have been no surprise; London has looked weak for a long time. If Johnson is serious about defending Western norms, decency and the rule of law, he will have to do much better than this. ●

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Letter of the week

Uncovering genocide



I wanted to congratulate the *New Statesman* on its special report on the Uyghur tragedy, especially the article by John Simpson ("Behind Xi Jinping's Great Wall of Iron", 18 February). It was passionate and well informed. Yet I was surprised there was no reference to Geoffrey Nice QC's independent tribunal assessing the alleged genocide. (He prosecuted Slobodan Milošević at the Hague.) Witness after witness and document after document

made clear the scope of oppression of the Uyghurs by the Chinese state.

Perhaps most chilling was the evidence of the population expert who, partly using data released by China, compared the size and nature of the Uyghur population with its Han neighbours. It is clear that by 2040 there will be millions fewer Uyghurs than there ought to be. This is not surprising given forced sterilisations, abortions, family break-ups and the "re-education" camps employed by the Chinese Communist Party. The tribunal's judgment, condemned by China's embassy in London, makes it plain that the genocide is all too real.

Rob Dunster, Rugby, Warwickshire

Alpha the elephant

There would be no risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine (Cover Story, 18 February) if the president of Russia was a woman. None of the tyrants throughout history have been women.

The preponderance of men in positions of power is potentially dangerous, and the current combination of unsavoury alpha males strutting the world stage is creating a perilous situation. This is the elephant in the room that is never addressed.

Mary Slinger, Highnam, Gloucester

Whiff of hypocrisy

Martha Gill (Newsmaker, 11 February) writes that the journalist Holly Watt,

"who helped break the parliamentary expenses scandal" in the *Telegraph*, was accused by irate MPs of failing to "understand the system". The obvious joke was not laboured. Throughout the 12 years I spent at the *Telegraph*,



we journalists understood the system all too well.

Nevertheless, on more than one occasion I was rebuked by the expenses department for scrupulously itemising hotel claims (lunch, phone calls and so on) rather than submitting the bill en bloc. Therefore, it struck me in 2009, at the height of the *Telegraph's* wallowing in the "scandal", that the whiff of attendant hypocrisy was not entirely confined to the editorial floor.

Patrick Barclay, London SW13

Sticking-together plaster

Rachel Cooke's critique of *This Is Going To Hurt* (The Critics, 11 February), an otherwise excellent drama, struck a note with me. The programme shows NHS doctors treating patients – and one another – with contempt. In reality, the NHS functions due to goodwill between staff and patients: we are all the victims of under-resourcing. The abuse doled out between colleagues rings particularly hollow. Having worked as an NHS doctor for more than a decade, I can say the culture is one of camaraderie between doctors, as well as a sense of privilege in treating patients.

Dr Alexander Carpenter, cardiology registrar, Bristol

Mention the war

Andrew Marr asks: "Would MPs remove their leader while an actual war in another European country is happening?" (Politics, 18 February). Didn't something like that happen in 1940? Maybe Neville Chamberlain jumped rather than being pushed, but there was a change of leader while war in another European country – and in this country – was happening.

Dave Sissons, Sheffield

Curtains for austerity

I am surprised to read of curtains in Hove (Down and Out, 28 January). I would have thought no curtain could have survived austerity and the lack of funding for local government.

Jennifer Hopkinson, New Zealand

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Putin's war games

As Russian troops cross the border into Ukraine, the Kremlin continues to twist the narrative

Lawrence Freedman

Why Putin holds all the cards and what might happen next in Ukraine

The war was supposed to start on Monday 21 February. The announcement that the Russian occupation of Ukraine was imminent came not from President Vladimir Putin, who had consistently denied any intention to invade, but from US president Joe Biden. He had been convinced by intelligence assessments that reported not only on the scale of the Russian military build-up on the borders of

Ukraine, and the high state of readiness among its forces, but evidence that orders had been sent out to unit commanders to prepare their tactical plans.

Biden was not alone in his expectation. It was shared by most Western leaders and by many independent analysts. They had been following Russia's preparations since last year, using commercial satellite images and other open-source intelligence, often derived from social media. Now they offered images of tanks with white winter camouflage and infantry fighting vehicles carrying extra fuel, moving from their previous deployment areas into attack positions close to the border, where they were unlikely to stay for long. Lloyd Austin, Biden's secretary of defence, described the forces as "uncoiled" and ready to spring into action.

The date for the war had been pencilled in the diary for some time. The Beijing

Winter Olympics ended on 20 February, so any action taken by Putin after that would not offend China's President Xi Jinping. The date was also supposed to mark the conclusion of Russian military exercises in Belarus, Russia's new client state, with its own border to Ukraine and not far from its capital, Kyiv. Russian troops moving home once the exercises were completed would have been an encouraging sign of de-escalation. Unsurprisingly, the Belarusian government announced that they were going to stay.

There was also the annual nuclear drill on 19 February, involving ballistic and cruise missiles, presided over by Putin himself. This would serve to remind the United States of the possibility of terrifying escalation should it allow itself to get drawn into the coming war. Meanwhile, naval exercises were under way in the Black Sea and Ukraine suffered from cyber attacks – a warning of how a war could start with an attempt to cripple the country's infrastructure.

To cap it all off, as the US had also forewarned, there were the inevitable staged, fake incidents in the Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics", the enclaves held by Russian-sponsored separatists in eastern Ukraine. As Putin would not wish to violate the UN Charter and launch an aggressive war without any provocation, one would have to be arranged. So it came on 17 February, as separatists first launched a barrage of artillery fire across their border with government-held territory, hitting a kindergarten as they did so.

To the separatists' frustration this failed to goad the Ukrainians into retaliation. Nonetheless they continued with their charade, providing their own fanciful maps of the coming offensive directed against them, conscripting men to fight and ordering civilians to evacuate across the border into Russia. The video appeals of the separatist leaders were shown to be pre-recorded, the odd explosion to demonstrate Ukrainian aggression crudely staged, and the evacuation a shambles, as those residents who followed the order found themselves bussed to cold camps with little food. If the situation was not so serious this theatre would have appeared risible.

All this confirmed the performative nature of the whole exercise. It was as if sometime last year Russian planners had scripted an unfolding conflict, moving up their own ladder of escalation, culminating in these carefully orchestrated last steps. A potential downside was that doing so conspicuously meant that there could be no surprise, but this was not really a problem for Moscow. The Ukrainians had brought in defensive weaponry from abroad and worked out how to impose as much pain as possible on the invaders. They were, however, always going to be outgunned and potentially overwhelmed in a conven-



tional fight. Their best deterrent, in addition to threats of economic sanctions from the US and its allies, lay in reminding Putin that wars such as this are easier to start than to end, especially if they lead to an interminable occupation of a hostile population.

Instead of the loss of surprise, Moscow got the benefit of intimidation. The unavoidably transparent nature of the build-up engendered a sense of intense crisis in which Putin seemed to hold all the cards, creating incentives for diplomatic initiatives that might help him get what he wanted without a fight. This could be an object lesson in coercive diplomacy, with a credible threat backing his political demands. Yet few concessions came his way, and the alliance held together, while the Kremlin undermined the impact of the build-up by regularly denying any intention to invade Ukraine, insisting that suggestions to the contrary were the

products of fevered Western imaginations. Biden was mocked for continually saying that war was days away.

Curiously, no explicit demands were made of Ukraine's government. There were no ultimatums. The Russian line was that the demonstrations that led to the flight in February 2014 of the more pro-Russian former president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, was fascistic and unconstitutional. When Volodymyr Zelensky became president in 2019 he wanted to improve relations with Russia. This would mean finding a way to implement the February 2015 Minsk-2 protocol, which would give more autonomy to the two enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk in return for them becoming once more fully part of Ukraine. Ukraine's parliament, however, has always been hostile to the constitutional changes that action would require.

Putin concluded last year that Zelensky

could not deliver what he wanted. Only Biden appeared a potential interlocutor, with the contributions of other Western leaders dismissed. It therefore made sense that, in a last-minute effort to avoid war, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, appeared to have persuaded Putin to agree to more diplomacy if it meant a summit meeting with Biden.

The morning of 21 February therefore opened with uncertainty about whether war was on the way or there was to be an opportunity for more diplomacy. Then events took a stranger turn. The world was invited to watch an extraordinary televised meeting of Russia's Security Council, with Putin (sitting at a safe distance) asking its members to opine one by one of whether Donetsk and Luhansk should be recognised as independent states as requested by their Russian-separatist leaders. ▶

◀ In place of the drama of war there were a series of wooden, staged contributions, explaining how Zelensky had no interest in implementing the Minsk-2 protocol, yet at the same time was also authorising atrocities in these territories and even offensives mounted against Russian territory. The danger of Ukraine being allowed to join Nato was described as an opportunity for an aggressive Kyiv to attempt to retake Crimea and the enclaves, knowing that its new allies would be obliged to back it with their own military strength. (Such a scenario is dependent upon a complete misreading of Nato's Article 5, which can only require alliance members to "take the actions it deems necessary to assist the ally attacked", and not those the ally might demand.)

At first Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, appeared to say, it would be worthwhile meeting his American counterpart, Antony Blinken, to talk about Russia's ideas for European security, including banning further Nato enlargement. By the end of the meeting, however, Lavrov appeared to have changed his mind and now said there would be no point. Putin concluded the meeting promising his own decision.

Soon after came an announcement that Putin would recognise the enclaves, and he would make a televised address. When his speech came it took the form of a full-blooded rant, drenched in tendentious history. First he challenged the concept of Ukraine as a separate state, then moved on to the perfidious treatment of Russia by Western powers, including Nato with its enlargement, turned to the "Euromaidan coup" of 2014, which he claimed was financed and blessed by the US and had led to an illegitimate government in Kyiv, one that now wanted its own nuclear weapons.

The speech ended with accounts of the daily provocations by Ukrainian forces in Donetsk and Luhansk. After this tirade, which seemed to be building up to a full declaration of war that would unleash the 150,000 troops surrounding Ukraine, the brief announcement that the People's Republics would be recognised was almost anti-climactic. If anything this was a step back for Putin because it would mean that he was stuck with paying the bills and, with the Minsk process dead, he would be giving up on exercising any influence over Kyiv. There would be no summit with Biden, or much further diplomacy.

After all the speculation about a massive military operation, 21 February ended with forces rolling into Ukraine on a "peace-keeping mission", hardly a trivial matter but not quite what had been anticipated.

On 22 February Putin said that – dangerously – he is supporting the separatists in the boundaries they would like to have rather than those they currently occupy. It is less clear whether he intends to use force right away to achieve this, but the situation is unstable and threatens further escalation. Putin's final words of his address were: "All responsibility for continued bloodshed will lay solely on the Ukraine leadership". The speculation on Putin's future intentions continues and is unlikely to abate unless and until all those troops return to their home barracks.

Jeremy Cliffe

How the Donbas region became a grotesque theatre of war

“Can you rule out the possibility of a war in Europe?” It was a straightforward question, put to Vladimir Putin by the German journalist Michaela Kuefner at a press conference with Olaf Scholz in Moscow on 15 February. The Russian president replied: “We witnessed war in Europe, started by Nato against Yugoslavia... It happened. With no sanctions from the UN Security Council.” The German chancellor did not leave unchallenged this implicit comparison between Russia's threatening military build-up around Ukraine today and Nato's intervention in 1999 to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo: “It was different. There was a threat of genocide.” Putin, raising a finger, interjected: “What is happening in the Donbas today is genocide.”

In retrospect, this nonsense claim about the actions of Ukraine's government looks like a significant turning point in the flurry of diplomacy over recent weeks. Its starkness left little room for de-escalation, seemingly confirming Western claims that Putin was by this point set on war. It indicated that it would be in the Donbas region, in eastern Ukraine, that Russia's new military assault on the country would come. And it hinted at the way Putin would justify this attack, with a garbled pastiche of the language of human rights and liberal intervention. All of which culminated in his announcement on 21 February of, in

effect, a new Russian invasion of the Donbas.

To understand the significance of the Donbas in the now-unfolding conflict, it helps to grasp its history. The region's name is an abbreviation of “Donets Coal Basin”, a reference to the rich coal seams on which its industrial economy was founded. Today it is divided into the two oblasts (provinces) of Donetsk and Luhansk – both cities established by British businessmen during the Industrial Revolution. About three quarters of the region's residents speak Russian, not Ukrainian, as their first language; it has close economic links to Rostov across the border in Russia, and in the past it has voted for politicians favouring close links to Moscow, such as the Donetsk-born former president Viktor Yanukovich.

Yanukovich fell from power in 2014 after his bid to stop Ukraine signing an association agreement with the EU sparked mass protests. Groups opposed to the country's new, pro-Western government took to the streets in the Donbas. This then escalated into fighting between forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) – which had declared independence following a bogus referendum – and the government. Though backed by Russia, which also moved to annex Crimea in Ukraine's south, the separatists were repelled by Ukraine's armed forces until Russia invaded with conventional forces.

A weakened Ukrainian government signed up to a peace deal (“Minsk-2”) in early 2015 that envisaged restoring its control of the state border in return for substantial autonomy for Donetsk and Luhansk. But the two sides interpret the agreement differently, and the ceasefire has been repeatedly violated along the 500km-long line separating the areas held by Russia-backed rebels (about a third of the Donbas) from those still in government hands. Meanwhile, the rest of Ukraine has continued its post-Yanukovich move westwards – economically, socially and culturally. It is this, not some hallucinated atrocity, that Putin wants to reverse by massing almost 200,000 troops on the country's borders.

Putin's method has been to mimic the West's justifications for humanitarian interventions like the one to protect Kosovo in 1999 (a technique that the BBC's Mark Urban has called “Kosplay”). His comment to Scholz was just one part of an unconvincing piece of theatre, casting Ukraine as a genocidal terrorist state and Russia as a liberal human rights defender. Other elements included a car bombing outside a government building and claims of mass graves and a planned chemical attack against civilians. On 17 February there were more ceasefire violations than in the whole of January, including the shelling

As Russia invades, Ukraine is surrounded

Russian military build-up and invasion of east Ukraine



of a kindergarten on Ukrainian-held territory (a false flag attack, Russian state media claimed). The following day the puppet governments of the DPR and LPR announced a mass evacuation of civilians to Russia.

Relatively few left. At the Uspenka border crossing between Russia and the self-proclaimed DPR on 20 February, uniformed members of the youth wing of the All-Russian People's Front, a pro-Putin organisation, waited at the border gate, carrying the pensioners' luggage, and handing out bars of Alyonka chocolate, an iconic Soviet brand, to the children. For the most of the day, they outnumbered the evacuees they had been sent to help.

Most of the evacuees who agreed to speak admitted only to confusion about what was going on in their home city. "I don't know what's happening in Donetsk," said Tatiana Nikolaevna, a frail 67-year-old who had fled the separatist capital's suburbs in the dead of night on her own, after explosions became more frequent. "They told us to leave, and I thought it was best to do so. I lived through 2014, and didn't want to go through that again."

The following day the Kospay reached its height with one of the strangest spectacles that world politics has produced in years. Sitting at a desk in the Kremlin's Hall of the Order of St Catherine, Putin watched as

members of his security council filed up to a podium and – with some looking downbeat – made the case for recognising the independence of the DPR and LPR. At one point a flustered Sergei Naryshkin, head of the foreign intelligence service, gave the game away by saying he backed the two statelets becoming part of Russia. Putin rebuked him, "That's not what we're discussing!"

If some of Putin's minions seemed uncertain about this course of action, that might be because the Russian public has received little preparation for any upcoming war. The crescendo of propaganda about Kyiv's supposedly genocidal designs came only recently and is hardly convincing (one video widely shared on social media depicts a man whose leg has supposedly just been blown off by a Ukrainian artillery strike, but inadvertently shows that he already has a prosthesis).

Rostov, 100km from the border and the destination for many of the Donbas "evacuees" to Russia, is a case in point. The city has close cultural links to Ukraine. Most people have family, friends, or at least someone they know in Donetsk and Luhansk, and sometimes in Kyiv and Lviv. The mood on 21 February was mixed. "If the Khokly [ethnic slur for Ukrainians] are shelling, then of course our army will stop them," said Dmitry, a driver, echoing some of the bombast emanating

from the Kremlin. "Seventy, 80 per cent of the people in Donetsk are Russians, with Russian passports. They're our people. You have to understand that." But Kirill, a barman, was concerned. "Just as long as we don't have a war," he said. "That's the one thing we can all hope for."

Later that evening the president delivered a rambling, paranoid address to the nation in which he brought together the fantasy version of reality in the Donbas that he, his cronies, the separatist leaders of the DPR and LPR, and the Russian state media had woven over recent days. Putin alleged torture and killings. He railed against "those who embarked on the path of violence, bloodshed, lawlessness" and "do not recognise any other solution to the Donbas issue except for the military one". Then he announced what he called the "long overdue" decision to recognise the two self-proclaimed republics.

The following day Russia's parliament approved a "peacekeeping" mission to the Donbas and Putin endorsed rebel claims to the entire region, not just the areas they currently hold – a move close to an outright declaration of war on Ukraine. As the *New Statesman* goes to press, Western governments are confirming that new Russian forces have already crossed the border.

The picture is grim. The recognition kills diplomatic efforts to revive the Minsk-2 deal. It provides an opportunity for the separatist leaders to request military intervention from Russia to "defend" civilians. Moscow's vitriolic rhetoric about Ukraine leaves little room for a climb-down. On 22 February Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said Ukraine has no right to sovereignty: "No one can assert that the Ukrainian regime, starting with the state coup of 2014, represents all the people who live on the territory of the Ukrainian state." Even Kyiv government sources – more sanguine than Western allies in recent weeks – expect some form of new conflict. "I think escalation in Donbas is nearly a certainty," says one. "Putin wants Minsk-3 but thinks he has to have some military victory for that to be achieved."

All of which will mean more suffering, most of all for the people of the Donbas. More shelling, more destruction of civilian infrastructure, more baseless and distressing Russian claims of ethnic cleansing and staged outrages to justify new acts of aggression. And for those who do not flee: confusion, destitution and violence. Such is the fate of those playing bit parts in a grotesque play being written and directed in Moscow by the delusional dramatist in the Kremlin. Even Putin may not yet know how it will end. ●

Reporting contributed by Felix Light

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PHILIP COLLINS



The Public Square

The monarchy desperately needs reform. First, we must allow the sovereign to retire

A defining historical moment is coming soon. At the age of 95, Queen Elizabeth II cannot reign much longer. Looking back on our time, historians in years to come will surely couple Brexit and the succession of a new king as the events that mark the end of an era in the history of the nation, not just the history of the monarchy.

The Duke of Edinburgh has gone. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have retired to California. The Prince of Wales's charity is under investigation by the Metropolitan Police and his brother Andrew has just paid a handsome settlement to forestall accusations of sexual assault. The Queen has now contracted Covid and, in the year of her platinum jubilee, the intimation of mortality can hardly come at a lower ebb for the House of Windsor.

The concept of the royal family works when the family is a happy and stable one. George III and Charlotte and their brood of children, Victoria and Albert at Osborne House, the stolid virtues of George V and Queen Mary, or George VI with his young princesses all embodied the idea of a national family that seems charming and apt. But a family on the edge of a breakdown is not such a grand idea.

This has happened before, but never in the age of maximum publicity. The sons of George III caroused their way through society. Edward VII started out at the gaming tables and went morally downwards from there. Edward VIII presaged his abdication with his youthful penchant for married women and American cocktails. The behaviour of the current crop of second-tier royals is not much worse than their predecessors.

There is just more daylight let in on the magic these days.

This light has revealed some terrible things. The Metropolitan Police is investigating claims that aides to the Prince of Wales offered to help Mahfouz Marei Mubarak bin Mahfouz, a Saudi businessman, with a knighthood in exchange for donations to a foundation set up by Charles. But it is his younger brother, Andrew, who has brought the family into disrepute. His out-of-court settlement with Virginia Giuffre (who had made serious allegations of sexual abuse against Andrew) at least avoids the media circus of a trial. But the damage is done.

There was some understandable indignation about whether public funds will be used to pay for the Duke of York's settlement. Andrew receives a stipend from the Queen's Duchy of Lancaster income. But, in a way, the money will derive from public funds no matter which pot is raided. The bill does not have to be paid directly from the civil list for this to be public money. As Phillip Hall showed 30 years ago in his book *Royal Fortune: Tax, Money and the Monarchy*, the wealth of the House of Windsor derives largely from the profit that Prince Albert made on the public purse when he professionalised the royal operation in the 1840s.

Before the age of common longevity, an heir would not have wasted his life waiting

The House of Windsor's princes illustrate a paradox of modern monarchy. If it is possible to capture an age in a sentence, this has been one in which power has seeped from institutions to individuals. The great democracy of public opinion is displayed daily on social media platforms. Yet monarchy cannot be popular in this sense. Its authority derives not from the people but from the right of birth.

The monarchy's concession to the era of celebrity has been to promote the individual characters of the royal play. There is a danger in this strategy in that the institution is subordinated to the fleeting popularity of the individuals who hold office. This is fine when the top job is held by the Queen, who was cited by 45 per cent of respondents to a recent Ipsos Mori poll as their favourite royal. The monarchy has been fortunate with the monarch, but that cannot last forever. Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, is the sixth most popular royal.

If the future of the monarchy now rests on it being popular – in the public relations sense rather than the philosophical sense – then it must be updated. The long wait of the would-be King Charles suggests some simple changes. Before the age of common longevity, there was little prospect of the heir to the throne wasting a whole lifetime waiting for the job, as Charles has been forced to do.

The first implication of this is that every member of the royal family who is not the sovereign ought to be in productive work. It's no kind of life simply waiting for the generation above to pass on. Prince Charles has been waiting for 73 years already and it is absurd that his best years should have disappeared in his role as the heir to the throne. His eldest son, Prince William, is already close to 40.

There is no reason that the serving monarch should not stand down at the usual retirement age. Queen Elizabeth could have retired 30 years ago, just after the tenure of Mrs Thatcher, around the time that provides the drama for the upcoming season of Netflix's *The Crown*. Prince Charles would have taken office in his early forties and served until retirement at the age of 65 in 2014. William would then have succeeded to the throne at the age of 31, with three decades of service ahead of him. His own son, Prince George, would then be primed to take over, all being well, at the age of 35. It would all fit so much better with the life cycle, and it would make the most of the available talent, such as it is. ●

Louise Perry writes on Prince Andrew, page 37

When walls came tumbling down

Fifty years after Richard Nixon's historic visit to Beijing heralded a new era of diplomacy, the divisions between the US and China are deepening again

By Katie Stallard

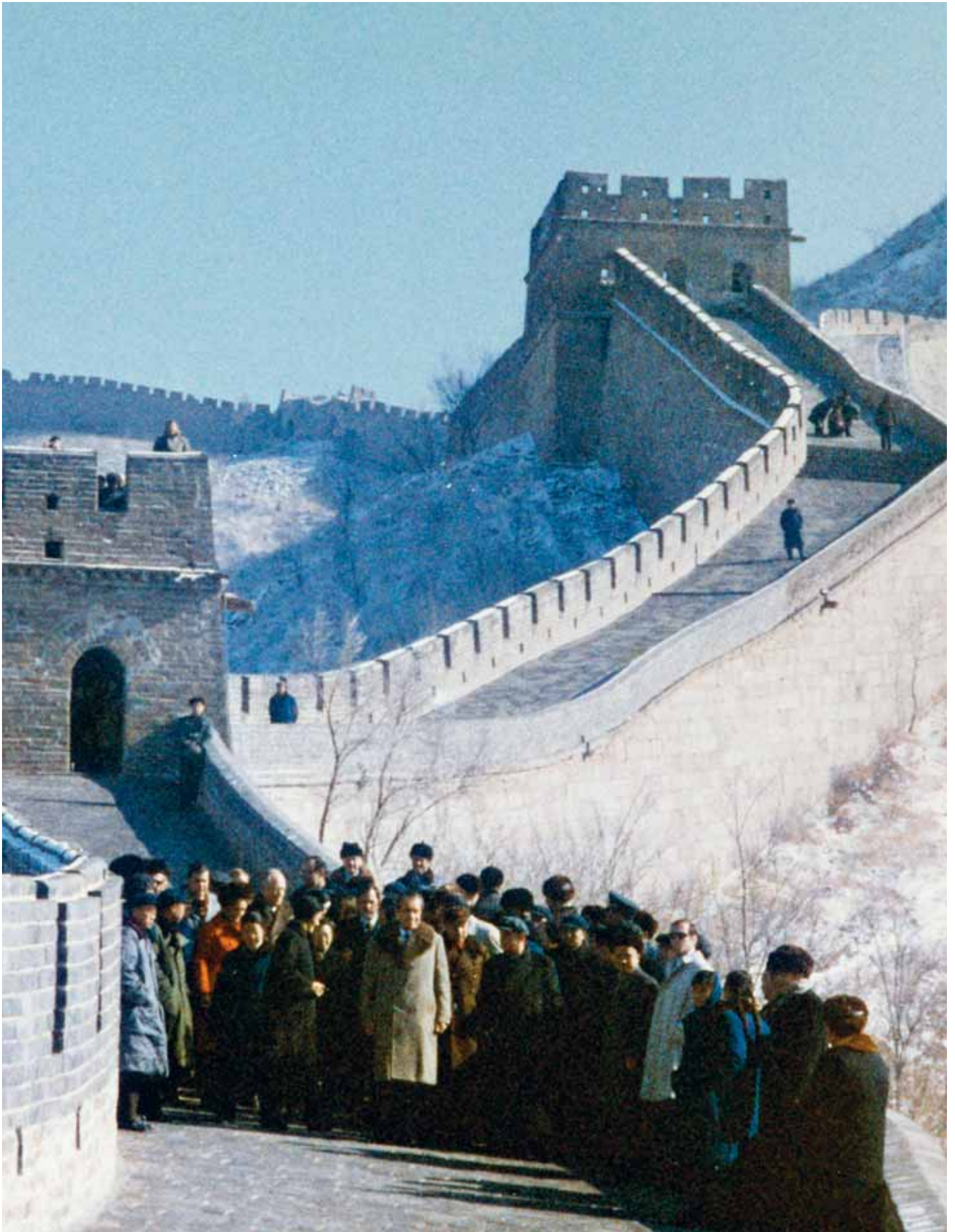
Leaving for China on 17 February 1972, the US president Richard Nixon gave a short speech to the excited crowds that had gathered on the White House lawn. Wearing a plain grey suit and looking slightly surprised by the number of people who had arrived to see him off, he described the “historic mission” that lay ahead and invoked the words of the American astronauts who had landed on the moon three years earlier. If there was one message he hoped to deliver, he said, it was this: “We came in peace for all mankind.”

Nixon called his visit to China the “week that changed the world”, and it did. It altered the course of the Cold War, and set the US and China on the path to formal diplomatic relations and decades of burgeoning trade and cultural exchange. But the trip also marked the beginning of a complicated, often painful story that is still playing out today. The fundamental differences that hindered negotiations between the nations then, such as the disagreement over the status of Taiwan, remain critical fault lines in the relationship 50 years later.

“This was a moment when a door opened between China and the US,” Rana Mitter, author of *China's Good War* and a historian at the University of Oxford, told me. “But the door only opened a small crack.” Beyond the lofty declarations about achieving world peace, the real motivation for the visit on both sides was more complex. Then, as now, there were elements of idealism and pragmatism in the calculations of Washington and Beijing. Domestic politics, the international balance of power and economic considerations all played a role. Indeed, if we want to understand the roots of the rapidly intensifying rivalry between the two powers, it is worth returning to the origins of their relationship in 1972.

The US and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were nominally enemies at that time. They fought each other during the Korean War (1950–53), and stood on opposing sides of the Cold War. The US refused to recognise Mao Zedong's regime, which had been in power in Beijing since 1949, as the legitimate government of China, instead maintaining diplomatic relations with Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang government on the island of Taiwan. In 1958 the US briefly considered launching a nuclear strike on the PRC after Mao began shelling Taiwan-controlled territories.

China was also then in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, with Chairman Mao urging young student radicals to “bombard the headquarters” and tear down all obstacles to revolutionary progress. Amid the violence and fervour he had stoked, there was, in some quarters, strong opposition to the idea of Mao hosting the leader of the US. “There were people in the top leadership who thought this ▶



GRANGER, NYC / TOPFOTO

Nixon in China: the US president (centre left) was an unlikely candidate to bring about a rapprochement with the PRC when he visited in 1972

The NS Essay

◀ was absolutely appalling,” said Mitter. This included the “gang of four”, a hard-left political faction within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing. “The gang of four wanted no part of an opening to the capitalist world,” Mitter added. “They really pointed the finger at Zhou Enlai [China’s then premier and the lead architect of the Beijing negotiations] and said, ‘Why on Earth are you doing this?’”

Nixon was a particularly unlikely candidate to bring about the rapprochement. He had built a reputation as a “red-baiter” during his early political career, denouncing various public figures for their communist allegiances, including towards “Red China”, as he and others liked to call it. For his part, Mao had long railed against the “US imperialists” and their capitalist “running dogs” as “the most rampant enemy of the people of the world”.

But the global balance of power was shifting, and for both Nixon and Mao, their inher-

ent mistrust of one another was subsumed by what they perceived as a greater threat: the Soviet Union. Although Beijing and Moscow had once declared an “unbreakable” and “eternal” bond, by March 1969 relations had deteriorated, with military clashes on their shared border over an island they both claimed, called Zhenbao or Damanskii by the opposing sides. During what became known as the Sino-Soviet split, the two powers also launched political attacks against each other as each claimed to be the true leader of the communist world. Mao was so concerned about the possibility of a large-scale Soviet attack that residents were mobilised to dig air raid shelters and stockpile supplies needed to survive a nuclear strike. As the fear of war intensified that September, four top commanders in China’s People’s Liberation Army suggested playing the “American card”, and allying “with the less dangerous enemy in order to confront the more dangerous enemy”.

On the other side of the Pacific, Nixon was coming to a similar conclusion: that the Sino-Soviet split presented an opportunity to cultivate the less dangerous enemy. “We simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbours,” he had concluded in a 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article. Nixon also wanted Mao’s help in extracting the US from the Vietnam War by persuading Beijing to cut off support for North Vietnam. There were domestic political considerations too. With the American economy stalling and his re-election campaign looming in November 1972, Nixon and his advisers were aware of the positive attention he would receive if the gamble paid off. In that case, he could position himself as the architect of the opening to China.

It was still unclear when Nixon landed in Beijing on 21 February 1972 whether he would even meet Mao. Henry Kissinger, the US national security adviser, recounted the “strangely muted” atmosphere as Nixon and his team drove through the Chinese capital on a bitterly cold winter morning. The streets had been “cleared of onlookers”, he recalled, and the president’s arrival was relegated to the final item on the Chinese state television evening news. In truth, the Chinese leader was eager to meet Nixon, even if he didn’t want the president to know it. “Mao was as excited as I had ever seen him,” the Chinese leader’s doctor, Li Zhisui, wrote in his memoirs. As soon as Nixon had arrived at his guesthouse, he was summoned for an audience with Mao.

The official photographs show the two men smiling broadly as they shake hands, both plainly recording their new friendship for the world – and especially the Soviet government – to see. Mao joked that he had “voted for”

Nixon and said he liked “rightists” because they were easier to deal with than the left. (This presumably only applied outside China: at home, he had presided over the brutal Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957–59, in which hundreds of thousands of alleged rightists were sentenced to hard labour and, in some cases, to death.) The two men talked for more than an hour, but very little of substance was discussed. Kissinger noted Mao’s use of “sarcastic evasion” through which the Chinese leader made it clear he did not want to discuss the “troublesome questions”, such as the Soviet threat. Mao left the detailed negotiations concerning, among other things, the future of Taiwan to his premier Zhou Enlai, to be carried out over the following days.

The greatest achievement of the visit, beyond it happening in the first place, was the Shanghai Communiqué. In particular, one single paragraph, which Kissinger said had taken two nearly all-night sessions to agree, cleared the way for the US-China relationship that followed (although the details would be negotiated over the next seven years before diplomatic relations were formalised on 1 January 1979 and Washington switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing). More accurately, it was an agreement to disagree, and to set aside the issue that had provoked the most profound difficulties between them: the status of Taiwan.

The formulation they hammered out, which would later be incorporated into what was known in Washington as the “One China” policy, stated that “the United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China”. But the US declined to say whether it agreed with that position. It was an elegant obfuscation that enabled both nations to sidestep the issue in pursuit of their economic and security goals, but it did nothing to address the underlying and still unresolved tensions surrounding Beijing’s claim to sovereignty over Taiwan.

Fifty years later, Taiwan remains a source of apparently irreconcilable difference between Washington and Beijing. Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, now both senior members of the Biden administration’s National Security Council, argued in a 2019 *Foreign Affairs* essay that Taiwan represented the “greatest unclaimed success in the history of US-Chinese relations”, but that assertion has become harder to maintain in recent months.

“It depends on your definition of success,” said Ivan Kanapathy, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, who served on the National Security Council as director for China, Taiwan and Mongolia under Donald Trump





Hall of mirrors: Xi Jinping (centre) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, 2 January 2019, giving a speech in which he described unification with Taiwan as “inevitable”

and Joe Biden. “Certainly, we prevented a war for years, but from Beijing’s perspective, they can’t be thinking this is a success. Every day that they don’t have Taiwan is a failure.”

Admiral Philip Davidson, at the time the US’s most senior officer in the Indo-Pacific region, assessed in March 2021 that a Chinese invasion of the island was possible within the next six years. In January 2022 Beijing’s ambassador to Washington, Qin Gang, warned of the danger of military conflict between China and the US over Taiwan. The issue had been deferred, Kanapathy told me, but that is not the same as it being dealt with. “In a similar manner to climate change, we have leveraged the future. We have left a more dangerous situation for future generations.”

The other fundamental disagreement that has persisted through the last half-century is the degree to which China was ever prepared to reform its political system. The idea that bringing China into the “family of nations”, as Nixon put it, would “induce change” and bring about liberalisation in the country has failed to deliver the expected results.

For instance, critics of China cite its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 as the first in a series of “broken promises” by Beijing to play by international rules and open up its markets, and perhaps some political freedoms too, in return for integration into the global economy. While China’s economy developed rapidly, liberal reforms did not follow WTO membership, and two decades later the CCP has

only strengthened its authoritarian control.

“Looking back on the campaign to get congressional support, there’s no doubt in my mind that we oversold it,” said Susan Shirk, who served as Bill Clinton’s deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, and now directs the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego. “But we did believe, and I still believe, that greater economic openness does create pressure inside China for greater freedom for individuals.”

“The major dispute today is over why China hasn’t become more like the United States,” said Yu Jie, a senior research fellow on China at Chatham House think tank. “But in fact, China never intended to become like the United States. If you go back and look at the public record of Deng Xiaoping and China’s other leaders, they never said that joining the WTO would induce political reform.”

But the idea that Beijing has failed to hold up its end of the bargain, and has exploited its access to the international system, has fuelled some of the most pointed attacks from US leaders and lawmakers in recent years. During his 2016 election campaign, Trump frequently claimed that China was “raping” the US, taking its jobs and factories. Joe Biden put it in less crude terms, but he reiterated the same basic belief, that China would “eat our lunch” and was determined to overtake the US as the “most powerful country in the world”.

For Yu Jie, this shift in economic power is

the most significant factor in how the relationship has changed, and unravelled, since 1972. At the time of Nixon’s visit, China’s economy was around a tenth of the size of the US’s, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991, liberal democracy seemed to be strengthening and spreading across the world.

“It was the... golden age of globalisation,” Yu told me. “America was extremely confident. But now the power parity is very different.” After the global financial crisis in 2008 and the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, which is predicted to overtake the US as the world’s largest by 2030, it is China that is increasingly confident in the strength of its political system.

That growth in confidence was on display at a fiery summit between the US and China in Alaska in March 2021, which exposed how dire relations between the two countries have become. Instead of the expected bland opening remarks, China’s top diplomat Yang Jiechi delivered a scathing 16-minute tirade and warned his American counterparts that they no longer “had the qualification... to speak to China from a position of strength”. His comments, along with an image of the two sides facing off became a popular meme on social media in China, where the country’s diplomatic “fighting spirit” was celebrated. The US and China have long had their differences and deep disagreements, but unlike in 1972, it seemed this time that neither side was making an effort to hide them.

In the end, even Nixon grew pessimistic about the future of the relationship. He told his biographer he thought conflict between the US and China was inevitable. “It might be a shooting war. It might be an economic war. But [the countries’] interests were fundamentally different over the long term. And eventually they would clash,” his biographer recalled him saying. Nixon said it would be up to his successors to prevent this.

Instead, tensions are steadily growing. Kissinger, who is now 98, has warned that we are “in the foothills” of a new cold war. This time there is no greater enemy, like the Soviet Union, to align against, and popular nationalism on both sides is fuelling ever more combative positions. A US president who attempted to reach out to China today would be vilified by their political opponents as weak, perhaps even treasonous. It is far safer for the leaders of both nations to signal strength and uncompromising resolve.

Half a century after Nixon toured the Great Wall of China and called for the barriers dividing the world – both physical and ideological – to be brought down, those divisions are building once again. A new great wall is going up. ●



Angela Rayner, photographed in her constituency of Ashton-under-Lyne for the *New Statesman* by Linda Brownlee

“The Tories fear me because I say it how I see it”

In an era of slick politicians, Angela Rayner is a throwback to an older style of Labour politics. She has been mocked, abused and underestimated. Is she destined to lead her party and even the country?

At Holy Trinity Primary School in Ashton-under-Lyne, a Year 6 class have been waiting for a visit from their local MP. They are going to report on a litter pick they organised, and a patch of land they campaigned to have cleared by the council. Angela Rayner sails in, black mask and long black coat making her look a bit like Batman. She is not the type to kneel down and look at the children's drawings. “See, this is politics,” she tells them. “You saw something you didn't like, you took action.” Then she asks, “Who knows what partygate is?” Twenty-eight hands go up. “Who wants Boris to stay?” No one moves.

“I just wanted to give them respect,” she explains, while having a cigarette outside and leaning on her police car. (Rayner has travelled in one since becoming deputy leader of the Labour Party in 2020 and receiving death threats.) “Rather than a paternalistic ‘oh, you're doing good’,” she continues. “It was more of an empowerment message: ‘Your aspirations and challenges are important.’”

There will be five or six cigarette breaks on a busy constituency day like this. Rayner is generally ahead of her entourage in order to get one in: she takes them leaning elegantly against walls, or round back-exits, like a rock star at the stage door.

It is late January, and after weeks of restrictions Rayner's surgery has just started in person again, in the library in Droylsden, Greater Manchester, four miles east of the city centre. For security reasons it is by appointment only, though today's single visitor was a no show. Instead, two veteran Labour councillors, Ged Cooney and Barrie Holland, come to chat about housing developments, among other things.

“We need to take back Scotland, Angela,” says Barrie, with a clench of the fist. “The difference is, now we look like we could win.”

“I want Boris to stay put,” says Ged. “He's the best recruitment drive we've got.”

Rayner tells them she's trying to tempt Rolls Royce to the area with its new production plant: the men seem quietly impressed.

“She is a campaigner,” Cooney tells me later. “I remember Barbara Castle speaking with the miners – Angela has that enthusiasm. A bit direct on some issues, but what do I want? I'm not asking someone to go up to parliament and just sit there. I've had my share of silent MPs. She is raising issues from her own background and life experiences.”

Is she popular with the old left? “She is what she is, and you have to get by with that. I deal with some of the fallouts as chair of the constituency Labour Party. We're not always going to agree, but generally she's liked because she's opinionated. People who were not supporters were texting when she was at the dispatch box, and they were impressed.” ▶

Interview

◀ Before her surgery, Rayner talked to me without her aides around. Her manner had shifted slightly: her large, deep-set blue eyes locked in and her voice was softer. Her own family still live in the area. She has told the story of her childhood often: her mother was unable to read or write, and suffered from bipolar disorder, so that Rayner became one of her principal carers as a child. She became a mother herself at 16.

Rayner tells me when her eldest son was two she had to find her mother an assisted living place. Her mother was unable to cope after the death of Rayner's grandmother, a stable figure upon whom the Rayner children had relied for hot meals and baths. After being diagnosed with cancer Rayner's grandmother had asked her daughter to administer a fatal dose of morphine; she didn't, but it prompted a crisis. Her mother is in a "good place" now, Rayner says: she watches PMQs, and worries about her daughter's safety.

Rayner knows that anyone with an interest has already heard this part of her story. Retelling it now serves a purpose other than disclosure; there is something unconscious, almost automatic about it. Her childhood is the spine of her politics: it shapes her thinking on education, the role of women in power, the economy, the divides within the left. It is the experience from which her ambition has arisen. It is not just the experience of poverty but of mental illness and unwieldy levels of responsibility placed on immature shoulders. As such, it sheds light on the emotional reasons someone might go into politics, or indeed seek power – in much the same way that Rayner started clubbing when she was 14: to put it all outward, to find definition from others, to prove something over and over, as though afraid it might all slip away.

I ask, as we drive to her next appointment, what she might have been had she not become a politician, expecting a playful answer – as a teenager, she wrote to British Airways to enquire about being an air stewardess. She replies quickly: "I think I would have been the secretary general of Unison." Her aides explode with laughter. "Does that sound arrogant?" She looks surprised. But Rayner has never aimed for anything less than the top.

In the corridors of Westminster, an aide says, the deputy leader is impossible to keep up with because of her long legs. Today she

is 5ft 10in, but only in her black vegan platform trainers, decorated with blue and red flowers, and a three-inch sole that flanges out like the rubber skirt beneath a hovercraft. She exploits a public obsession with the shoes of female politicians, which to date have been nothing like hers: Rayner's are like toys, deliberate talking points. In 2015, six months after she was first elected, she tried to get her hands on a limited edition pair of Star Wars shoes (the heel was a little R2-D2) and believed herself to be on a pre-order list. When she discovered the shoes could only be bought in person, she wrote an angry complaint on Commons letterhead, which was duly shared with the press.

She probably wouldn't make that mistake now, but the past year has damaged as well as boosted Rayner's reputation. After Labour's defeat in the Hartlepool by-election in March 2021 there was a failed attempt to demote her. The Labour leader Keir Starmer removed Rayner from her role as campaign manager, but after emergency negotiations she came out with the epic title she has now: shadow chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and shadow secretary of state for the future of work – in effect, a promotion.

When Starmer announced plans to reinstate the electoral college system for leadership elections last September, it was reported that Rayner was against it. At a party conference fringe event, she described the Tories as "homophobic, racist, misogynist... scum". Starmer distanced himself ("He wasn't refusing to defend me, he was just being Keir," she says now). In interviews, when asked whether she wants to be prime minister, Rayner winkingly says she wouldn't say no; facing Boris Johnson at the dispatch box in January, she told him there would soon be a vacancy for PM, and didn't deny that she'd like to fill it.

The feeling, one source inside the Labour Party told me, is that Rayner went to last year's conference like a leader-in-waiting and pitched it wrong, losing allies, and hasn't recovered: "Her team wouldn't worry about a front-page story about a row with Starmer if it advanced her short-term needs, but that's a dangerous game to play." As if the pair have recently sat down with a couples' therapist, Rayner considers the reasons for their clashes. "I'd be very upfront and in your face if I

"I'll never apologise for the last Labour government. Did we get it all right? No, but we did so much!"

think something's wrong, whereas Keir would analyse it and be more subdued, and probably more reflective. I think we've got to a position where I understand that Keir's way is not about him being dismissive, in the same way that Keir understands my way isn't about me being combative or aggressive."

She tells – and it is still rather moving – the story of their first meeting as leader and deputy, when the Prime Minister was "very poorly in intensive care". She'd had Covid, Starmer hadn't: the first part of the conversation considered what would happen if Johnson didn't make it. The second discussed Rayner's role if Starmer became unwell. "Tom Watson and Jeremy Corbyn had a very different relationship," she says. (Their differences were such that deputy Watson voted against Corbyn when Owen Smith challenged him for the leadership in 2016.) "I absolutely believe that Keir would make a brilliant prime minister. Keir has the utmost respect for me in my role. I don't feel patronised by Keir, I never have."

The same Labour source tells me, however, that as a colleague Rayner is "hyper-vigilant". "There is so much more going on below the surface. She won't allow anyone to see her vulnerability – and why would you, if you spent the first 20 years of your life vulnerable every day? She is looking for the slight, the betrayal, the attack, all the time, and that is exhausting. She is the most hyper-vigilant politician I've ever met."

There is, in her story, a through-line of self-loathing overcome: Rayner once revealed that she identified with the gawky loner Muriel in the film *Muriel's Wedding*. She took night shifts in a care home when her eldest son was a baby, and trained as a Samaritan; she traces in care work, and her later union work, her first awareness of a natural "hit" that came from helping others. "It made me feel I had some self-worth – it was my natural drug. I wanted to be a counsellor because they'd helped my mum, and I'd seen the impact that you can have on someone just by listening to them. I thought, who am I to parachute into your life and say, 'this is what your worth is'?"

As a politician, Rayner has focused on big state public provision, workers' rights, identity and class. She would put a well-being index at the heart of government, following the example of Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand. "Our policies should make people feel they have more control, and support them in taking risks. We need a much more proactive model, rather than, 'How do we get more mental health services in when we break you?' I don't want people to feel they have to be in crisis before they get the support."

Rayner's father (the day he walked out was "a very happy day") was what she calls a



United front: Angela Rayner and Keir Starmer in south London, December 2021

“council house Tory”. Why did she not become one? “Because luck got me to where I am more than ability,” she says. “Now, some people might disagree and say, ‘Well, you’re an incredibly talented person, Ange.’” She says this without irony. “But I was lucky enough to be found by the union movement, which encourages you to be more combative.”

As branch secretary of Unison at Stockport Council she negotiated for 4,000 members: she once brought a case against a rude coroner who slammed doors on his staff. Coroner’s offices were surprisingly boring, she tells me: she thought there would be dead bodies but they’re kept elsewhere. Rayner has something of Victoria Wood’s command of language, finding the funny moment in the mundane.

Last year Gabriel Milland, a former special adviser to Johnson, said that Rayner was the only Labour MP the Tories needed to fear. What does she think he meant? “One of the things the Conservatives fear about me is that I say it how I see it, and that’s why the public believed in Johnson. You might not agree with what I say, but you know whatever I say is authentic, and people are looking for authenticity. That’s what they felt they were getting from Johnson. What they’re realising now is, he is authentic – he’s just an authentic liar.”

“I think we should be open about why we come into politics, what drives us and what we want to do for other people. This is not about ‘poor little orphan Angie’, it’s about inspiring people to say: ‘My past informs my politics and my values.’ That’s all I want.”

In Ashton-Under-Lyne, we visited striking workers of the First Bus company in Oldham, campaigning for fair pay after a year of record profits. “You’ve not seen a picket till you’ve seen a miners’ strike picket,” said Councillor Barrie. Rayner grinned – she is both of that world, and at an ironic remove from it (“I love a good picket,” she said). In the darkening mist, 50 or so men greeted her after eight days of strikes; a single scab in hi-vis peered from the other side of the bus station.

The men had been starting shifts at 3am: a local Indian restaurant brought them samosas at lunch. One striker told me he admired Rayner’s forthrightness; another shrugged and said she was all right. There wasn’t an ecstatic welcome but when she started to talk she quickly touched the right buttons, saying they had put their lives on the line through Covid. She hit a winning phrase, absorbed the crowd’s energy, hit another, rising to a peak like a surfer, then slowed, maybe with a few ideas repeated, by which time no one cared. When we met again in Westminster ten days later, she said that a 9 per cent pay rise had been agreed: she wanted this noted down.

“To be the uber deputy, she could make a name for herself,” said my senior source within the Labour Party. “She could be the new John Prescott. Take on the tricky stuff, deal with the unions – face down Sharon Graham [the general secretary of Unite] over a bin dispute in Coventry. She’s got the authority because she comes from the shop floor. It would make her an invaluable part of the Labour

government if Keir wins, and give her more authority if there’s a leadership election. But I don’t know if that’s the role she wants.”

At a sixth form college, its politics classroom decorated with a student’s poster of Andy Burnham styled like Russian revolutionary propaganda, Rayner took 15 questions from teenagers. She did not pause before each answer but launched in, her words generating ideas. “Misogyny is rife,” she said to a girl who asked about entering politics. “If you’re a woman or from an ethnic minority you’re going to get abuse.” She would not abolish tuition fees: she’d raise the threshold for repaying student loans and lower interest rates. She was best on the dishonesty prevailing in government: this is where she hits the high notes.

“If you wonder why I’m good on PMQs, you can see I practise on Ashton Sixth Form College,” she said as we crossed the car park. She brought Corbyn here in 2017 when she was shadow secretary of state for education. “He was like a rock star – kids lining the corridors. Jeremy’s problem was he never got anything done because he stopped to talk to everyone.” A former member of the Corbyn cabinet tells me that Rayner was, “like Keir, playing through the Corbyn years, realising that it wasn’t her time”. When she took on the education brief, she was the third person to hold it in one week, following a mass exodus of MPs.

Milland, who also worked at the department for further education, describes Rayner as the most effective shadow education minister he has seen. “There is still a lot of the pragmatic Unison official in her,” he tells me. “She resisted getting sucked into Corbynite nonsense about ending academies and free schools – such as the absurd Corbynite-proposed National Education Service. She wanted to talk about things that she knew mattered – such as early years.”

At her constituency office above Ashton’s covered market, there are photos of Rayner and her team walking the local hills at Hartshead Pike. Her staff is the opposite of the old-fashioned office set-up of several middle-aged men and a younger woman to brighten the place up. There are five women, all picked on merit, she says, and not connections, and one older man, praised for his ability to stay civil even when dealing with complaints about dog turds.

In a side office, the team eat baked potatoes – Rayner’s is filled with tuna mayonnaise – and she engages in a weekly ritual. Every Friday she calls an elderly lady who we shall call Edna, with whom she was paired on a charity phone-a-friend scheme before she became deputy leader. The call is long: it begins with an enquiry about tomato soup and takes in the shrinkflation of the Cadbury’s Flake. Edna has a fire in her: “They’re saying it’s smaller for the sake of our health!” ▶

◀ Rayner, picking at her potato with a fork, says, “You and me are kindred spirits.” They have never met and Edna knows her only as a local mum of three. She wouldn’t vote for Rayner even if she knew who she was – Edna is a Tory. Edna once mentioned she’d seen that deputy Labour leader on telly, and she “can’t talk properly”.

Rayner painted her office during a nine-hour Zoom conference with Labour's National Executive Committee. (She is known to do video calls with her camera off – this annoys Starmer, she adds – because a cataract incurred as a child is irritated by the screen.) She chose teal for the walls, and added a sequinned unicorn cushion to her sofa. “The sensory room, I like to call it. Party officials come in here to moan, because they know nothing leaves the four walls.” She has a bust of the Labour founder Keir Hardie, his nose chipped: she coloured it in with black felt tip.

"I know that he doesn't prepare. I don't think he gets to the dispatch box and thinks, 'I'm just going to lie to the public'. He just spouts whatever comes into his head. That's why he comes out with fluffy words that he learned at his school. Whereas Keir over-prepares. He'd never wing it."

Although Rayner is always “on”, you feel it when she hits upon her real causes: in the ris-

In the political analysis of Dominic Cummings, at least, this opinion could appeal to swing voters who, he thinks, are more left than Blairites on the economy and more right than Tories on crime. Last year Cummings tweeted: "Red wall extremely vulnerable to a woman LAB leader focused ruthlessly on violent crime & the small business ecosystem abused by Tories for a decade. Move HQ to Midlands



Tory-held marginal, 'live in the village', you'll quickly turn Tory MPs to civil war." Though he may have been talking about Lisa Nandy.

Rayner tells me she is impatient for government. "My biggest regret is that I've been in opposition for nearly seven years. I've had to try and convince the government of things that I know are wrong, and I've not been able to do all that we could have achieved. The Sure Start Plus model, for example, is on a shelf. That's our fault. Many of our ex-voters blame Labour for Johnson getting in, because they said we didn't give them an alternative. I accept that criticism – you can't say the voters were wrong. Hopefully, they've seen that we are different. We are reflective and respectful, and we're going to put forward a government-in-waiting that people can vote for.

How does Labour win? “We’ve got to articulate this in language that people understand – we can get very technocratic. Most people don’t go rooting through manifestos. It’s about how we make people see that Labour is the party that has always stood for opportunity and aspiration. The welfare state,



Front-bench politician: “most people don’t go rooting through manifestos. It’s about how we make them see that Labour has always stood for opportunity and aspiration”

the NHS, social housing – these made people’s lives better. We can be radical but also pragmatic. Radicalism isn’t recklessness.

“We’ve got to be proud of our past achievements, which the Labour Party is never good at. If we achieve 96 per cent, we’ll go on about the 4 per cent we didn’t. It infuriates me. I’ll never, ever apologise for the last Labour government. Did we get everything right? No, of course not! But we did so much!”

When Rayner used to go clubbing – she caught the Hacienda at the tail end of its life – she learned to approach anyone and have a conversation with them. In fact, there is something about her energy, an edgy intensity, that reminds you of someone you might meet on a night out. She used to be tired by midnight, being only 14, but would push through, because she was pretending to be older. These days she is in London Monday to Thursday, and in her constituency on Friday and Saturday. But on Sundays Rayner does not leave her house – sometimes not even her bedroom. Last weekend, she binge-watched the entire *Superman & Lois* series. She

does not dress, or put on make-up, or wash.

At night, when she can’t sleep, Rayner listens to audiobooks and podcasts about serial killers. She has insomnia – a family thing: she can’t wind down – but true crime is a surprising choice. In October last year, a 36-year-old man was given a suspended prison sentence after sending an email in which he told her to “watch your back and your kids”. She has panic buttons in her house, and a device on her watch which tells her when someone is at her front door.

Why does she listen to true crime in the dead of night? “I’m just intrigued by extreme behaviour,” she says. “I mean, the idea of being able to murder someone, if you think about what you’d have to do to cross that line. It takes my mind off everything that swirls around in my head, and then I fall asleep.”

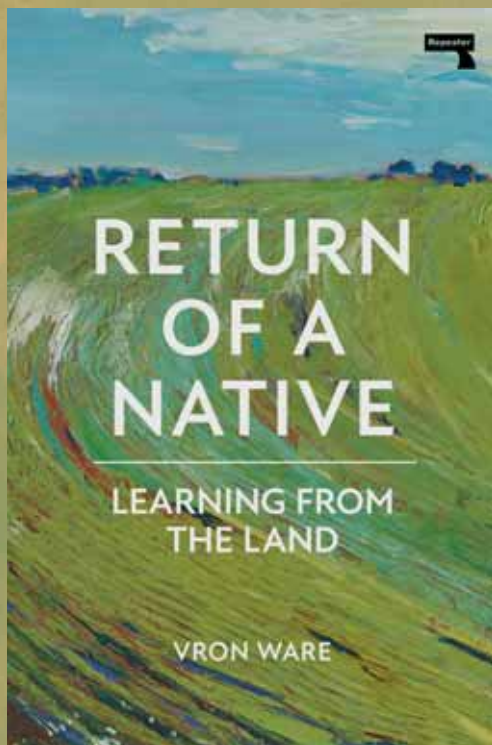
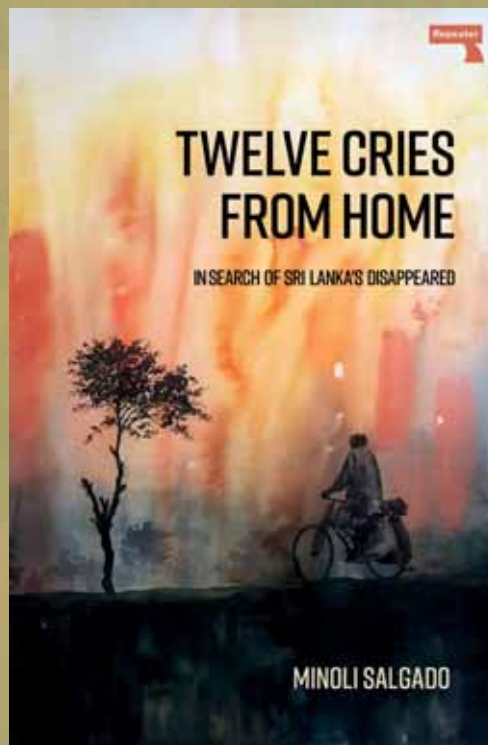
She is one of those people who buys a house and has to do it up. She still lives with her ex-husband and two younger sons, aged 12 and 13, in a 1920s villa in a Manchester suburb, with the hills on one side and an impressive view of the city on the other. (It was recently reported that she is in a relationship with Sam Tarry, the Labour MP who ran

Rayner’s campaign to become deputy leader.) Her 13-year-old is registered blind. Her granddaughter – Rayner became a grandmother at 37 – is non-speaking autistic and lives locally.

The main gathering area is the bit of the house she is most proud of – a big white kitchen and extension which she painted herself on an internal scaffold using 50 litres of paint. In the middle of the room is the largest kitchen island I’ve ever seen, in white marble. She hovers a finger over it – “watch this” – and from its centre rises a slim robot extractor fan, sinking down again on command. The tiles on the floor are much larger than regular tiles and therefore hard to place. “Guess how much it cost to lay my tiles,” she asks. “Guess!” Her boys and her staff gather around the island, as she pours the white wine. Rayner had a banner up on the ceiling for a while, she says, which read, “This is a gathering not a party.”

“Everyone should be able to have nice things,” she had told me in Westminster. “I want you to have a lovely house where you feel pride in it, not ‘I’ve got a roof over my head, so I should be thankful’. Why should you have the minimum?” ●

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LOUISE PERRY



Out of the Ordinary Is Prince Andrew's settlement just? That depends what you think the system is for

"The grand old Duke of York, he had 12 million quid. He gave it to someone he'd never met for something he never did."

This is the rewritten nursery rhyme reportedly composed by palace aides in response to the news on 15 February that Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, had settled with the woman who has been pursuing a civil case against him, alleging that he sexually abused her as a teenager.

The woman in question, Virginia Giuffre, is the most outspoken victim of the sex trafficking ring run by the late Jeffrey Epstein and his former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, who was convicted in December for five sex trafficking-related offences.

Prince Andrew has said he has "no recollection of ever meeting" Giuffre. But there is that infamous photo, allegedly taken inside Maxwell's house in Belgravia in London, in which the Duke's arm is wrapped around the bare midriff of a young Giuffre. (The Duke has said it is impossible to verify whether the photo is genuine, and no one seems to know the location of the original image.) Giuffre alleges that it was taken by Epstein, with whom, the Duke says in his settlement statement, he "regrets" having an "association".

Despite the photo, the Duke's lawyers had previously insisted that he was ready to go before a jury to fight Giuffre's claims, with a trial expected later this year. Thus this settlement represents a retreat on his part and, although he does not admit to any wrongdoing, the Duke's statement concedes that Giuffre has "suffered both as an established victim of abuse and as a result of unfair public attacks".

There is much speculation about how

exactly he is going to pay his settlement with Giuffre. Royal finances are always complicated but, in Prince Andrew's case, they are particularly so, and also carry a whiff of indecency.

In 2017, he reportedly had a £1.5m loan paid off by a prominent Conservative party donor and – far worse – his ex-wife, Sarah Ferguson, has admitted to accepting £15,000 from Jeffrey Epstein to pay off another debt (she later described this as a "gigantic error of judgement"). When it comes to a multi-million-pound settlement, the pair are not – most royal commentators suggest – good for it. The Queen is therefore expected to bail out the son once believed to be her favourite.

So, all quite embarrassing for Andrew, then. He's had his military titles and HRH removed. Prince Andrew Way in County Antrim is one of several streets where the residents are considering a name change. And he's had to go begging to his mother.

But he has never faced any criminal charges. He still enjoys a lifestyle more luxurious and leisured than most people could ever dream of. Is this justice? Well, it depends on what you think the criminal justice system is for.

For Giuffre, this is a relatively good result. She has had her suffering publicly acknowledged and she has been offered a

The Duke still enjoys a life more leisured than most people could dream of

life-changing sum of money. In general, victims of sexual violence rarely achieve as much. Only around 1.5 per cent of rape cases in this country result in a charge or summons, let alone a conviction. The attrition begins at the very start of the process, because most rape victims never go to the police.

Some victims feel that pursuing the case is worthwhile even when there is no realistic expectation of conviction. But it often takes years for a case to come to trial and, unsurprisingly, a lot of victims who are initially determined to have their day in court are demoralised and exhausted by a process that stops them truly moving on. Many withdraw their support for the prosecution before the case reaches trial. The result of all of these system failures is a conviction rate so low that only a spectacularly unlucky rapist will face any legal consequences whatsoever.

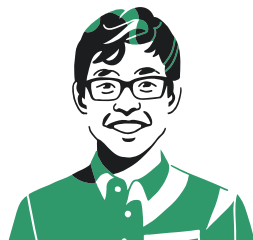
Having observed the dismal performance of the criminal justice system, feminists have proposed various alternatives over the years. Germaine Greer once suggested tattooing an "r" on a rapist's hand, arm or cheek. At the height of #MeToo, there were many attempts at extrajudicial punishment of men accused of sexual misconduct, including the "Shitty Media Men" list, a crowdsourced Google spreadsheet that listed dozens of men in the media industry rumoured to be sexually predatory.

There have also been more formal alternatives developed such as "restorative justice", which involves a meeting between perpetrator and victim, sometimes with other representatives of the wider community. There is some evidence that the restorative justice process can make victims feel better, but little that it significantly reduces rates of reoffending.

All these options, along with cash settlements, achieve some kind of justice, whether that be punishment, closure for victims or attempted rehabilitation. But none of these methods achieve the goal that is, in my view, the most important of all: the physical separation of dangerous offenders from their potential victims. That is a goal that can only be accomplished by the state, and only through the use of prisons. That such a tiny fraction of perpetrators end up behind bars sends a message about how seriously the justice system takes protecting women.

Giuffre's dogged commitment to her cause is admirable, and I congratulate her on this win, which will hopefully bring some solace. She has not, yet, seen justice allowed to reach its conclusion. But then, very few victims ever do. ●

JONATHAN LIEW



Left Field

Why a power struggle between players is the least of Manchester United's problems

By any objective long-term measure, Manchester United are one of England's most stable football clubs. Over the last seven Premier League seasons, they have never finished higher than second or lower than sixth, qualifying for European football every year and winning three trophies. Their fan base is large and loyal. Their business model is one of the most robust in the game, generating steady revenue growth without relying on oligarch wealth or player sales. In an age of labour churn, United's squad is settled: the average first-team member has been at the club for seven years.

For those who follow the club on a day-to-day basis, however, the sensation is rather different. As a lived experience, United can feel like the most chaotic club in the world: a ceaseless typhoon of vivid triumph and bleak disaster, setbacks and comebacks, action and reaction, news and feuds, scandal and rumour, and above all the relentless noise of real-time judgement from a voracious media and a global following of millions. To be a United fan is to run the entire gamut of emotions, from relief to despair, hope to rage or boredom, often in the same week, even the same half.

Partly this is a result of the club's internal dysfunction. Almost a decade of poor recruitment and coaching has created an unbalanced squad stuffed with rich individual talent but lacking cohesion. This is why United are capable of both spectacular collapses and memorable surges, brilliant goals and basic errors. Their 4-2 win over Leeds on 20 February was a good synopsis of their approach: throwing away a 2-0 lead in the space of two minutes, only to storm to a late victory.

But United are also turbulent by design. Like many big clubs, they derive the bulk of their revenue not from ticket sales, prize money or television rights but from commercial activities: sponsorships, partnerships, advertising. In other words, the function of United is not to win matches but to win audience share; not to harvest points but to harvest eyeballs. Winning helps. But when you are essentially a consumer entertainment product, what matters more is the story you sell: a steady supply of plot twists, dramatic intrigue and cliffhangers to keep viewers engaged.

Nine years after their last league title, United are undergoing their latest rebuild under the interim stewardship of the German coach Ralf Rangnick. A brilliant tactical mind with the sober deportment of a family dentist, the studious Rangnick is a departure from the passion and vibes of his predecessor Ole Gunnar Solskjær, who in turn was a departure from the pragmatic gloom of José Mourinho. Rangnick has overseen a cautious improvement in results since taking over in November: the win over Leeds was United's ninth consecutive game without defeat. Yet the new coach is also fast discovering that, at a club of United's size, results are only half the battle.

Every week seems to bring fresh, curiously well-sourced tales of splits,

ruptures and disgruntlement. There are rumours of a rift between an English clique led by the captain Harry Maguire and an Iberian faction led by Cristiano Ronaldo. There are reports that players are underwhelmed by Rangnick's training methods. Whether any of this is true is beside the point. United are not simply a footballing project but a daily content machine, and what is in the interests of the former – patience, foresight, a resistance to short-term judgement – is not necessarily in the interests of the latter.

In many ways United are an extreme example of a phenomenon visible across the European game. Never have the biggest clubs been more immune from the fluctuations and fortunes of competitive sport. At most clubs, a disastrous season might mean relegation, perhaps even extinction. For Real Madrid, Juventus or Chelsea, a disaster means finishing fifth. Champions League football is virtually guaranteed every year, along with the world's best players and an expectation of winning. But has this relative stability made for happier clubs and fans? It has not.

The reason for this lies in the disconnect between the stability of the organisation and the daily turbulence required to fulfil its commercial function. The result is that many big clubs – throw in Tottenham, Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain with those mentioned above – are trapped in a kind of permanent discontent, a mini-cycle of boom and bust characterised by endless quick fixes, endless snap judgements, endless new hope. Every setback inspires an overreaction (amplified by social media), which then demands an instant correction, usually a big new signing or a managerial sacking that offers the illusion of progress. But of course the long-term structural issues remain unaddressed. So the problems recur, and the cycle starts again.

A genuine structural overhaul at United would involve gradually reducing the age profile of its squad, investing in its midfield, working out what its footballing identity should be and then assembling a backroom infrastructure that can build towards it. At Tottenham it would involve diluting the power of the chairman Daniel Levy and introducing more footballing expertise at board level. At Paris it would involve clearing out overindulged star players and replacing them with guys who can actually run. But where's the fun in any of that? As any self-respecting pharmaceutical executive will tell you: the real money isn't in the cure. It's in the treatment. ●

Jonathan Liew is a sports writer at the Guardian

Big clubs are trapped in a mini-cycle of boom and bust, with endless quick fixes

THE CRITICS

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Books

This is America

A portrait of a homeless girl and her family reveals a racist, unequal system that is brutally rigged against them

By Gary Younge



“Compelling in every way”: Dasani Coates, the subject of *Invisible Child*

In 2010 the *Dallas Morning News* won a Pulitzer prize for a series on the economic, racial and cultural divide between the mostly prosperous, white north Dallas, and the mostly poor, black and Latino south of the city. The veteran foreign correspondent, Tod Robberson, said he approached the assignment as though he were writing from a foreign warzone. “I treat it as if readers in north Dallas have no idea what’s going on there [in south Dallas],” he said. “I explain it the way I would if I was writing about Lebanon.”

The divisions bequeathed by economic inequality and social segregation bring a whole new meaning to the term “social distancing”: people who live miles apart in the same city can have such fundamentally different life experiences that they might as well be in another country. Journalists are not immune to this dislocation: indeed, they are far more likely to be wealthier, white and well-educated than the public at large. (With more than a third of Britain’s newspaper columnists passing through private school and Oxbridge, this country is no better.)

For the most part journalists simply do not occupy, cannot relate to and have little experience of the worlds that they cover, even when those worlds are a short bus ride away. So they venture, episodically, into the “unknown”, like Joseph Conrad did in *Heart of Darkness*, to anthropologise the socially excluded who routinely escape their gaze, and to send dispatches from the front lines of race and poverty. None of this is inevitable. With enough reporting, research, self-awareness, curiosity, empathy and, crucially, time, it is possible to produce the kind of immersive journalism that informs its readers about the lives, challenges and aspirations of those who live on the margins without excoriating or exoticising its subjects.

Invisible Child is one such piece of journalism. Andrea Elliott, an investigative reporter for the *New York Times*, tells the story of a tight-knit black family of eight children and two parents from New York City who are gradually being unpicked by poverty, drug addiction, bureaucratic indifference, bad luck, bad choices, criminality, racism and generational dysfunction, and their efforts to weave themselves back together through resilience, pride, love, defiance and devotion. This is non-fiction writing at its best – uncluttered, evocative and well-researched.

The story’s central character is Dasani Coates (named for the bottled water), the eldest daughter, who journeys from childhood into adolescence shuttling in and out of rodent-infested homeless shelters, foster homes, courtrooms, state and private schools, the projects and the streets. We meet her aged 11 – an impressive, precocious, impulsive, belligerent, perceptive girl: compelling in every way. “There are three ways to be popular,” her mother tells her. “Dress Fly. Do Good in School. Fight.” Economic circumstances mean the first is not an option: the other two she pursues with vigour.

But Dasani is nothing without her supporting cast of siblings, in which she plays a parental role from her earliest years; her mother Chanel (named for the perfume), who vacillates between tough, tender,

RUTH FREMSON/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

absent and strident, as she struggles with drug addiction; her brooding stepfather Supreme, an eccentric autodidact prone to occasional bouts of violence, frequent drug use and depression; finally, the crucial extras of extended family, teachers, caseworkers, lawyers, and foster families, who may help or hinder. The amount of space devoted to the minor characters in this latter category is the only serious criticism of the book. We are too often given potted biographies of people we never hear of again.

Invisible Child emerged from a series on poverty Elliott wrote for the *New York Times* in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the Occupy Wall Street movement. Dasani's story, which ran on the front page in late 2013, became totemic in a moment of electoral flux in New York – after the election of Democrat Bill de Blasio as mayor on a populist message, but before his business-friendly predecessor Michael Bloomberg had left office. Dasani briefly became the poster child for both the city's failings and its potential – sharing a stage with Hillary Clinton and Harry Belafonte, among others, at de Blasio's inauguration.

Dasani's headteacher leverages this fame into a successful application to a private boarding school in Pennsylvania for children with proven academic potential who come from challenging circumstances, set up by the chocolate magnate Milton Hershey. This is Dasani's big break; but while she thrives there (track team, cheerleader, good grades) she never quite feels at home. Meanwhile, her family back in New York is collapsing. Drug use, destitution and desperation, all compounded by institutional neglect, conspire to leave Supreme home alone with the children, without money, food or running water. The state intervenes, breaking up the family and sending the children to three different foster homes.

Dasani blames herself and tells her mother she wants to come back. Chanel, who may have the children taken away from her for good, explains that there is no home for her to come back to. In an act of premeditated self-sabotage, Dasani gets into a fight at Hershey and is eventually expelled, so she can return anyway.

This is not a polemic. Elliott bears witness but does not preach; she shows but rarely tells. She does not pretend to be a neutral bystander (how could you immerse yourself in a struggling family for eight years and not root for them?) but does not intrude on her own storytelling. It is not a morality play either. The villains are too elusive and the heroes too flawed for that. This is structural, generational poverty at work in all its gruesome, demeaning inhumanity and punitive, institutional brutality. People keep telling Dasani not to be a statistic. But the statistics are edifying. In a city with one of the highest rates of inequality in an already unequal country, with the most segregated school systems in an already segregated country, 94 per cent of the children removed from their parents by the state are non-white. More than half of all black children in the United States are subjected to at least one child protection probe before turning 18.

It only makes sense to talk about what is possible in

terms of personal responsibility and good and bad choices if that conversation is also framed in terms of what is likely, given the outcomes of racial capitalism: a society where you name your kids after products you cannot afford. The two most dependable women in Dasani's life – her teacher Ms Hester and her mother's godmother Sherry – both end up homeless due to eviction and foreclosure respectively.

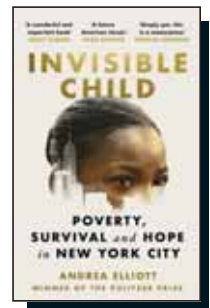
A 2014 paper presented to the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston showed that, by the age of 40, high school dropouts born to rich families are as likely to be earning high salaries as college graduates from poor families. The *Washington Post* put it more succinctly: "Poor kids who do everything right don't do better than rich kids who do everything wrong." "The real explanation of why the poor are where they are," wrote Michael Harrington in his landmark book on poverty *The Other America*, first published in 1962, "is that they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry, or in the wrong racial or ethnic group. Once that mistake has been made, they could have been paragons of will and morality, but most of them would never even have had a chance to get out of the other America."

There is no happy ending here – Khaliq, Dasani's elder stepbrother, will go on trial for murder and Supreme and Chanel break up, at least for now. But it is not a hopeless story either. Neither Dasani nor the rest of her family are "paragons of will and morality" but nor are they, as Zora Neale Hurston would have put it, "tragically coloured" either. Elliott portrays a family bound together by a fierce love even as it is threatened by deep dysfunction – when they move into an apartment with several bedrooms they still drag their mattresses into the living room and sleep on top of one another as they did in the shelter.

It is hard work being poor and they put the hours in. Chanel hustles, lobbies and fights to bring her family back together; Dasani is the first in her family to graduate from high school. It is Dasani who has the chutzpah in court to defy her state-appointed lawyer, and argue that it is not in her and her sisters' interests to be taken from Chanel permanently and put up for adoption. "What's not in dispute," says the judge, "is that you love your mother. What's not in dispute is that your mother loves you. What's not in dispute is that long after we're out of your lives you're still going to be a family."

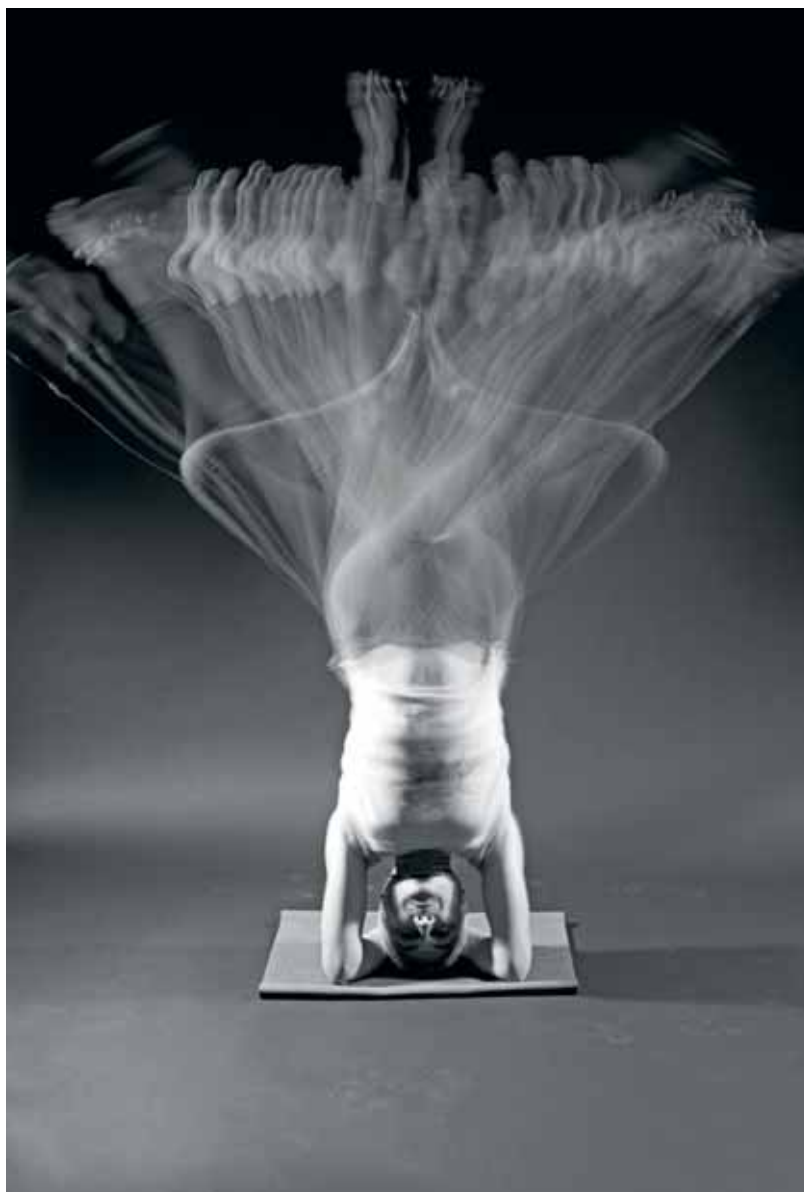
"How can we be a family when we're all separated?" replies Dasani. "How can we be a family when I can't even see my sister when she turned eight yesterday? That's not a family." Against all odds, social services back down; Chanel is reunited with her kids. They make the familiar trek up to the Bronx to enter the homeless shelter system once again. But at least they are together. This is what victory looks like when a system is rigged. ●

Gary Younge is professor of sociology at the University of Manchester and a Type Media Fellow



Invisible Child: Poverty, Survival and Hope in New York City
Andrea Elliott
Hutchinson
Heinemann,
624pp, £16.99

"Poor kids who do everything right don't do better than rich kids who do everything wrong"



The physical is political

Exercise has been shaped by science, culture and the quest for autonomy. But does keeping fit offer empowerment, or merely the feeling of it?

By Sophie McBain

The first exercise classes I attended religiously were Captain Mahmoud's weekly aerobics lessons, to my knowledge the only group exercise class in Libya that permitted men and women to work out together. The gay bodybuilders, with narrow waists and backs like walnuts, always occupied the front row, closest to the mirrors. Dancing at the back were usually four or five beautiful Ethiopian women, who all worked as cabin crew for Afriqiyah Airways. I preferred to be inconspicuous in the middle row, which I shared with a few friends and a retired scientist who'd been senior in Libya's recently suspended nuclear weapons programme. The scientist sweated so profusely that Mahmoud periodically mopped the floor around him to prevent falls.

In the UK, to work out is to conform to social expectations – women, especially, are supposed to “look after” themselves – but in Libya, then under the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi, Mahmoud's classes were playfully subversive. We never discussed politics (that would have spoiled the atmosphere), but it was political: we should not have been doing the grapevine together. Mahmoud and I barely spoke beyond the usual pleasantries and his barked catchphrase – “one, two, three, stretching!” – but when a few years ago I learned he'd died in a car accident, I wept. What a fragile, precious world he'd created for us.

In his latest book *Sweat*, the writer Bill Hayes invites his readers to think more deeply about gyms, and what they represent. The inspiration for *Sweat* came to him during a workout. He was pounding away on a StairMaster when the question struck him: how did we get here? Visiting a rare books library soon after, he came across a sumptuously illustrated edition of the 1573 book *De Arte Gymnastica* (*The Art of Gymnastics*) by Girolamo Mercuriale, an Italian physician who hoped to revive ancient Greek and Roman traditions of exercise. One of the earliest and most comprehensive texts on exercise, it discusses the merits of activities such as walking, running and swimming, as well as crying, laughing and holding one's breath. Hayes subsequently travelled across the US and Europe in search of Mercuriale's remaining manuscripts, and *Sweat* weaves together this hunt with a lively, broad-brush history of exercise, from antiquity to today, and a memoir of his own relationship to fitness.

Hayes can be relied on to provide amusing anecdotes and interesting trivia, but I grew bored reading of his various encounters with librarians. His account of his efforts to track down Mercuriale felt like a distraction from the real reasons he set out to write *Sweat*. Lulled by the tedium of so many library trips, the sudden emotional force of his personal stories can hit you like a professional boxer's left hook. He writes of taking up boxing soon after the death of his long-term partner and fellow gym rat Steve in 2006, who was HIV positive but otherwise healthy, and died of a heart attack while lying next to Hayes in bed. Steve and Hayes had met in Muscle System, a gym for gay men in San Francisco in the Nineties, when the community was in the grip of the Aids crisis. It was a time when gay men felt a new urgency to get in shape, whether to

KATHRYN FAULKNER/MILLENNIUM IMAGES, UK

stave off the wasting effects of the disease or because bodybuilding was a way to feel in control. Hayes writes too of how, after the death in 2015 of his partner of six years, the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks, he abandoned exercise (and *Sweat*) for years.

Our personal histories of exercising, or not exercising, are bound up with our emotional lives. Reading *Sweat*, I reflected on the role exercise has played in my own life, the beloved gyms and workouts I now associate with a certain mood or phase. The Pilates studio in Cairo that was a place of release and respite. The ridiculous and very New York baby-wearing barre class I attended when my eldest was still small enough to strap to my chest while I did pliés before a mirror. Or the half marathon I did soon after she turned one, when running felt like an act of reclamation, of my body and my identity, after the all-consuming experience of pregnancy and early motherhood.

The history of exercise has been shaped by our slowly unfolding scientific understanding of the body – it was only in the 1950s that researchers began to properly investigate the link between exercise and good health – as well as by culture and, most importantly, power. Hayes ascribes special significance to the invention in the 1890s of the women's bike, seeing a direct link between the physical freedom this gave women and their demands for greater political participation. The American women's rights activist Susan B Anthony observed in 1896 that "the bicycle has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world".

The connections between female power and fitness are explored in much greater depth by the US journalist Danielle Friedman, whose new book, *Let's Get Physical*, is a history of female fitness told through the stories of the bold, pioneering, often troubled women who shaped it. Friedman charts how over the past seven decades women, relegated for so long to the "weaker sex", developed a new relationship with their bodies, cultivating both physical strength and autonomy.

Friedman is aware that when women exercise they are often motivated less by the prospect of enhanced well-being than by elusive beauty ideals, to stay forever slim and youthful. From the outset, elements of the women's fitness movement have exploited body insecurity. Yet despite the often toxic association fitness has with the beauty industry, Friedman is an exercise evangelist. She hopes the radical body-love movement, spearheaded by advocates such as the influential black yoga guru Jessamyn Stanley, will help to liberate fitness culture from restrictive beauty norms, and encourage more people to get moving. In Friedman's view, the biggest problem with fitness culture is exclusion: health disparities are rising between the rich and poor, with too many lacking the time or money to stay fit.

Friedman's book developed out of her viral 2018 piece, "The Secret Sexual History of the Barre Workout", published in *New York Magazine*. It tells the story of Lotte Berk, a professional dancer forced to flee Nazi Germany for London, where in 1959 she leased a studio to teach a

workout that combined elements of ballet and yoga, with a spicy emphasis on improving participants' sex lives. "If you can't tuck, you can't fuck!" she'd tell her students as she guided them through exercises such as "the prostitute" and "naughty bottoms". In the 1970s Prue Leith (!) invited her on to her TV show, on which – according to Leith's memoirs – Berk "danced around like a demented teenager, exhorting us, 'squeeze, squeeze, make like fucky-fucky'". Berk's workout was exported to the US, and now you can barely make it a few blocks in Manhattan without encountering a barre studio. Berk's story might have been largely forgotten, but anyone who has done barre and lain on their backs thrusting their pelvis skywards in time to the music will know that her legacy lives on.

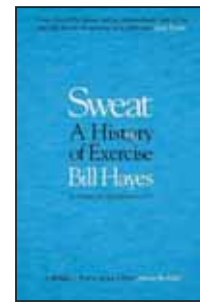
Let's Get Physical begins with the story of Bonnie Prudden, the leotote-wearing, straight-talking dynamo who in the 1950s alerted Americans to the dangers of their sedentary lifestyles and encouraged housewives and children to start exercising. Together with Hans Kraus, a doctor, she conducted studies showing that American children were falling dangerously behind their European counterparts on fitness measures, producing a report that shocked President Eisenhower into creating a special council to improve young people's health. Prudden developed fitness classes, churned out bestsellers, created the first real line of women's exercise wear, and eventually sparked a revolution, as gyms sprang up around the country.

Friedman's focus on individual personalities makes for an absorbing, pacy read – and her enthusiasm for exercise is contagious. After finishing *Let's Get Physical*, I jumped on an exercise bike for the first time in months and felt reborn. But the book left me curious about the precise nature of the connection between physical power and political power. Friedman quotes Gloria Steinem: "An increase in our physical strength could have more impact on the everyday lives of most women than the occasional role model in the boardroom or the White House." Boutique fitness brands and gyms often elide physical and political power in their pitches to customers. When I lived in New York, one of my local gyms released a series of ads with nonsensical, pseudo-political slogans such as "resistance bands not travel bans" and "warming up not global warming". Does exercise offer empowerment, or merely the feeling of it?

When I lived in Egypt, post-Arab Spring, while the military regime was violently retrenching, I joined a group called Cairo Runners. The running club's slogan was "We Run This Town", and during organised races it would close down the traffic-choked streets of the capital for a few hours so that hundreds of us could pound the uneven roads together. It was unusual to be allowed to gather in such a crowd: protests were illegal and would be violently broken up, and even football spectating was banned for fear of unrest. On those early mornings it really did feel like we ran the city. But in no time the runners would disperse and the cars would return, and I still don't know if our running together meant something – an exercise in political imagination, an expression of solidarity – or nothing at all. ●

Lotte Berk's workout combined ballet and yoga, with an emphasis on improving participants' sex lives

Sweat: A History of Exercise
Bill Hayes
Bloomsbury,
256pp, £20



Let's Get Physical:
Danielle Friedman
Icon, 352pp,
£16.99



Lone wolves and Wall Street

Pankaj Mishra's tale of growing up amid globalisation suffers from a distant narrator and a self-sabotaging form

By Lola Seaton

One thing Pankaj Mishra seems certain of is that humans are uncertain creatures, but uncertain in a notably coherent way. "Human identity," Mishra wrote in the prologue to *Age of Anger* (2017), is "manifold and self-conflicted". He thus feels "unqualified regard for a figure like Montaigne", for he recognised "the acute self-divisions of individual selves". Mishra is hardly alone in emphasising human ambivalence, but his is a rather spruce, even schematic vision of perplexity: we are less awash in inarticulate doubt or disarrayed by our unconscious than intelligibly sundered between our "inner and public selves".

As a writer, Mishra's public self has had the upper

hand for most of his career. He is best known as an intellectual and essayist, and among the essays that have appeared in prestigious Anglo-American journals over the past 25 years, he is more associated with his forceful political, sometimes polemical, writings than with his mellower literary criticism. But as an aspiring twenty-something writer in the early 1990s, living in verdant seclusion in a Himalayan village in north India, when he imagined himself writing it was "always as a novelist". Being a writer, however, demanded a kind of cerebral worldliness: "to engage rationally with, rather than retreat from, the world; it was to concern oneself particularly with the fate of the individual in society".

So after publishing a single novel, *The Romantics*, in 1999, Mishra spent the next two decades writing, alongside his trenchant higher journalism, non-fiction books – many of them hybrid intellectual histories spliced with biography. This didn't demand a total suppression of his novelistic instincts. He retained his preoccupation with individuals and "subjective experience": "our unit of analysis", Mishra insists in *Age of Anger*, "should also be the irreducible human being, her or his fears, desires and resentments".

An End to Suffering (2004), his absorbing account of the life and legacy of the Buddha, is studded with memoir; *From the Ruins of Empire* (2012) tracks the "intellectual and political awakening of Asia" in the 19th and 20th centuries by considering "the collective experiences and subjectivities of Asian people" responding "to the encroachments of the West". *Age of Anger* is an attempt to understand contemporary political rage, from ethno-nationalism to Islamic fundamentalism, through the prism of an archetype derived from Rousseau – the resentful, "alienated



HARRY BORDEN

The divided self: in *Run and Hide*, his second novel, Pankaj Mishra's strident journalism gives way to a solitary, melancholy voice

young man of promise” spawned by the traumatic advent of “commercial-industrial civilisation”. Modernity created fault lines, Mishra argues, which “run through human souls as well as nations and societies”, and so *Age of Anger* relies “more on novelists and poets than historians and sociologists”.

If, in his attention to how subjectivity is configured, and disfigured, by social change, Mishra is a novelistic intellectual, he also thinks novels should be infused with ideas. For example, he criticised the tranquil insularity of Amit Chaudhuri’s *Freedom Song* (1998), in which “broad themes” (“the steady disappearance of an old middle-class, the rise of Hindu nationalism”) are merely “sensed”. Mishra has an abiding subject – how individuals have metabolised modernity and its cruel contradictions, especially in late-coming countries like his native India. Yet there is an arresting contrast in style between the political writings on which his reputation is chiefly built and the more introspective mode on display in his memoir and fiction.

Those weaned on the gripping velocity and adamant syntax of Mishra’s essays may be surprised by the assiduous lucidity and serene poise of his new novel *Run and Hide* (“... on the floor, where a spear of sunlight, seething with dust motes, was perfectly aimed”). Instead of the impassioned, self-assured, robustly erudite persona encountered in his polemics the narrators in his fiction are naive, studious, solitary, vaguely melancholy.

The conflict between withdrawal and worldliness is staged in both *The Romantics* and *Run and Hide*. The novels’ respective narrators – Samar and Arun – follow parallel arcs: from studious retreat from the world, to tentatively entering it, to fleeing again. Freshly graduated Samar, living on a meagre allowance in the city of Benares, is embarked on a self-imposed syllabus of ambitious reading in Western literature and philosophy, while Arun, after eight frenetic years in Delhi, has retired to a Himalayan village to translate classic Hindi literature. Both monkish idylls are punctured by an encounter with a beautiful, wealthy woman – Catherine, in *The Romantics*, the daughter of a Paris banker; Alia, in *Run and Hide*, a journalist from an elite Muslim family, educated at English boarding school and NYU (a conspicuous shift of elite sociological coordinates). These women precipitate a sexual awakening and eventually a crisis from which our narrators find refuge in the Himalayas.

This contrast between “ambition and repose”, as Arun puts it in *Run and Hide*, comes with a suite of associated oppositions: sex and celibacy, travel and rootedness, bourgeois careerism and Buddhist self-sufficiency, modernity and tradition, West and East or, as the Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand put it, “the Alps of the European tradition” and “the Himalaya of [the] Indian past”. The woman who inducts Samar into Western classical music and introduces him to Catherine in *The Romantics*, proroguing his life of the mind, is called “Miss West”. Arun’s translation of Hindi works for a “tiny but loyal and respectful readership” from his Himalayan perch contrasts with the “noisily

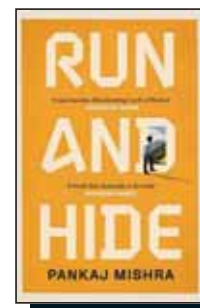
flamboyant” novels written for a global market by his university friend, Aseem, a sort of literary celebrity and “intellectual entrepreneur”.

We leave Samar at about the age Mishra was when he published *The Romantics* (late twenties), and similarly pursue Arun of *Run and Hide* into its author’s middle age. One senses an ambition to make those extra decades tell in the new novel. *The Romantics* hews, with appealing guilelessness, to the modest limits of a *Bildungsroman*, but in scale, formal complexity and the historical import of its themes, *Run and Hide* is more ambitious. Mishra’s new book is still in essence a *Bildungsroman*, extended into midlife and encased in a grander, more sensational story about the downfall of Arun’s friends from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), who become hedge fund billionaires in the US before getting embroiled in a Wall Street insider-trading scandal. This appears to draw from a real scandal recounted in *The Billionaire’s Apprentice*, a 2013 book by the journalist Anita Raghavan. A similar-sounding book features in *Run and Hide*, but its protagonists are Arun’s ill-fated IIT friends and its author the glamorous Alia.

Run and Hide is presented as an epistolary memoir addressed to Alia, in which Arun relays the details of his and his university friends’ “class backgrounds and moral and emotional lives”. Such details were omitted from Alia’s book – and, apparently, from her research, as well as from Arun and Alia’s conversations during their relationship (which was not trivial: Arun leaves India to follow Alia to London). These lacunae, however bemusing or unlikely, are made necessary by the formal contrivance – the letter-memoir – Mishra has selected to affix Arun’s life story to the more dramatic, momentous narrative of the Wall Street scandal. Arun is forced into a triangulated address that produces unrealistic utterances – giving exposition to the reader that it’s implausible Alia would need to be informed of too, either because it’s about her, or her book, or something they must have talked about.

As a rule, Arun can only tell Alia (and so us) things he hasn’t already told her. It thus becomes important to explain his earlier reticence about his life and those of his friends (the protagonists of her book) – he says he was “too ashamed of those early humiliations... to volunteer them” and that in any case Alia wasn’t “curious” – but there is a significant cost. To make the revelations in Arun’s memoir plausibly revelatory to Alia, Mishra has had to render their relationship insubstantial, or at least make Arun and Alia inscrutable to each other. This is a legitimate theme, but here it stems from narrative necessity, which makes the pathos of their relationship’s disintegration underwhelming. Addressing the novel to Alia seems an act of formal self-sabotage, imposing an inverse relation between the substance of the novel and the substance of the romance the novel chronicles: the less Arun shared with Alia in person, the more there is for him to explain now.

And explaining is his dominant mode: by “pick[ing] out of the past those scraps you overlooked in your own book”, Arun, as if he were a reader of *Age of Anger*, will sociologically clarify the spiritual conflicts that ▶



Run and Hide
Pankaj Mishra
Hutchinson
Heinemann
336pp, £16.99

Mishra bifurcates his writing into polemic and introspection, bypassing much of what lies in-between

◀ led to the varieties of wrongdoing with which Alia's book concludes. The imbrication of the *Bildungsroman* with Alia's book about the scandal – itself described in *Run and Hide* as a “secret history of globalisation” – seems a way of raising the stakes, of importing “broad themes” (the secret history of the secret history of globalisation?).

If this novel can seem overly freighted with ideas, its characters at risk of congealing into emblematic case studies, Mishra's narrators can also seem isolated figures against a world-historic ground, individuals temporarily drawn “in” to society but rarely seeming “of” it. Whether swept up in sex and cosmopolitanism or chastely opting out of those in rustic tranquillity, they remain socially sealed-off, their relationships with others distant or evanescent. Samar and Arun's limpid, pensive sentences provide an almost soothing refuge – a taste of the austere grandeur and peaceful seclusion of their Himalayan retreats. But there are few points of sustained contact between interiority and society, subjective experience and the wider world.

The gregarious zone of intimacies, domestic and otherwise that mediate “between individual states of mind and specific historical realities”, as Mishra put it in his essay “Edmund Wilson in Benares”, is largely absent. It's as though the rather stringent opposition between engagement and detachment dramatised in the lives of Mishra's narrators bifurcates his own writing into polemic and introspection, public and inner life, bypassing much of what lies between – social and private life – and so vacating much of fiction's richest traditional terrain.

This is partly, perhaps, why the novels resemble memoirs, either by design (*Run and Hide*) or default (*The Romantics*). Mishra's narrators are proto-writers, and we are chiefly witness to their writerly reveries, observations, reflections. However acute and riveting, these do not necessarily evoke an autonomous, dynamically individuated personality. First-person narrators naturally monopolise their self-presentation, but Arun's self-aware, penetrating account of his and his friends' wayward lives does not elicit the sort of vigilant, ludic attention that readers bring to more devious first-person fiction that allows us to glimpse the intriguing gap between a narrator's self-portrayal – and self-knowledge – and possible alternative views on their personality or predicament.

If fiction can generate pleasure and insight from its narrators' unreliability – a quality that autobiography conventionally disavows – one could say that Mishra's narrators are not sharply particularised or distinguishable enough from the reliable “I” of memoir to become interestingly fallible. Their interiority is at once immersive and of a strangely generic, unadorned kind. In this, their thoughtful reflections are somewhat reminiscent of an autobiographical tradition of philosophy – what Mishra has described as the “self-reckonings” of Montaigne or Nietzsche or Thoreau that influenced him as a young writer. In *Run and Hide* a professor helps Arun to think of books not merely as entertainment but as “guides to existence, a

The NS Poem

Weirdos

Ben Wilkinson

A burp of laughter in the boardroom
or sombre at a birthday party,
we spy each other quick as sweat.

Fitful sleep in the passenger seat?
Check. Introspective in rain like you
forgot your own name? You bet.

Here's a gin in a whisky tumbler
to us, who sit in the theatre's
singular dark to watch the full

credits run and beyond; who hear
the fox's cry in the night and think
it some portent; who seriously

work away at poems, as if poems
might shape strangeness into charm,
or box the latest *faux pas* we've

played over and over and over
in the auditorium of our thoughts
this long deserted night. Day comes

just as surely as we are ourselves,
goggle-eyed and fretful by turns,
weird fish preoccupied with water.

*Ben Wilkinson's second collection “Same Difference”
will be published on 28 February by Seren Books.*

way of finding oneself in the world with others”.

Sometimes claimed of fiction, the note of spiritual gravitas is perhaps better suited to “self-reckonings” like Montaigne's *Essais* or Thoreau's *Walden*. We don't classify such works as novels, perhaps in part because, aside from questions of veracity, their narrators are not mired in the disquieting complexity of social and family life but have withdrawn from it. Conveying personal journeys in a manner somehow released from the accidents of personality, they are not quite like the people we come to know in novels, but authoritative Everymen, emblematic and a little elusive, and specialising in a different sort of wisdom. ●

Reviewed in short

The Right to Repair: Reclaiming the Things We Own by Aaron Perzanowski

Cambridge University Press, 364pp, £14.99

My last phone, an iPhone 7, was bought second-hand for less than a third of its original RRP. I replaced the screen six times for less than £20 a go (plus a one-off £10 on some very specific screwdrivers) before the button gave out. I work on an eight-year-old iMac that I've also repaired and upgraded under the direction of the tech repair website iFixit. My thrifty approach hasn't exactly held Apple back – in January it became the first company to be worth more than \$3trn – but it has nevertheless gone to some lengths to thwart me.

As the law professor Aaron Perzanowski points out in this comprehensive overview of the war on repair, Apple has introduced unusual screws, software locks and warnings that appear designed to prevent people from fixing its products. Its own "repair" service simply replaces AirPods headphones, which are effectively impossible to fix. Apple is far from the only company to do this: as Perzanowski explains, repair prevention is now built into consumer gadgets, tractors, military equipment and medical devices. Where *The Right to Repair* is strongest, however, is on the intellectual property law that doesn't just discourage repair but makes it, in some cases, a criminal offence.

By Will Dunn

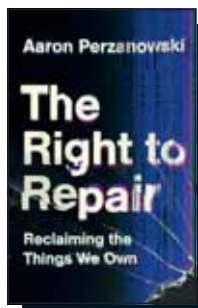
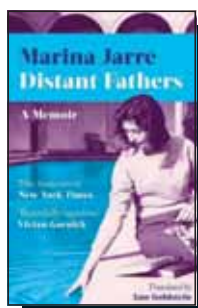
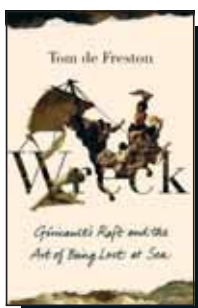
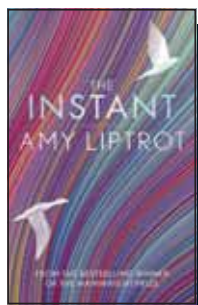
The Instant by Amy Liptrot

Canongate, 192pp, £14.99

The romantic associations of moving abroad often pose a tension. Do we cast off old anchors so we might attach ourselves to something new? Or to test the durability of our sense of self? Both impulses shaped Amy Liptrot's decision to leave her native Orkney Islands to begin a new life in Berlin – with enthralling and instinct-sharpening effect.

While a return home, aged 30, was the subject of *The Outrun*, her acclaimed first memoir, *The Instant* reckons with the call of the elsewhere. The book combines the usual challenges of job hunting and dating with searching for raccoons and traffic island mapping – a warning of intense loneliness is beautifully merged with the rewards of discovery. And with the actor Saoirse Ronan cast in an upcoming film adaption of the earlier book, I cannot help wondering if Liptrot's work updates for the existentially anxious 2020s what Helen Fielding's (very different) *Bridget Jones* books gave to the image-obsessed millennial generation. Namely, showing us how to breathe deeper in our own skin.

By India Bourke



Distant Fathers: A Memoir

by Marina Jarre, translated by Ann Goldstein

Head of Zeus, 240pp, £16.99

As the Italian novelist Marina Jarre contemplates separating from her husband, her resentment is not directed towards the man who made her feel like an "unmarried mother" while she raised their children, but towards her friends for "not perceiving the distance between my appearance and my frenzied inner world". It is this tension that lies at the heart of Jarre's moving memoir, the first of her books to be translated into English – by Ann Goldstein, who is known for her translations of Elena Ferrante.

Jarre's prose is rich and lyrical but not straightforward; memories are mixed with dreams, chronologies are twisted and vivid streams of consciousness are jarringly interrupted with historical fact. She divides her story into three parts: her childhood in Latvia, where Jarre observed the breakdown of her parents' marriage; her adolescence living with her Protestant maternal grandparents in Italy during the Second World War, when her Latvian-Jewish father was killed in the Holocaust and her mother was absent; and her adulthood in Turin, where feelings of displacement and detachment continued to haunt her. Jarre's life is fascinating, yet she maintains her distance, even from the readers that she has invited in.

By Christiana Bishop

Wreck: Géricault's Raft and the Art of Being Lost at Sea by Tom de Freston

Granta, 352pp, £16.99

When Théodore Géricault's huge painting *The Raft of the Medusa* was exhibited in 1819, it was seen as an indictment of France's corrupt Restoration government. The frigate *Medusa*, under the command of a hapless royalist officer, foundered off the coast of West Africa in 1816: of the 147 crew and passengers who committed themselves to a raft, only 15 survived an ordeal that included mutiny and cannibalism. As he worked on the picture, Géricault was deranged: reeling from an incestuous affair with his aunt, he prepared for the painting by depicting the severed heads and limbs of executed criminals.

In *Wreck*, a mix of art, identification and memoir, the artist Tom de Freston explores his fixation with Géricault's painting while weaving in his own collaboration with Ali, a Syrian writer blinded by a bomb, and a personal catastrophe too. It is a strange hybrid but he finds the right tone, and it becomes clear that what De Freston is examining is not so much one painting as the relationship between art and suffering.

By Michael Prodger

The shifting styles of Mary Swanzy

From cubism to futurism, the Irish painter personified the art of early 20th-century Paris

By Michael Prodger

The painter Mary Swanzy (1882-1978) was for much of her career a one-woman personification of the art of late 19th- and early 20th-century Paris. She was both a witness to and a participant in the birth of modernism, and there was barely a style among the bewildering flurry of “-isms” of the early years of the century that she didn’t try. It counted against her in the long run because her work can seem so full of the influences of other, better-known painters that it is hard to discern her own artistic personality. This, though, is unfair; her paintings were not pastiches but real-time responses to the shifting artistic developments happening around her.

Although Swanzy had at least 15 solo exhibitions during her lifetime and showed her work in group exhibitions alongside figures such as Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Raoul Dufy and Henry Moore, she was both modest and a woman – a double burden for an aspiring artist. Nor did she have a bohemian legend to bolster her name: she may have studied in Paris in the years that fauvism and cubism were invented, attended Gertrude Stein’s celebrated salons and watched Montmartre become the centre of the art world, but she did not join in the rackets going on. “You did not sit up at night carousing and drinking and making a fool of yourself,” Swanzy later said. “I couldn’t afford to. I couldn’t afford the time to be idle.”

In later life she made little of the extraordinary circumstances in which she started her career, but they left their mark nevertheless. She knew Pablo Picasso – her senior by just four months – when he was first making a reputation in Paris. But, she said, “the names that are of note now were not known then”. Picasso was “just an ordinary person like I might be myself... a

Mary Swanzy
Abstract, undated

little man painting”. Nevertheless, she recognised that he and Braque had changed the course of art. Cubism, “which I still thought rather comic”, shook her out of her more conventional 19th-century painterly manners. “I had lost my other world, it had spoilt it for me entirely. [Cubism] had killed the other thing for me... I couldn’t look at that stuff at all.”

A degree of gentility – personal and painterly – was inherent. Swanzy was born in Dublin to an eminent Protestant ophthalmologist father and a mother who was a descendant of John Knox. She attended a finishing school in Versailles and then a second establishment in Freiburg. By then fluent in French and German, she was taught art back in Dublin by John Butler Yeats, the painter father of WB Yeats, and looked set for a career as a portraitist. In 1905, however, she went to Paris and what she found there elbowed her on to a different track.

The early influence of modernism on her work was initially tentative: her depiction of the gardener Gertrude Jekyll in around 1910, for example, comprises a conventional portrait set against a rapidly brushed and colour-rich background. Over the years she worked in any number of manners, from post-impressionism, fauvism and cubism to orphism, futurism and symbolism. Nevertheless, she never quite shook off her breeding, and there is a sense of decorum and restraint in all her work, as if she were incapable of fully letting go. Following her progress is not easy: she dated few of her works and preferred to sell to private clients, making her paper trail harder to trace.

Swanzy’s artistically polyglot tendencies were intensified by her travels. When her parents died in quick succession before the First World War, she found herself financially independent and moved to Florence to “settle” her life and also spent time in St Tropez. During the war she lived in Dublin, exhibited with the Société des Artistes Indépendants in Paris and travelled to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia to visit her sister, who was engaged in relief work.

Although Swanzy was not political, she was caught up in Ireland’s war of independence when a relative, Oswald Swanzy, a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary, was killed, it is believed, on Michael Collins’s orders. The murder and the riots that followed spooked her, and she left Ireland to go travelling. It seems she wanted to get as far away as possible: she went to Quebec and then on to Honolulu, where an uncle was a sugar merchant, and from there she travelled 2,500 miles by sea to Samoa. On her return she moved to Blackheath in south-east London, which was to remain her home for the rest of her life.

Samoa in particular awakened in Swanzy a love of rich tropical foliage, and she produced a series of works showing local women among palm trees and a profusion of greenery. Here was a place a world away from sectarian Dublin, and in her homages to Gauguin she was just as enthralled as he had been by the verdant landscape and the people of Tahiti some 30 years earlier. Swanzy’s paintings, however, have none of the sexual overtones of his paradisiacal fantasies. The way the leaves of palms and banana trees



chopped the light into shards became a motif in many of her subsequent landscapes.

This undated painting, *Abstract*, now in the Ulster Museum in Belfast, shows how she combined the lessons of both Paris and Samoa. Here is the jungle interior, tessellated into a patchwork of polygons as the light reaches through the canopy. A river is suggested, with the reflections being softer and paler, and a clump of overhanging foreground trees give structure to the patterning. The scene is totally enclosed with just a small area of blue sky showing, but it is not a threatening place, rather a joyous one with a colour range much lighter than Gauguin's richer – and sometimes oppressive – hues. Swanzy's is a world of senses too, but one that engages fewer of them.

The style of the picture is a remembrance of her Paris years and the orphism developed there by Robert and Sonia Delaunay in around 1912, when they took the uneven shapes that constituted cubist painting, filled them with colour and moved them closer to abstraction. In Samoa Swanzy discovered that these

effects were not just the result of a European artistic experiment but could be found in nature itself.

Although Swanzy called painting her "hobby", it was in fact her life. When you paint, she said, "you're lifted up... you can't breathe without it... it's just everything". She never married, not least because she feared that art and a partner were incompatible: she could control what went on her easel. A career as a portrait painter wouldn't have worked, she reckoned, because "men wanted to be painted by men, and women were expected to paint pussie-wussies and doggie-woggies".

Swanzy acknowledged too that being a woman had made her career much harder: "If I had been born Henry instead of Mary, my life would have been very different." Nevertheless, she painted her last picture at the age of 90 in 1972, *Reading Employment Offer Column* – a return to her youth and a homage to Picasso's *The Absinthe Drinker* of 1901. Despite physical frailties, she was still in thrall to art, even if arthritis meant she had to tape her brushes to her fingers. ●

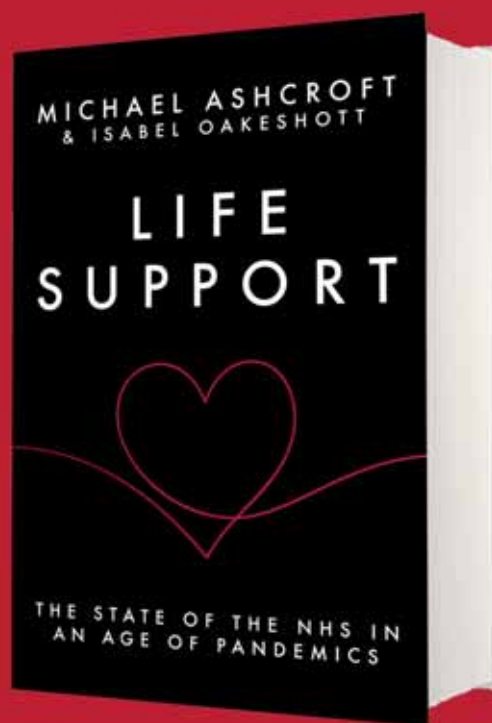
**For Swanzy,
Picasso
was "just an
ordinary
person like
I might be
myself... a little
man painting"**

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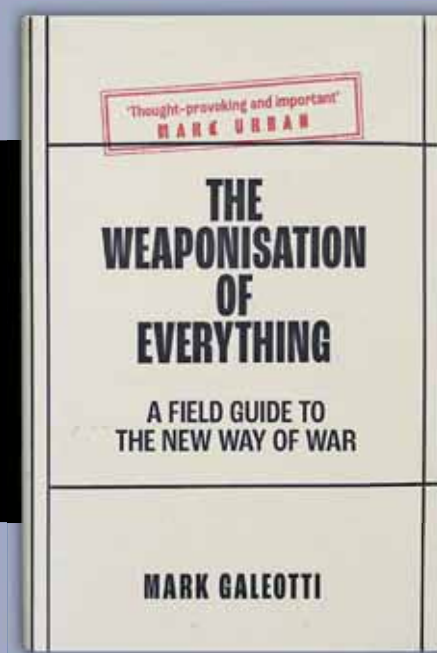


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Film

The man who stole a priceless portrait

In Roger Michell's penultimate film *The Duke*, Jim Broadbent plays a community activist who held a painting for ransom

By Ryan Gilbey

If the *Notting Hill* director Roger Michell had a pet subject, it was the vitality of the middle-aged and elderly. In three films written by Hanif Kureishi (*The Mother*, *Venus*, *Le Week-End*) – as well as in *Nothing Like a Dame*, his documentary chinwag with Eileen Atkins, Judi Dench, Joan Plowright and Maggie Smith – Michell showed that age shall not wither us nor custom stale our infinite variety, not even once we qualify for a free bus pass.

The director died suddenly five months ago at 65 but the theme continues in his last fiction film (his documentary *Elizabeth* is due out later this year). Make that fictionalised: *The Duke* tells the tale of the real-life theft in 1961 of Goya's *Portrait of the Duke of Wellington*, snatched from the National Gallery shortly after £140,000 – £40,000 of which was public money – was paid to keep it in the UK. George Fenton's snazzy score, its hi-hat hissing over on-screen graphics that evoke late-1950s jazz albums, suggests that a hip art-world caper is in the offing, but *The Thomas Crown Affair* this is not.

You would be squinting long and hard before you mistook Jim Broadbent for Steve McQueen. With his apologetic lankiness and his look of befuddled alarm, Broadbent is a joy as the idealistic amateur playwright Kempton Bunton, who stages street-corner protests in his Newcastle neighbourhood. Explaining his faith in small-scale activism, he asks: "How do you eat an ►



An unlikely tale: Jim Broadbent stars as Kempton Bunton, retired bus driver and amateur playwright turned art thief

◀ elephant? One bite at a time.” His doleful wife, Dorothy (Helen Mirren), is unconvinced. “Who eats elephants?” she snaps.

To his adult sons, Kempton is an anti-authoritarian hero. Tampering with the family television so that it can't receive a BBC signal fails to win over the men in the detector van, however, so Kempton launches a campaign. “Free TV for OAPs” is the slogan on the banner he unfurls in the Houses of Parliament before being hustled out by security. Which is where Goya comes in.

Kempton holds the portrait hostage in exchange for a ransom large enough to cover the licence fees of the elderly. To the police, the theft exhibits all the hallmarks of an international crime syndicate. Little do they know the Duke is stashed in a back-bedroom in the north-east, his fixed unblinking eye peeping through a hole in the wardrobe.

When the movie premiered at the Venice Film Festival in September 2020, the licence fee was not quite the political hot potato it has become in recent months. Look beyond this and the script's mistrust of expertise, especially when exhibited by women (including the criminologist who discerns in the ransom note signs of a poor education), and there is a charming Ealing-style sensibility that dispels any Little Englander connotations. It doesn't hurt that Kempton at one point takes up the cudgels on behalf of an Asian factory worker against a racist boss.

Broadbent is a snug fit for the part, perhaps because Kempton, who responds with a feeble “I can explain” when Dorothy catches him Duke-handed, recalls the sort of bumbling figure he played for Victoria Wood in the 1980s. Helen Mirren spends most of her time trying not to be Helen Mirren. Slightly stooped, or sporting a hairnet, she wrings the back of a chair with fretful hands; it's less a performance than an attempted vanishing act. Fionn Whitehead, smouldering in his donkey jacket like a young Terence Stamp, is decent enough as one of Kempton's sons to make you wish he had more to do.

The film establishes early on that the portrait that must be restored to its rightful place is not the Goya at all, but a photo of the Buntons' late daughter. Kempton, who keeps her picture in his drawer, would dearly love to discuss her. Dorothy forbids any such outpouring (“It's done, isn't it?”) and is aghast to find he has been writing about their loss. Michell keeps the film light and funny even as his compositions show how the family's life is fragmented by grief. He shoots the actors through doorways within doorways, and fractures the image with optical effects or panels that glide across the screen like paintings liberated from their frames.

It was in theatre that Michell did his most urgent work: Nina Raine's *Consent*, Joe Penhall's *Blue/Orange*. But in parts of *The Duke*, as well as throughout *The Mother* and his gutsy 1995 version of *Persuasion*, he proved himself a dab hand at the modest brushstrokes that reveal a bigger and knottier picture. ●

“*The Duke*” is in cinemas now

Television

Whose identity is it anyway?

By Rachel Cooke

Chloe
BBC One,
Sundays, 9pm;
all episodes on
BBC iPlayer now

I started watching Alice Seabright's psychological thriller *Chloe* for only one reason: its lead is Erin Doherty, whose star turn as Princess Anne in *The Crown* was so very knowing and witty. But pretty soon I was stuck to it like glue. If you haven't seen it yet – it's all on iPlayer, waiting to be unwrapped like some crazy present – let me just say that I think this may be the first time social media and its attendant ills have been fully and convincingly incorporated into a TV drama, and that Doherty is indeed the real thing. Here is an actor who can transform her entire appearance with only the smallest change to her posture. However, I must also add a gentle health warning: *Chloe* comes with a wardrobe that may cause some viewers (like, er, me) to indulge in a particularly frenzied bout of internet window shopping.

Becky Green (Doherty) has a boring, difficult life. Her mother, with whom she lives, has early onset dementia, and her job as a temp is taking her precisely nowhere. She's also broke. No wonder, then, that she's apt to live vicariously through the Instagrammed life of a girl she knew at school, Chloe (Poppy Gilbert).



Two-faced: Erin Doherty (left) excels as Becky – or should that be Sasha?

Chloe and her filthy-rich husband Elliot (Billy Howle) have a huge, minimalist home and a close crowd of moderately unpleasant “influencer” friends – among them Livia (Pippa Bennett-Warner), a PR, and Richard (Jack Farthing), a DJ. They all hang out at a place that vaguely resembles the members’ club Babington House (only it’s in Bristol), where they do yoga, drink Sauvignon, and have “openings” and “launches”. (Livia’s husband Phil is an artist; Elliot is about to announce he’s standing for parliament.) What’s not to envy, eh?

But – surprise! – all is not what it seems. One morning, as she’s manically chewing her breakfast cereal, Becky discovers that Chloe has died, which means there is now no more scrolling to be done... Or does it? Hunched over her phone, she coolly clicks away until, as if a key has turned in a locked door, she finds a way into Chloe’s circle. Having given herself a new name (“Hi, I’m Sasha”), a new voice (bye bye Bristolian accent), a new career (naturally, she’s a gallerist) and a new look (buying her frocks on the tick, she rips off their labels in the manner of a lion tearing off the head of a wildebeest), pretty soon, she practically *is* Chloe. How long can she keep up the act? What will Elliot and his ghastly pals do if the mask slips? Or are they wearing masks, too? Believe me, you will be all questions and clammy anxiety right until the very end.

I’ve loved imposter dramas since childhood, when I first read Josephine Tey’s excellent mystery *Brat Farrar*, and part of the enjoyment *Chloe* has given me stems from this. Every scene has the potential to explode, the bomb of discovery ticking away beneath it. But there are other things going on, too. Social class is in play – the notion of keeping up appearances has a double meaning here – and so are the addictive properties of Instagram and the rest; the way they must be consumed like food (Becky inevitably scrolls as she eats, devouring her screen as well as her breakfast). Seabright’s script captures, without ever labouring the point, the sadomasochism involved in social media: its lies and blandishments are so punishing and painful, and yet Becky cannot tear herself away.

The plot may not, ultimately, hang together, and its minor characters, with their four-wheel drives and their rustled-up luncheon frittatas are on the flimsy/preposterous side. But who cares? Doherty is amazing, flipping imperceptibly (and yet, astonishingly) between Becky and Sasha, spouting her character’s lies in such a way that they seem at once incontestable (to Sasha’s friends) and supremely shoddy (to us).

And what about her gear, eh? On Twitter – OK, I looked! – people were calling her outlandish dresses revolting. But I liked them, especially the sparkly, stiff one her mother denounced as “fancy dress”. Somehow, they catch something, these clothes: her desire, perhaps. Like her, they strive for effect. Sasha may be a fiction, a half-formed thing, but she sets something free in Becky, nevertheless. Here is a girl who can pull off a long, lavender, one-sleeved frock even when she’s stumbling across a seaside caravan park. ●

Radio

The day of the diagnosis

By Rachel Cunliffe

Room 5
BBC Sounds

Helena Merriman knows how to tell a compelling story. Her previous podcast series, *Tunnel 29*, about German rebels who dug a tunnel under the Berlin Wall, had me utterly captivated. *Room 5* is mesmerising in an altogether different way: the stories are smaller, more personal, but still life-changing.

Each episode, Merriman interviews someone whose world was upended by a medical diagnosis. There’s a young woman tormented by hallucinations so severe her doctors think she must have psychosis; a father who discovers there’s something drastically wrong with his penis while at Peppa Pig World with his children; a medical student who can feel other people’s pain when he looks at them. Gently but thoroughly, Merriman turns their experiences into 30-minute narrative dramas, spoken word juxtaposed with an immersive soundscape that transports the listener through waiting rooms and hospital corridors, past tests and treatment, and out the other side.

It sounds like it should be depressing – and certainly some situations had me in tears. But the honesty and the intimacy bring light to some of the darkest moments any of us can face. Rarely do we talk about what happens in those anonymous doctor’s rooms; rarely do we contemplate that our bodies will not work flawlessly forever and we will one day have to seek “answers that don’t exist in medical textbooks”.

The twist, which Merriman reveals in her introduction to the series, is that she understands all too well what her interviewees are going through. It was the reaction to her own shock diagnosis that inspired her to seek out those with similar experiences. The final episode is all about her: narrator becomes subject. “All of us one day will sit in a room and be given a diagnosis,” Merriman says, and by this point I’m so invested in her journey I feel I’m there in the room with her. “Perhaps it hasn’t happened yet, but if – when – it does, I hope these stories will help shepherd you through whatever comes.” ●

**Rarely do we
contemplate
that our
bodies will
not work
flawlessly
forever**

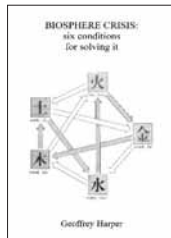
BIOSPHERE CRISIS: SIX CONDITIONS FOR SOLVING IT

We face a biosphere crisis: both atmospheric carbon dioxide and global population are rising inexorably. These are just two of the many aspects of the biosphere crisis (think of soil erosion, water shortage, poverty, mass migration, biodiversity loss) yet the Western mind treats them as independent problems.

This book argues that we face a complex system – the biosphere – in crisis, and that there are six conditions for solving this crisis, beginning with simply understanding it. A publisher is sought for a post-COP26 edition.

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THE BACK PAGES

Drink



Nina Caplan

In Italy I find
both ancient rulers
and young winemakers

It wasn't precisely a coincidence that I ended up drinking the last two wines from my 2016 book research trip in the same week: both were 2010s, and I was worried I'd kept them too long. Also, I had been reminiscing about that wonderful journey, searching for traces of ancient Rome in her long-dead inhabitants' favourite wine region around Vesuvius, and I wanted to return not just there, but then.

Italy is already a place where time blurs; there is so much past crowding the present, which is why it became the focus for *The Wandering Vine* – my book about wine, memory and history – in the

ANTONIO IACOBELLI



◀ first place. The wines I tasted there were young, and often, so too were the winemakers, but very little else was. The first 2010 was an Aglianico from Il Cancelliere, more than 500 metres up Montemarano, a mountain locals still refer to as “the place the Romans couldn’t conquer”. The vines are worked in harmony with the phases of the moon, which many practitioners of biodynamics would be surprised to know was first suggested by the Roman writer Columella, in the first century AD.

Il Cancelliere’s Nero Né is named for its deep colour (“nero” means black) but also for the scandalous Roman emperor. Recently, the British Museum tried to rehabilitate him: the exhibition was terrific, but I wasn’t convinced that the sadist was actually a decent ruler maligned by vengeful successors. I first tried the wine on that ancient hillside, when it was lovely but too young: a baby named for a 2,000-year-old emperor who was himself dead before his 31st birthday.

Seventeen villages here have the right to label Aglianico as Taurasi, a DOCG (Italy’s top quality designation) that should be better known than it is. The wines have the tannin and acidity required for ageing, and the bottle I’d saved still breathed dark chocolate, black cherry and tobacco, wafting me back six years and more than a thousand miles.

The other wine, La Sibilla’s Marsiliano, was still pretty, perfumed with smoke and raspberries, but as faded as a photograph left out in the Campanian sun. I drank it recalling a day spent at La Sibilla and at Cumae, an eerie nearby archaeological site that was said, in Roman times, to be the home of the Sibyl. This seemed apt: what could be more of a blend of old and

new than a mythical priestess who foretells the future?

The owners of the Sibyl’s namesake winery only started making their own wine in 1997, on a site so old that they claim the ruined villa above the vineyards belonged to Julius Caesar. Up there, we looked down into the turquoise waters of Baiae, where Nero apparently tried to drown his mother. Agrippina managed to swim ashore, and I like to imagine her visiting Cumae, and those two remarkable women sharing survival tips. Perhaps Sibyl comforted Agrippina with the foreknowledge that posterity would punish her vicious son, remembering only his cruelty.

Not all Italian wine’s intertwining of past and future involves myths or murders. Laithwaites has just started selling a wine called W/O (which stands, apparently, for “without compromise”), made from Sicily’s cherryish Frappato grape, in a bottle that is 100 per cent recycled glass: the old, repurposed. Sicily, too, has a Nero: a rich, plummy red grape called Nero d’Avola. Recently I tried Colpasso, a version made from grapes left to dry until the water evaporates, making a richer, more concentrated style. The technique is called *appassimento*, and is used in the north for the powerful dry reds known as Amarones. Unlike them, Colpasso is a gently priced wine that will soon be available in Morrisons.

My Campanians, meanwhile, are found in independents: Buon Vino and Hay Wines for Il Cancelliere, while Justerini & Brooks has other cuvées by La Sibilla and I wish they’d stock this one. Although I really shouldn’t complain. I live in an era awash with great wines, my only worry being when to open them. How I would like to consult the Sibyl on that! ●

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.

Absolutely binned

A holidaymaker who lost his false teeth while vomiting into a bin on a boozy night out in Benidorm was stunned when they turned up in the post 11 years on.

Paul Bishop, 63, said he “fell ill” after drinking cider during a night out in the Spanish party resort in 2011.

After Paul’s dentures were found in landfill, Spanish authorities used DNA records to eventually track him to his Greater Manchester home.

He said he was “stunned and gobsmacked” when he saw his long-lost gnashers. *BBC North West (Daragh Brady)*

Can’t buy me love

A North Yorkshire restaurant has slammed a couple for allegedly making off without payment after enjoying a fancy steak and lobster dinner on Valentine’s Day.

The pair are said to have racked up a “hefty” bill, with managers issuing a warning on Facebook. An update was posted to say the people responsible had assured managers they would settle tomorrow “when he gets paid”. *Yorkshire Live (Steve Morley)*

In for a snoutful

A friendly pig gave drinkers a shock after wandering into their local.

The pig, thought to be called Roddy, made its way into Easington Colliery Club in County Durham. After approaching customers for a stroke, he was lured outside with cheese and onion crisps before someone arrived to claim him. “Everyone was laughing about it,” the bar’s stewardess said. “It was a bit of entertainment for a Tuesday night.” *Northern Echo (Anne Turner)*



ALEX BRENCHLEY

The Fan



Hunter Davies

Owners and investors are all just passing through. But fans are here for life

I dislike that couple in the Newcastle director's box, the accountant-looking bloke and the lady with the swishy hair, both with brand-new Newcastle United scarves. They clearly have no idea about the game, or where they are, or what Geordies are, but they leap into each other's arms whenever Newcastle get a throw-in, a corner, or, oh ecstasy, they score a goal.

Yes, I know they have shares in the club, and represent the new owners who come from, er, wherever it is. But they are here on sufferance, investors passing through our footballing lives for a few moments, with their exaggerated gestures, pretending to be lifelong fans. Then they will be gone, taking their money, or someone else's money, quickly to be forgotten.

And yet I am desperate for Newcastle to escape relegation. Oh Gawd, I do hope they survive. It looked impossible a few weeks ago but now, thanks to a new manager and new players, and yes, these new investors, the team should stay up. Which means that down will go – possibly, maybe – Watford, Burnley, Norwich. And I will feel sorry for each of them, and their fans. I am dead soppy that way. I want all teams in small towns, with generations of families supporting them, to be happy.

I don't really care whether Man City or Liverpool win the league, and certainly don't want Chelsea or Arsenal to win it. Though, of course, I do want Spurs to make the top four. They have been my team for more than 60 years, so as each season begins, I want them to stuff everyone, win every game. For 30 years all Spurs fans have been endlessly disappointed. Once a season they manage something unexpected, like beating Man City, as they did again on 19 February, then slump back into mid-table mediocrity. But still we dream, like all fans.

Most fans inherit their team through blood: usually

it's their home-town club, otherwise they acquire them at an impressionable age by chance or for some dopey reason, and then stick with them for life. Or longer. But most fans also have a soft spot for other teams, whose results they look for.

I feel guilty about Carlisle United, my home-town club; I have neglected them these past six years, since my wife died and I gave up our Cumbrian home. I've not seen them once in that time. Not much of a fan, eh? Just as fickle as those Arabs and Russians and Americans who arrive out of the blue and buy one of our clubs.

I have always loved Newcastle's shirt. Those black and white stripes are classic. I love their fans, singing their heads and hearts off, following the team everywhere, standing shirtless on the coldest day. Their hatred of Sunderland is funny, not nasty. I loved Malcolm Macdonald, a caricature of a bullet-headed centre forward and, of course, Gazza: God, he gave us all so much entertainment and amusement.

I hated Mike Ashley when he owned Newcastle, so was pleased when he finally went. But really, there is no point in hating owners, wherever they come from. They are irrelevant, they are not your club. You don't follow them; you follow the team.

I worked on the *Sunday Times* when Rupert Murdoch arrived as owner. Those hacks who had principles left, refusing to work for such a person, and fled to the *Guardian* or the *Indy*. Murdoch did not bother me, still doesn't, yet when I meet those friends they still go on at me: how could I, still writing a column for the awful *Sunday Times* after all these decades?

My answer is simple: all newspaper owners are bastards. Editors are not much better. But they will move on. The *Sunday Times* was owned by Kemsley when I joined. Then came Lord Thomson. Then Murdoch. But the paper remained the one most journalists wanted to be on. You work for your line manager, the features editor, or whoever commissions you. You have a bond with him or her. Not the owner.

Football fans feel much the same. And political party loyalists, too. I voted Labour when Jeremy Corbyn was leader, despite thinking him an idiot. Loyal Tories must look at Boris Johnson and tell themselves he is just passing through their lives... ●

I love the
Newcastle
supporters,
singing their
heads off,
standing
shirtless
on the
coldest day



Down and Out



Nicholas Lezard

Laziness is not yet a crime,
as far as I know, but when it
is, I'll be locked up for it

The inability
to do things
that are
essential to
my well-being
suggests
a certain
degree of
self-loathing

I need help. It is now one year, four months and ten days (at time of writing) since I moved into the Hove-I, my current address. This also means it is now one year, etc, since I have failed to tell the subscription department of the *London Review of Books* that this is where they should now be delivering their learned magazine. It is also far longer than one year etc that I have failed to invoice a certain publisher £100 for a piece I wrote for one of their literary guides.

On the other hand, it is only three months since I failed to invoice Bloomsbury for a project of theirs and a week since I have failed to invoice *Perspective Magazine* £300 for a piece I wrote about the BBC. And last night was yet another night when I realised I didn't have any booze in the house and couldn't be bothered to go out and get any.

To put this into context: I pay my rent pretty much on the nose every month. My council tax, now being handled, admittedly, by a debt collection agency, involves a just-manageable monthly payment that gets delivered when it ought to. This is because I imagine debt collection agencies are all manned by people like the Ben Kingsley character in *Sexy Beast*, and you really don't want to get on the wrong side of people like that.

But seriously – I have asked this before – has this condition been named and defined? Is it in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition? In these pages recently, the ever-excellent resident NS cartoonist Becky Barnicoat listed “a few of [her] very specific conditions and disorders”, such as “panesia”, the inability to remember when the egg went in, or “xzema”, the compulsion to sign all messages off with a kiss. I, too, suffer from these. Not so much

panesia, ever since I once put an egg in the pan and forgot about it completely until I heard a loud BANG and the Hovel (the original one) started smelling of sulphur and burned protein. Ever since then, I stand over the boiling water like a hawk, stopwatch running. It's the only way.

I would say, not that I have any other qualifications than a degree of self-insight, that the inability to do things that are not only beneficial but essential to my well-being (£700: that's nearly a month's rent, or, holy crap, a hundred bottles of drinkable wine) suggests a certain degree of self-loathing. And why should I not hate myself, at least a little bit? On the positive side I am pleasant enough company on a good day, and I love my children, and I think they know it. That's about it. The bar is set pretty low, I think you'll agree.

On the negative side I am an idler, a drone, a waste of space in a functioning society. If I didn't have a certain way with words to the extent that I get paid for using them (oh, and Lord, how hard it is to get me to do even this, as my editor, who has seen me deliver my copy late for five out of the last six weeks, can attest), I would probably be in prison for sheer laziness. This is not actually a crime yet, as far as I know, but the time is coming when it will be.

A recent edition of this magazine fell open at a certain page in the *Spotlight* supplement and my attention was arrested by a headline which ran “Jobseekers to be pushed into working in any sector”. I felt as though someone had walked over my grave. The article was illustrated by a photograph of Thérèse Coffey, the Work and Pensions Secretary, leaving Downing Street; on the left side of the picture was the imperturbable No 10 cat, Larry, and I thought, even he has a job. My only hope is that one day, a little Christian charity is brought back to the public realm. Specifically, Luke 12: 27-29: Consider the lilies of the field, who toil not, neither do they spin, etc.

Perhaps this self-loathing is allied to, or a consequence of, a sense of despair. Since ejection from the Hovel four and a half years ago, I have been extremely aware of the temporary, contingent and fragile nature of existence. We are all a heartbeat away from death, but there's nothing like being kicked out of your home to, well, bring it home to you. It took me years before I tempted fate by putting up any pictures on the walls of the new Hovel, and even then, they were not valuable; charming but largely worthless framed prints from 19th-century magazines, bought for a song from the framer next door; then his landlord trebled his rent, and off he had to go. Send not for whom the bells tolls, it tolls for thee.

But compared to others, I have nothing to grumble about. Amazingly, I have my health, touch wood. The little lumps or nodules I could feel below the surface of my armpits, which had absolutely been freaking me out for the last two months, seem to have disappeared. The plague of boils on my back has returned but as I'm never going to be in a relationship again unless a miracle happens this isn't much of a problem. Like Don Marquis's Mehitabel, I am *toujours gai, toujours gai*. X ●

Off the Record



Tracey Thorn

Sometimes I feel strong enough to be unsettled by art, but not today

Can an art exhibition make you sick? I'm wondering this as I walk around the Royal Academy feeling nauseous, though I'm unsure whether the cause is the Francis Bacon show, "Man and Beast", or whether it's the new medication I'm on, which lists nausea among the possible side effects. I'm hyper-aware of my body since I started taking the tablets, and it is perhaps not the ideal state in which to view this particular exhibition.

Michael Prodger wrote in the *New Statesman* a couple of weeks ago that it is "a visceral if bleak and disturbing show", and he describes the mood as "compelling and terrifying", the walls of the gallery covered with "blind, howling forms... screams and mangled bodies... strange, snarling, menacing, biomorphic organisms".

I have to sit down for a moment on one of the benches. I take a few deep breaths and have the thought that I am in the wrong place at the wrong time. My own body seems to be turning against me and, fearful of causing a sensation by vomiting in front of a work of art, I decide to head for the outside and the fresh air.

It's 5.30pm and the light is fading on London's Piccadilly. I gulp down the lovely exhaust fumes, and look at the sky, which is doing interesting things with pinks and purples, and I start to feel a little better. I'm due to be meeting a friend for the evening, but I'm now way too early, so I decide to buy a book from Waterstones across the road. Ten minutes of happy browsing is rudely interrupted by the fire alarm, and as we are herded down the emergency stairs, I smell something like burning rubber, and again start to feel queasy.

Back out on the street I make the strange decision to kill some time by heading for a high fashion

emporium, the kind of place I normally avoid. I am clearly not thinking straight. The shop is starkly white and dazzlingly lit, the clothes are all stiff and lurid and there seems to be only one of each item of clothing, in the tiniest size imaginable. None of this is improving my sense of physical unease.

Once more I return to the pavement. It's dark now and yet I still have an hour to go. There is only one thing for it: I will have to arrive early, but I will need to have a book with me. So it's into Foyles where I narrow down the choice to a book small enough to fit into the bag I am carrying. Annie Ernaux's *Exteriors* will do it, being only 74 pages long and one of those beautiful, minimalist Fitzcarraldo Editions. I pay, and slip it into my bag, and I am triumphant. To the bar!

Settled inside, in a comfy armchair, I take a sip of my martini and feel restored for the first time all afternoon. The nausea is gone, the slight discomfort has vanished, and I feel at ease in my body. I think what I experienced earlier was pure, visceral anxiety, exacerbated by disturbing paintings of physical suffering that made me think dark thoughts. As, indeed, they should. I'm no enemy of difficult art, but there are times when we are strong enough to be profoundly unsettled, and other times when we need soothing, and there is no shame in that.

I take out the Annie Ernaux book, which is a collection of journal entries describing fleeting encounters on the streets of a small town just outside Paris. Opening it at random, I read her description of a man in a Metro corridor leaning against the wall: "His fly was open, revealing his balls. An unbearable sight – a shattering form of dignity... The women walking by avert their eyes." She goes on to ask herself why she has chosen to describe this scene. "What is it I am desperately seeking in reality? Is it meaning?"

She comes to the conclusion that it is more that she is trying to learn something about herself, and says that "sitting opposite someone in the Metro, I often ask myself, 'Why am I not that woman?'"

All this sends me down a rabbit hole of thinking about how we appear from the outside; how unknowable and mysterious people are; how hard it is to understand even ourselves, let alone others. Another sip of martini. I'm happy now. ●

My body is turning against me, and I am fearful of causing a sensation by vomiting in front of a work of art



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David Lammy MP (TBC)
Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
(Subject to availability)

Sponsors

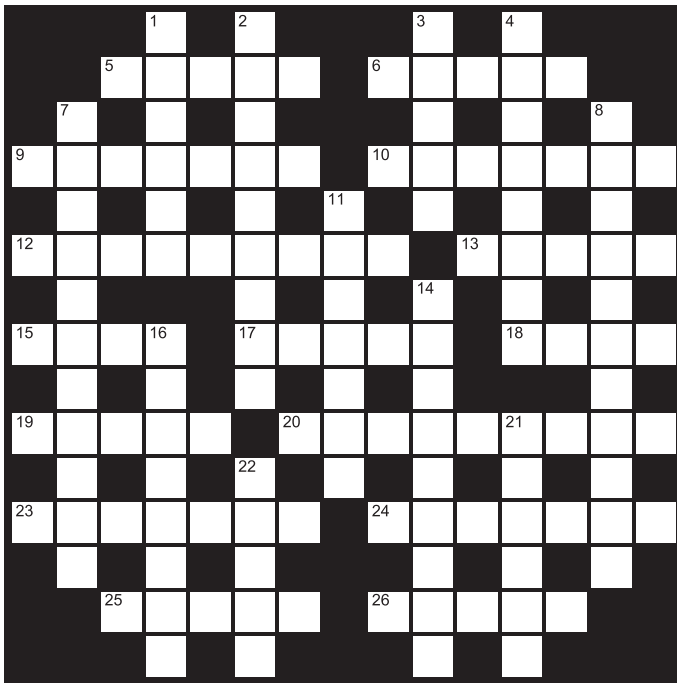
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The NS Cryptic Crossword 573: Sporting Alphabetical by Anorak



Clues lead to solutions beginning with the letter indicated. Fit the solutions into the grid, jigsaw fashion. (Clue numbers appear to ease presentation of the solutions in next week's issue.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>A Kent and England wicket-keeper making one thin negative with teetotaller (4,5)</p> <p>B Posh footballer's streams (5)</p> <p>C Aussie cricketing family at church, it's said (8)</p> <p>D One went off, back to leading jockey (7)</p> <p>E Choice of including "s" or not! (8)</p> <p>F Snooker and billiards legend may add five fries (4,5)</p> <p>G Anna's geezer – strange US golfer (4,7)</p> <p>H Severe winter weather for obdurate TV detective (4,5)</p> <p>I England batsman may be in all trouble (3,4)</p> <p>J England wicket-keeper's hound (4,7)</p> | <p>K Some hill on Kerrera, on reflection (5)</p> <p>L Praise F1 driver endlessly (4)</p> <p>M Distance round north for Pooh's creator (5)</p> <p>N Wanting, working dough, we hear (7)</p> <p>O Editor gone out, wandering nervously (2,4)</p> <p>P Plant from rein and plane! (9)</p> <p>Q Emirate's question and answer to sailor (5)</p> <p>R England cricketers Smith and Hobbs get the birds (6)</p> <p>S Girl's embracing member and tennis champion (7)</p> <p>T Cat in the Woods! (5)</p> <p>U Strongly advised to mix drug with ecstasy (5)</p> <p>V Cricket captain showing an expression of disgust in the lead (7)</p> <p>W Virginia leading Wimbledon and defending eagerly (4)</p> <p>X Ten choppers on graphs (1-4)</p> <p>Y Cathy rebuilt boat (5)</p> <p>Z Areas in Amazon estuary (5)</p> |
|---|---|

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

Answers to crossword 572 of 18 February 2022

Across 1) Soused 5) Manifest 9) Redeemed 10) Borsch 11) Sea dog 12) Libation 14) Aggrandisers 17) Life sentence 20) Paradise 22) Eclair 23) Mimosa 25) Omitting 26) Reverend 27) Nodder
Down 2) Opener 3) Speed camera 4) Demagogue 5) Medulla 6) Nabob 8) Succours 13) Tessellated 15) Dandelion 16) Vitalise 19) Fiancé 21) Irate 24/7/18) One for the road

Subscriber of the Week: Gabriel Osborne

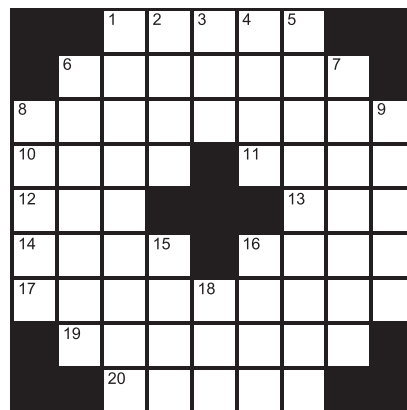
What do you do?
I'm studying for an MPhil in the history of political thought.
Where do you live?
Bristol and Cambridge.
Do you vote?
Yes.
How long have you been a subscriber?
Almost a year.
What made you start?
I wanted a weekly publication that I could work through at my own pace.
Is the NS bug in the family?
My mum tries to steal my copy.
What pages do you flick to first?
Reviews, then columnists.
How do you read yours?
Willingly.



What would you like to see more of in the NS?
Coverage of foreign affairs.
Who are your favourite NS writers?
Jeremy Cliffe and Rachel Cunliffe.
Who would you put on the cover of the NS?
David Hume.
With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?
Matt Hancock.
All-time favourite NS article?
Jeremy Cliffe on the geopolitics of lithium, published in September 2021.
The New Statesman is...
Sensible.

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

The NS Crossword In Brief 22: by Brendan Emmett Quigley



Answers to crossword 21 of 18 February 2022

Across 1) Wand 5) Tsks 9) Aloe 10) I Too 11) Redaction 13) Daleks 14) Nutmegs 16) Tonier 17) Heirlooms 21) Ante 22) Leak 23) ID'd 24) Eddy Down 1) War 2) Ale 3) Nod 4) Dead tired 5) Title role 6) Steig 7) Kooks 8) Sons 12) Camel 14) No end 15) Unite 16) Thai 18) OED 19) Mad 20) Sky

Across

- 1 Hunger twinges
6 Social outcasts
8 Team England coach
10 Some punches
11 Son of Venus
12 Journaux article
13 Cold call?
14 Fit
16 *Strictly* ___ *Dancing*
17 Like yoghurt or jelly
19 Mammal with a bottlenose
20 Boy band with an * in their name

Down

- 1 "Mother and Child Reunion" singer
2 Liberal pursuits
3 MRC : UK :: ___ : USA
4 Lady with a mic
5 Very disorganised
6 Gave some juice
7 Enter like a hurricane
8 Puts (away)
9 Missed the mark
15 .001 inch lengths
16 Rock critic Nik
18 *The* ___ *Who Came in from the Cold*

The NS Q&A

“I wish people didn’t constantly talk about how exhausting parenting is”

Alice Boyes, psychologist



Alice Boyes was born in Greymouth, New Zealand, in 1980. A former clinical psychologist, she is now the author of books including *The Anxiety Toolkit*, and is a blogger for *Psychology Today*.

What’s your earliest memory?

When I was five, my mother told me she was in labour: my youngest sister was on her way. She then proceeded to make my school lunch.

Who are your heroes?

I’m very much a “be your own hero” type of person. I’m home-schooling my six-year-old and we’ve been learning a lot about scientists from history and how discoveries have been made. I love those stories. But we all have the capacity to be heroic in our own way.

What book last changed your thinking?

Todd B Kashdan’s *The Art of Insubordination*. He talks about how being willing to be the only one who thinks something is predictive of success. In clinical psychology training, it was drummed into me to always consult supervisors to make sure my thinking about clients wasn’t off base. The idea of thinking differently from others felt reckless to me, but the book helped me see the value in it.

Which political figure do you look up to?

As a same-sex married person, I have loved to see the Buttigiegs being same-sex parents in the top echelons of government.

What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?

Infertility. Over the last two and a half

years I’ve been through multiple rounds of IVF and I feel like I’ve almost got a second PhD in it. I’ve read so many studies.

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

The future. I think about what it would have been like to die before the electric grid, long-haul air travel or the internet was invented. I want to see the next human invention that’s on that level.

Who would paint your portrait?

My daughter is probably the only one interested in that.

What’s your theme tune?

It’s clichéd, but if I need to pump myself up then Eminem’s “Lose Yourself”.

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

“Finish each day and be done with it.” It’s part of a Ralph Waldo Emerson quote that a mentor had on her email signature. I relate it to letting go of rumination, and recognising that we’re imperfect.

What’s currently bugging you?

A section in my book. I deleted one example and kept another and I regret it. On reflection, I wish I hadn’t cut the other example. Come to think of it, I should publish the example I cut on my website.

What single thing would make your life better?

The border restrictions in New Zealand ending. I live in the US but I’m from New Zealand. My spouse and I haven’t seen our mothers in more than two years. We want to hug our mothers.

When were you happiest?

Every day with my daughter. I put off becoming a parent until I was 35, partly because everyone said how hard it is to be one, but so far parenting just gets better and better. I wish people didn’t constantly talk about how exhausting parenting is. I wouldn’t have left it so long.

In another life, what job might you have chosen?

A real estate investor. I like work that’s project-based, that has busy and quiet periods, rather than jobs that require consistently showing up every day.

Are we all doomed?

Eventually. ●

“Stress-Free Productivity” by Alice Boyes will be published by Ebury Edge on 3 March



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