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Tanya Gold: who is the real Prince William? • Louise Perry on the sexual revolution

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The West can't desert Ukraine

During the early months of the war in Ukraine, it looked as if the Russian offensive might collapse under the weight of its own incompetence. The planned assault on the capital, Kyiv, had to be abandoned after the advancing Russian forces ran out of fuel and food before eventually being compelled to retreat, although not before they had committed terrible atrocities against Ukrainian civilians. The attempted encirclement of Kharkiv, the country's second largest city, similarly failed, with the Ukrainian military forcing the attackers back across the border to regroup.

The unexpectedly stiff Ukrainian resistance and the unexpectedly swift response from the West, along with these spectacular early failures, began to fuel serious discussions among Western analysts as to whether Ukraine could actually win the war. Some suggested that perhaps Kyiv should go even further and try to reclaim Russian-occupied Crimea. But with the conflict now entering its fourth month, that initial optimism has faded as the momentum shifts back towards the Russian side. International observers are moving from considering how far Ukraine should push to how much territory the country might have to concede to achieve a ceasefire.

But such suggestions fundamentally misunderstand President Vladimir Putin's objectives and undermine the perception of Western unity that will be critical to persuading him to end this war. The only way to stop the fighting is to convince Mr Putin that he cannot afford to go on, and that means redoubling Western support for Ukraine. This includes providing more weapons and ammunition for the forces that are still valiantly fighting on the front line.

Mr Putin appears to have adjusted his immediate objectives from the quick takeover of the entire country he initially sought to a slow, grinding offensive that aims to consolidate Russian gains in the east, cut off Ukraine's access to the coast, and bring the country to its knees by destroying its economy and exhausting its will to fight. While the Russian economy



Vladimir Putin appears to have adjusted his objective from a quick takeover of Ukraine to a slow, grinding offensive

is contracting, the Ukrainian economy is shrinking far faster (its GDP is projected to fall by 45 per cent this year).

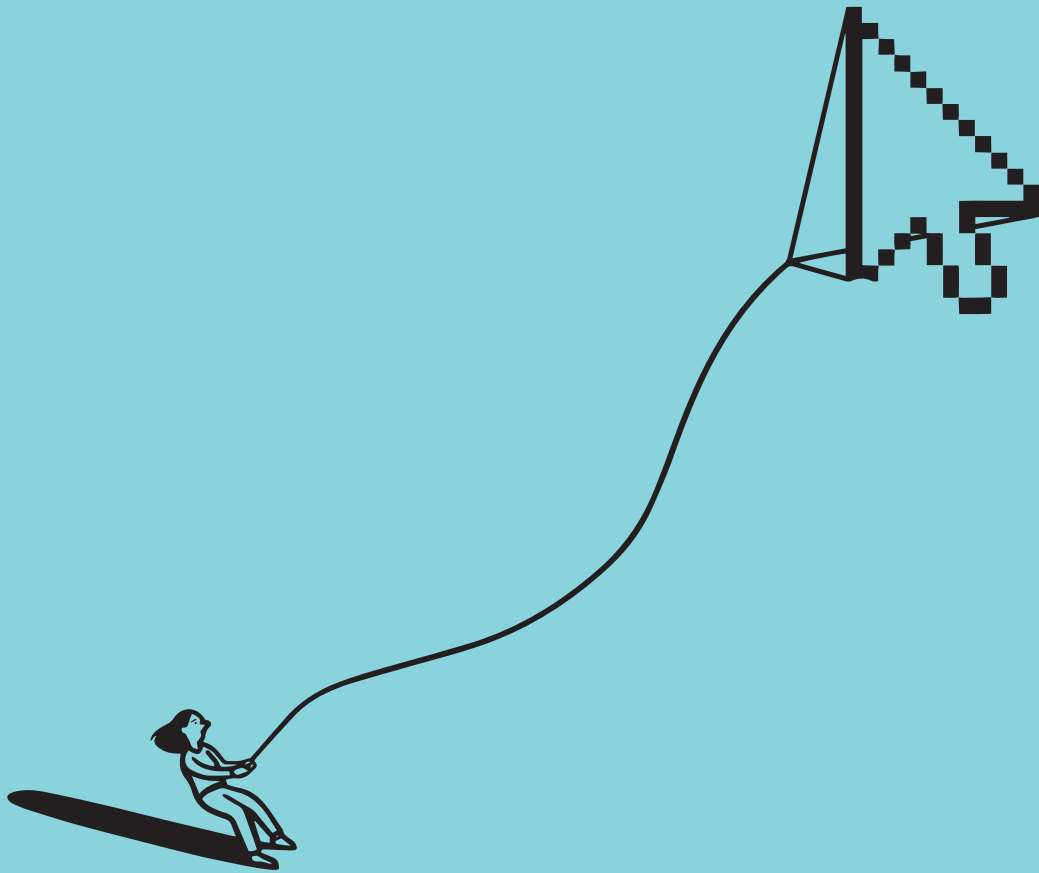
The south-eastern port city of Mariupol finally fell to Russian forces on 16 May, giving Russia its long-sought land bridge to Crimea. The Russian army is also close to taking control of Severodonetsk, one of the last Ukrainian-held cities in the Luhansk region, where President Volodymyr Zelensky has acknowledged that as many as a hundred Ukrainian soldiers may be dying every day.

Confronted with this attack, Kyiv does not need the unsolicited advice it has received in recent weeks from figures such as Henry Kissinger, the former US secretary of state, who urged Ukraine to concede territory to Russia to end the war. This will not halt Mr Putin's march westwards or end the threat that he poses to neighbouring democracies; it will only empower him and enable him to celebrate an initial victory before attacking what is left of Ukraine in the years to come.

Instead, Western officials must focus their efforts on getting effective weapons as rapidly as possible into the hands of the highly motivated Ukrainian forces who are fighting and dying every day to slow the Russian advance. Ukraine's government has been clear about what it needs. Western leaders must listen to these pleas, not the advice of Mr Kissinger.

It is encouraging that European Union leaders have agreed to block most Russian oil imports by the end of the year, but it is all too predictable that Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, carved out an exemption for himself. Mr Putin undoubtedly factored the cost of international sanctions into his invasion plan, but he may well have assumed that Europe's dependency on Russian oil and gas, and domestic political pressures, would cause European leaders' resolve to weaken.

As with his early flawed assumptions about the depth of Ukrainian resistance, it will be up to the West to prove Mr Putin wrong and to convince him that the only way out of the crisis he has created is to halt his offensive and begin negotiating seriously for peace. ●



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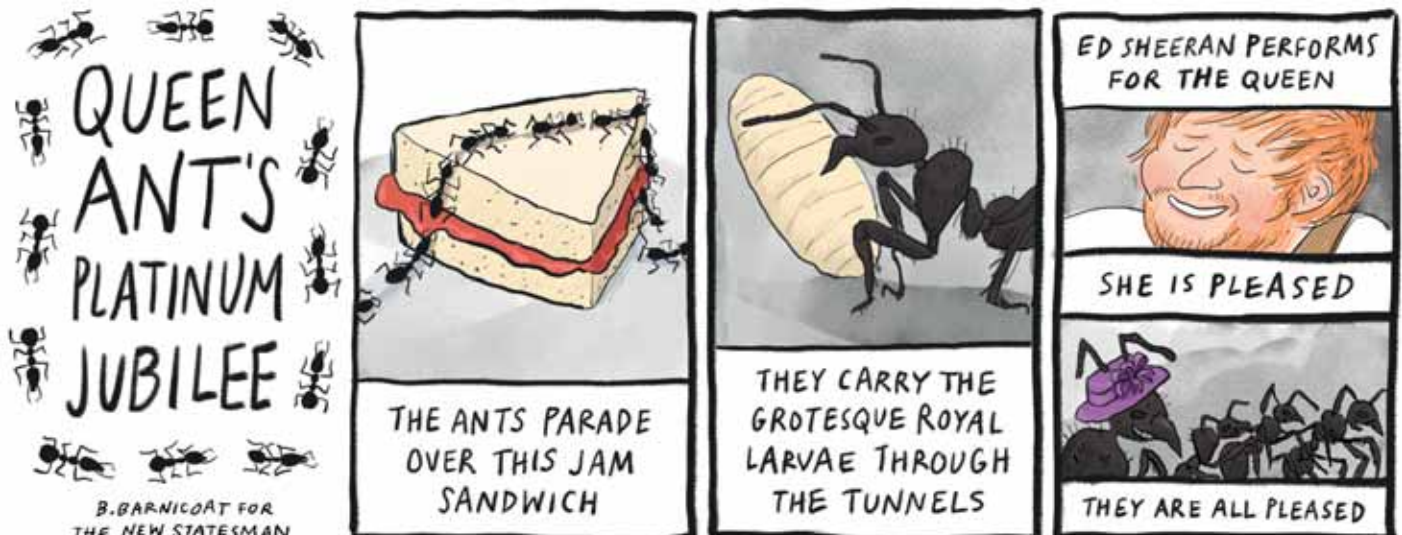
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THE NOTEBOOK



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Comment

The fatal grip of the US gun lobby By Emily Tamkin

The day after his 18th birthday on 16 May, a teenager in Uvalde, Texas, purchased a semi-automatic rifle, capable of shooting dozens of rounds a minute, from his local gun shop. The next day he bought 375 rounds of ammunition. Two days after that, he bought a second semi-automatic rifle from the same shop. Each of these purchases were legal. The following week, on 24 May, he entered Robb Elementary School and shot and killed two teachers and 19 young children. It was the US's 27th school shooting this year.

Twenty-seven school shootings in a year – before the year is even halfway over – is an unfathomable number. After each high-profile shooting, many Americans ask themselves if this, finally, will be the moment that spurs change. Yet it wasn't the moment in 2012 when a school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, took the lives of 20 six- and seven-year-olds. It wasn't in 2016 when a man shot and killed 49 people in a gay nightclub in Orlando, ▶

◀ Florida. Or in 2017 when a man shot and killed 59 people at a country music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Gun advocates in the US mythologise the second amendment of the US constitution, which says, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” They ignore the fact that there is nothing in the constitution about assault rifles, or that letting any 18-year-old buy such a weapon, no questions asked, is antithetical to “well regulated”.

The National Rifle Association (NRA), now the most powerful organisation lobbying against even mild restrictions on gun ownership, was, until the 1970s, non-partisan. Indeed, the NRA backed the National Firearms Act of 1934, which taxed the making and transfer of arms, and the Gun Control Act of 1968, which regulated gun sales internationally and across state lines. Some historians argue the latter decision was part of a process that politicised the NRA. Others have made the case that it was the backlash against civil rights in the 1960s that prompted many white Americans to view the right to bear arms as a necessity not for a well-regulated militia, but to protect one’s family. In the decades since, gun control has been transformed into a deadly battle in America’s culture war.

The Republican Party has become entwined with the NRA’s agenda, refusing to support even light-touch legislation such as requiring universal background checks, which polling suggests the majority of Americans support. It is rewarded for this both by its base, which believes in the right to unchecked access to firearms, and by the NRA, which funnels tens of millions of dollars to the party. Texas senator Ted

The Texas senator Ted Cruz accepts more money from gun lobbyists than anyone else in the Senate

Cruz accepts more money from the NRA and other gun-lobby organisations than anyone else in the Senate.

And so, in the aftermath of mass shootings, Republicans tend to advocate restrictions on schools. Following the Uvalde shooting, Cruz and the House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, suggested that limiting the number of doors at schools was a solution, while the conservative online publication the *Federalist* suggested parents home-school their children. Republicans have also suggested arming teachers or stressed the need for police officers in schools. Yet armed police didn’t prevent the tragedy at Uvalde. Officers were on the scene for more than an hour before entering, as children inside repeatedly called the police for help. When asked why officers left the shooter with so many students for so long, a Texas Department of Public Safety official said that they were cautious about engaging with the shooter because “they could have been shot”.

Yet it would be a mistake to blame only the NRA or the Republicans for inertia over gun laws. The response from the Democratic leadership has been woefully inadequate. Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, where the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting occurred, has championed gun control for a decade. On the evening of 24 May, he gave a powerful speech on the Senate floor, asking his colleagues, “What are we doing here?” He then told reporters he was sure that there were ten Republicans who would join Democrats in supporting legislation on guns, despite all evidence from the past decade suggesting otherwise.

Meanwhile, the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, responded to the shooting by encouraging Americans to vote in the November midterm elections. The Senate then adjourned for a ten-day recess. According to the Brady Campaign, a non-profit organisation that advocates for gun control, 321 people are shot every day in the US – which means more than 3,000 are likely to be killed or injured by guns by the time the Senate gets back to work. We do not know how many shootings, in schools or elsewhere, will take place between now and November’s elections.

Democrats are not even united in opposition to the NRA. The day of the shooting coincided with the Texas primary, in which the Democratic congressman Henry Cuellar, who opposes abortion and has accepted donations from the NRA, ran against the more progressive Jessica Cisneros. Yet the Democratic leadership, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, endorsed Cuellar, and the party invested money in his primary race.

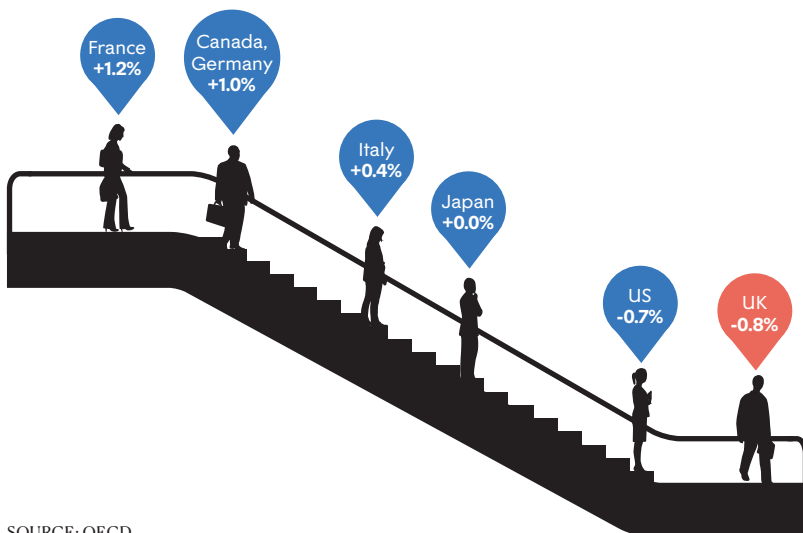
One Democrat did at least offer an expression of the anger many were feeling. Beto O’Rourke, a former Texas congressman who is now running for governor, showed up at a press conference held by the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, on 25 May. “This is on you,” he told Abbott before he was escorted out by security. Outside, a reporter asked O’Rourke about Abbott’s comment that now wasn’t the right time to “make this political”. “Now is the time,” O’Rourke said, “to stop the next shooting.”

By the following Monday there had been at least 12 more mass shootings in the US. ●

Chart of the Week

The UK’s employment rate has fallen by more than in any other G7 country

Change in employment rate: Q1 2022 compared with Q4 2019



SOURCE: OECD

The Diary

Kharkiv is shelled, streets are renamed, and soldiers on a break head for the cafés

By Bruno Mações

On 26 May, the day I arrived in Kharkiv, north-east Ukraine, Russia shelled parts of the city for the first time in weeks. A family was walking on the street. The man died immediately, the woman was hospitalised. Police later found the dead baby. The body had been thrown up onto the roof of a building's entrance by the blast wave.

Kharkiv had been trying to return to life after Russian troops retreated from the city, but the attack made some fear that full normality would never resume this close to the Russian border. Most shop windows remain boarded up. Other windows are broken or shattered and no one feels it is time to replace them. Most vehicles are military. The air alarm goes off numerous times every day and the distant sound of artillery rounds follows you everywhere. On street corners, long lines of pensioners wait to receive a plastic bag with milk or potatoes from humanitarian relief cars. Charred and partially collapsed buildings dot the central avenues and the streets remain eerily quiet. One apartment building on Svobody Street has been ripped open by missiles and shells. Someone painted three words across an exposed bedroom wall: Time hears us.

An illusion is broken

Later in the day I was sitting in the hip Protagonist café, where alcohol is still banned but every table is full with animated journalists and locals discussing the war. The sun was shining through the windows and the sirens had stopped. I felt as if I'd been transported to the city before the war. One could be happy here. Abruptly, the young woman at the table next to mine stood up and rushed to the door. Her friend had walked in and they embraced, sobbing. It's a scene I witnessed a few times.



In February thousands of residents moved to the metro and remained underground for three months

People are returning or visiting friends they feared could be lost. A few minutes later they were chatting about common acquaintances and shared teenage memories, but for me the illusion was broken and the beautiful spring day darkened again. In Kharkiv everything occurs in the gap between life and death.

The voice of Ukraine

In one of his books, the poet Serhiy Zhadan described a series of encounters between the living and the dead inside Kharkiv's metro. It was a prophetic work. When the bombing started in February, thousands of residents moved to the metro and many remained underground for three months. The city has now decided to resume normal metro service and everyone was forced to return to life outside. These days Zhadan has become a poet everyone in Kharkiv knows by name and an activist organising money and equipment donations for the army. Kharkiv is the centre of a new Ukrainian national movement and Zhadan its main voice.

War on the home front

Who are the people sitting in the city's pizzerias and cafés? They are soldiers from the "Kraken" volunteer battalion that is mainly responsible for Russia's failure to take Kharkiv. Things here were not like in Kyiv, where the Russian invasion took a few days to reach the outskirts of the city. In Kharkiv the invaders were in the ring road by the early hours of 24 February, and many special forces and saboteurs even marched down the main avenues. (Some of those early developments still need to be properly explained; President Zelensky has just fired the head of the security service in Kharkiv.) The outcome of the battle was close, but the Kraken were prepared. Now, during scheduled breaks between combat, soldiers in the Kraken come down to the city centre to meet their girlfriends or relax in the cafés. By evening they are back in their positions pounding the Russians with artillery. There is a war where you never leave home. The soldiers do not have to become fish swimming among the people, as Mao said, because they are the people.

Moscow no more

One morning, as I walked along Moscow Avenue, the boulevard running through the city, I noticed construction workers on top of a ladder. They were replacing the street signs. Moscow Avenue is now called Heroes of Kharkiv Avenue – just one of many Russian toponyms now being replaced across the city.

A silent journey

I leave by train on the morning Zelensky arrives in Kharkiv for his first visit outside the capital since the war began. In the station only the children seem relaxed. There are soldiers leaving and arriving, walking fast despite the obvious exhaustion. The few civilians waiting for the train carry their pets in boxes. It is raining so everyone waits until the last moment to board. My wagon is empty. I travel in silence until we arrive in Poltava, where the sky is blue and a throng of people enter the train, the living taking over from the dead. ●



Encounter

**“I’ve come to regret
being a populist”**
US pollster Frank Luntz
on what voters really want
By Freddie Hayward

Frank Luntz had just walked for 17 minutes in the rain from Tony Blair’s office near Bond Street, London to a modern French restaurant off Marylebone High Street. His grey-flecked beard was wet as he took off his blue jacket, sat down and looked at the menu. After a pause, he asked with a hint of contempt: “What is *Rossini*?”

America’s best-known pollster, famous for his political punditry and support for Republican causes, was not happy there. The people next to us were loud and it wasn’t the type of restaurant he would usually frequent. “I eat steak. I eat spaghetti Bolognese. I eat like a child,” Luntz, 60, told me. “I’m as likely to have a chicken and sweetcorn sandwich from Tesco as I am to have anything else.”

“And I haven’t done that for 25 years,” he added, pointing to a glass of wine. Instead, Luntz ordered a double espresso, a Coke Zero and a glass of ice. He picked up the espresso and poured it on to the ice. He then added the Coke. “This will be the third one today.” Why does he drink a minimum of six espresso shots and three cans of Coke before lunch? “Because I had a stroke two years ago and it clears my head.”

Luntz has worked as a pollster for the Republican Party for decades. He worked on the Republicans’ 1994 policy platform, Contract with America, alongside Senator Newt Gingrich. In 2002, he persuaded

HANNA KATRINA JEDROSZ FOR THE NEW STATESMAN

President George W Bush to say “global warming” instead of “climate change” (which he told me he regrets) and coined the phrase “death tax” to make inheritance tax sound less attractive. He convinces people to believe in products, policies and politicians through simple and persuasive language.

All of which requires that he understands what people think and feel. As he said in a 2003 interview, “My job is to look for the words that trigger the emotion.”

There’s little room for irony or allusion in the way that Luntz speaks; he’s abrupt and upfront. He doesn’t like pretentious words, much as he doesn’t like pretentious restaurants. I made the mistake at one point of using the word “milieu” and he cut in: “Now that is the *most* pretentious word.”

Indeed, Luntz has a knack for demotic speech. That’s essential in politics. The past six years have seen some of the most effective political slogans ever deployed. What did he make of Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again”? “Politically brilliant, ethically problematic,” he pithily replied.

The Leave campaign’s “Take back control”? “Brilliant, because it’s active. It’s not ‘Get control’. It’s not ‘Take control’. It’s ‘Take back control’. And that is a focus on language that most people do not have.” Is it also morally questionable? “I don’t know. Because I’m torn about Europe – I want more integration, not less... the Brexit campaign is proof that, politically, emotion trumps rationality.”

A few days before our interview, Luntz gave a lecture a few hundred metres from parliament at the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), a free-market think tank, in a room lined with grand portraits. Luntz told the gathering of elderly, aloof conservatives to “Wake up!” His speech built on research and polling he’d done at the CPS last summer. He had found a deluge of resentment, he warned, which is manifesting itself in populism on the right and “wokeism” on the left. And he’s worried that the US’s invidious, hateful politics is coming to the UK.

When Luntz asked people last summer what aspects of their lives they thought politicians understood least well, the “rising cost of living was far and away the top answer... We warned then that politicians were already being blamed. And that it was going to get worse. But I’m sorry, the politicians didn’t listen,” he said. “So let me try one more time. With so many people struggling to get by... it is no surprise they feel disenchanting and believe their country is not invested in them.”

And we are only at the beginning of the economic spiral. “If you’re working class, you’re already in a recession,” he said during another event at the CPS. Indeed, UK inflation is set to reach 10 per cent by the end of the year and a potential recession looms. What is needed now, Luntz argues, is seriousness.

Luntz’s opinion matters because he has influence. In the past week alone, he’s met three former prime ministers, as well as Boris Johnson, with whom he attended Oxford University, and he’s due to meet a fifth, Gordon Brown, within a month. “I have met every British prime minister since Harold Macmillan,” he

said with pride. He wouldn’t divulge the details of their conversations, but thinks Tony Blair remains the best politician on either side of the Atlantic. “No one is more likely to present a global vision of democracy, economic freedom and social responsibility... the best thing about Tony Blair is what he did to make Thatcherism more compassionate,” he said. “The best thing Thatcher did was to make people believe in the UK again. The best thing David Cameron did was to blur the party lines so that people could unite again.”

By contrast, Luntz’s view of Johnson’s government is cutting. The Conservatives, he said, “lack discipline. They lack focus; they lack answers. And there’s not enough empathy. People need to know that you care and they need to know that you get it. And I don’t think there’s enough of that... The only thing worse than the Conservatives right now is Labour.”

He argued that Labour is “all performance. It’s all entertainment. They don’t demonstrate it [empathy] either. They’re just telling you to vote against the Conservatives... They have no answers. They have no solutions,” he said, pausing to pour his white asparagus velouté into his espresso and Coke concoction.

“[Keir Starmer’s] language is not that good,” he continued. “His vision is not that strong. People are not passionate about him. But he’s responsible... I’m not inspired by him. I’ll tell you someone who I am interested in is David Lammy [Labour’s shadow foreign secretary].” Why? “He’s provocative and I think he has an understanding of his voters... but his social media is too extreme.”

“There needs to be some sort of consensus now more than ever,” he said. He listed the most important issues as NHS waiting times, crime, inflation and the “fourth one that no one’s talking about now, but they will be, is education... And it’s not a Conservative solution, not a Labour solution and it’s not a Lib Dem solution. They need to be borrowing from each other.”

In a bookshop after lunch, Luntz grazed his fingers along the book spines in its Russia section. “I always look at what they show on the cover because I know how important the cover is as to whether or not you buy it. You’re looking at that kind of writing,” he said, his finger flicking to another book, “versus that kind of writing.”

How does he reconcile the superficiality of the sell with the substance of the product? “To do good things you have to be able to explain them,” he said as we walked out of the shop. But over the past six years, the sell has superseded the product. The slogan has replaced the policy. That has left Luntz in despair. “I can’t shut my head off, I don’t sleep at night. I haven’t been healthy in some time. And I’m agitated about the world around me...”

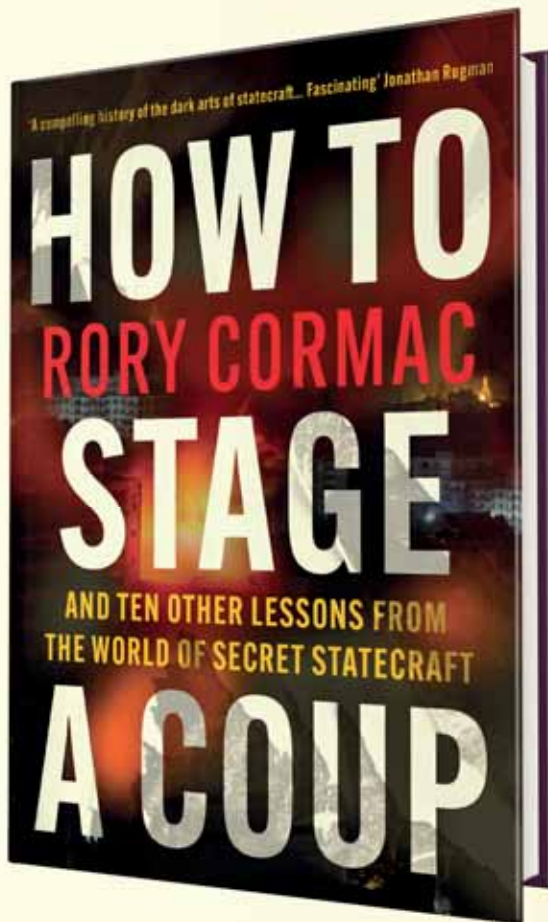
“The truth is the truth doesn’t matter. And that’s what I hate most about society right now. That is my greatest frustration,” he said.

“I used to be a populist, a very proud one,” he added. “And I’ve come to regret that.” ●

“Someone I’m interested in is David Lammy. He’s provocative and he understands his voters”

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It might not be long before Boris Johnson sends in a letter to Graham Brady, chair of the 1922 committee of Tory MPs, to demand that Boris Johnson be subject to a vote of no confidence. Johnson is hardly likely to chastise himself for creating the impression that the Conservative Party no longer respects British institutions. He might, though, conclude that if a vote of no confidence is going to come, it might as well happen sooner rather than later.

For months now, Conservative MPs have pretended to themselves that they were on the threshold of changing leader. Trigger points have been variously set and abandoned. First they were all waiting for Sue Gray's report, which was then delayed. The Prime Minister was fined by the Metropolitan Police instead but that was not thought sufficient pretext for action. Then they were all waiting for the local elections, which came and went with poor results for the Tory party but more indecision on the leadership question. Gray has now reported and, though in the aftermath there was a trickle of new rebels, the majority of MPs are still waiting, Micawber-like.

The Prime Minister and his team had assumed that, with parliament not in session, the appetite for plotting would abate. But a mixture of constituency pressure and WhatsApp scheming has made that a fond hope. Dispersed into the country, Conservative MPs are discovering for themselves what every opinion poll for weeks has also been telling them – that Johnson's lockdown shenanigans are going to cost them their seats. They then take to the instant communication channels and embolden themselves by talking to other MPs who are finding the same where they are. A Prime Minister whose only claim on the loyalty of many of them is that he is a winner has lost his golden touch. If Johnson is not seen by his team as a winner he is in trouble because he has no reserve of affection to draw on.

People close to the action assert that a confidence vote is now a matter of when rather than if. Unless something significant changes in the meantime, though, Johnson is more likely to win than lose any such vote. All the Tory prime ministers of recent memory who have faced a confidence vote of their MPs went on to win. In November 1990, Margaret Thatcher beat Michael Heseltine by 204 votes to 152, only four votes short of the 15 per cent margin of victory that was then required in the first ballot. In July 1995,

PHILIP COLLINS



Politics

The cabinet, not Tory rebels, holds the key to ending Boris Johnson's premiership

after years of acrimony over the Maastricht Treaty and the future of the European Union, John Major forced and won a leadership contest in which he beat John Redwood by 218 votes to 89. In December 2018, Theresa May won a confidence vote by 200 votes to 117. The payroll vote – all the ministers who owe their careers to the favour of the prime minister – came in for her, as it had come in for Thatcher and Major.

Yet none of them was a winner for long. Thatcher was perfectly entitled, as the winner on the first vote, to enter the second round, but she was persuaded not to do so. Major stumbled on to the 1997 general election at which his party was soundly thrashed. May's victory was followed by the Tories' humiliating defeat in the European elections (they finished fifth with 8.8 per cent of the vote) and she soon agreed to set a date for her departure.

There are two lessons for the current moment in these examples. The first is to watch the percentage. Thatcher won 55 per cent of the vote, Major 66 per cent and May 63 per cent. Major was deemed to have won and survived the process. Thatcher and May's victories were considered defeats in disguise, and they were soon gone. Advocates

of other possible candidates in the field are already putting it about that 63 per cent is the minimum threshold of acceptable success. If Johnson dips under the percentage of the vote gained by May, they argue, then surely he has to depart.

The second lesson, though, complements the first. None of the previous Conservative leaders simply packed up and left. The vote itself never did the trick. Thatcher declined to enter the second ballot because most of her cabinet told her in a series of private meetings that she no longer had their support. Major was, in due course, thrown out by the electorate. May was forced out because it became clear that she too had lost the trust of her most senior colleagues. In other words, back-bench MPs can take to the airwaves to voice their dissatisfaction all they like, but it's not in their hands. All their noise can do is to provide a signal.

Let us imagine that, this time, we have more than the usual bluster. Suppose there is a vote of no confidence and that Johnson wins it and takes precisely 62 per cent of the vote. Then what? Johnson himself will not give way. A victory by a single vote will do for him. Echoing Thatcher, expect him, in those circumstances, to fight on, to fight to win. Either a cabal of senior colleagues – led by a Rishi Sunak or a Michael Gove – tells him to leave or Johnson will stagger on to meet the electorate. MPs are on the news today but this is not about them. Eventually this pathetic spectacle will have to be put to an end by those who actually wield the power. ●

Backbenchers can voice dissatisfaction, but change is not in their hands

CORRESPONDENCE

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Letter of the week Why Keynes was right



John Gray writes of the end of the market-led era that began with Margaret Thatcher (Cover Story, 27 May), and if John Maynard Keynes was alive today, he would be smiling quietly with satisfaction. Politicians and economists have never really understood his principal message, which was that capitalism needed to be saved from itself. The recent failures of Texas electricity generators, during which Texans froze in their homes, and of course the present fiasco of the British energy markets, where a timely investment in gas storage facilities would have prevented the current crisis, are quickly forgotten. This contrasts unfavourably with France, where a nationalised industry has kept prices to a minimum.

Was it naivety that caused politicians to believe the economists who said that economic management should be junked in favour of the self-regulating free market? When did any man-made institution ever work perfectly? Now, having failed to heed Keynes's words, we will have to relearn the politics of intervention, so foolishly abandoned 40 years ago.

Derrick Joad, Leeds

Fuel inequality

Your call for new ideas (Leader, 20 May) applies to the social injustice of domestic fuel poverty. Current proposals such as the windfall tax are welcome but will only bring some short-term relief. One longer-term solution is a progressive structure of charges for energy consumption: the greater the use of gas and electricity, the higher the cost per unit. The lowest unit cost would be paid by those obliged to use payment meters. The next band would allow occupiers of small or moderate dwellings to heat their homes without incurring unmanageable debt. Beyond that, successive tiers would oblige heavy energy consumers to pay more for the privilege of their lifestyle.

Nicholas Bowley, York



"For the Platty Joobs, I'll be slipping on a light crown and smashing a bottle of rosé"

Gray matter

Andrew Marr is correct (Politics, 27 May) that the Sue Gray report will not dislodge the Prime Minister for now, but there must be a longer-term effect. It reveals a squalid pit of entitlement. Boris Johnson's equivocations in defence of this blatant disregard for the rules that he was exhorting everybody else to follow brings to mind Aneurin Bevan denouncing Anthony Eden's similar shiftiness over the Suez crisis.

Dr Colin J Smith, West Kirby, Wirral

I am enjoying the "new" *New Statesman* very much. How good it is to have Andrew Marr released from his Sunday morning show to chart Boris Johnson's demise.

Liz Storrar, Oxford

Any Conservative should have realised the government's lack of a moral compass (Correspondence, 27 May) when, in support of Dominic Cummings's Barnard Castle exploits, Michael Gove avowed that he too had occasionally driven to test his eyesight.

Neville W Goodman, Bristol

Disparate diasporas

It was good to read Kavya Kaushik's piece on Labour losing Harrow council (NS Online, 24 May). Trying to disaggregate the voting patterns formerly known as "BAME" is a fraught but worthwhile endeavour.

However, Kaushik's claim that Southall is "the west London equivalent of Harrow" is not accurate. Southall was mainly transformed by postwar migrants from Punjab – a great number of whom were Sikh – while the "Africanisation" policies that some east African states pursued was the main cause of Harrow's demographic change in the 1960s. Southall's radical history is often glossed over; this part of London has given birth to organisations such as the Southall Black Sisters and The Monitoring Group.

When Kaushik writes of Indian voting habits and aspirations, she is effectively discussing east African Gujarati Hindus and their British children. That two of the country's most significant politicians, Rishi Sunak and Priti Patel, are the children of east African Asians is notable. Their attachment to the Conservative Party and conservatism is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it skin-deep.

Satya Gunput, Birkbeck College, University of London

One for the team

I am disappointed at the NS running a piece about teams and leadership with no mention of women (Newsmaker, 27 May). Whom are our girls to look up to when men are always cited? You could have included any number of women, from Natalie Campbell, who leads the incredible social enterprise Belu, to Abby Wambach and all she has done for football in the US.
Rebecca White, Norwich

Not many could find a thread running through Herbert von Karajan, Ben Webster and Jürgen Klopp, but Michael Henderson managed this in his fine essay on the team.
David Willis, London SE11

The Marshall myth

David Reynolds (The NS Essay, 27 May) gives a highly sanitised account of the Marshall Plan. The prospect of aid may have influenced the Italian election in 1948, but so did the fact that American and British warships were anchored off the Italian coast. In 1948, the CIA engineered splits in the major trade unions in France and Italy – ostensibly to reduce communist influence, but in practice to greatly weaken trade-unionism. While France achieved “intensive industrialisation”, it also clung on to its empire. This meant a vicious seven-year war in Indochina, leading to the even more disastrous American war that ended in 1975. This is hardly a model for anything.
Ian Birchall, London N9

Piece of the action

Leo Robson (The Critics, 27 May) makes the incredible claim that “in the three and a half decades since *Top Gun*, tales of military-industrial derring-do have been relatively rare”. What about, among many others, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Lone Survivor*, *13 Hours*, *American Sniper*, *The Kingdom*, *Max*, *London Has Fallen*, *Angel Has Fallen*, *Independence Day*, *Midway*, *Stealth*, *Collateral Damage*, *Executive Decision*, *The Great Raid*, *GI Jane*, *Memphis Belle*, *Lions For Lambs*, *Under Siege* and *Under Siege 2*?
Ian Sinclair, London E15

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Commons Confidential

By Kevin Maguire



The only person who knows precisely how many Tories have submitted letters formally requesting a confidence vote in Boris Johnson is Graham Brady, the frustratingly discreet chair of the 1922 Committee. A panicked Downing Street spewing crowd-pleasing policies at the PM’s reactionary base (imperial measures, grammar schools) suggests the total is edging closer to the incendiary 54. Evidence that the partying premier tried to knobble Sue Gray over boozy bashes is going down like a cup of cold sick. Mandarin colleagues whisper that the veteran civil servant resented the political interference and that the report will be her last big job in government. She’s going to quit Whitehall, they say.

Talk of a ministerial reshuffle is resurfacing, but Rishi Sunak won’t be moved when he is Johnson’s human shield in the cost-of-living battle, muttered a usually reliable source. The Chancellor’s battered prospects of succeeding the PM won’t be revived, however, by spending £21bn and imposing a “temporary, targeted energy profits levy”, more colloquially known as a windfall tax. The Tory party’s right-whingers are furious. “We can’t tell where the tax-cutter starts and Rachel Reeves ends,” moaned one dismayed MP.

Jeremy Hunt’s leadership campaign is up and running. A 2019er who asked if the former health secretary would stand recounted being advised by a member of the team: “Ask us after the Wakefield and Tiverton by-elections.” The Red and Blue Wall contests are on 23 June.

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart repeats a whiskery story so often at receptions in Gwydyr House that it must qualify for a preservation order. The well-worn tale involves Labour predecessor Peter Hain and Fusilier William Windsor, also known as Billy. He was the goat mascot of 1st Battalion, the Royal Welsh. Hart records him emptying his bowels on a Gwydyr House carpet during a visit to the Wales Office. My snout murmured that it serves as a metaphor for Johnson’s soiling of public life.

The freedom of information revelation that four-day-weeker Jacob Rees-Mogg produced only three “Sorry you were out when I visited” notes, which were left on the desks of civil servants working from home, exposed the wheeze as a cheap stunt. Card and “printing ink” cost less than £1, said the Cabinet Office, and the Moggmonster spent only five minutes delivering them on his way to a government meeting in 1 Horse Guards Road. The haughty minister for the 18th century, who dismissed partygate as “fluff”, isn’t as high-minded as he poses.

South Staffordshire MP Gavin Williamson, knighted for services to Johnson, wrote to Lord Speaker John McFall requesting that the House of Cronies meet in Wolverhampton during parliamentary renovations. The surprise is that the former education secretary didn’t tout Somaliland, where Sir Shameless is an unlikely hero because – hissed a jaundiced colleague – they’ve never heard of Ofqual. ●

Sunak won’t be moved on – he is Johnson’s human shield in the cost-of-living battle

The selfless monarch

How the Queen's sense of duty prevailed in an age of individualism

By Andrew Marr

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee marks... what, precisely? First, obviously, her longevity. No previous monarch in British history has been on the throne for 70 years. Elizabeth II has reigned for more than six years longer than Victoria, whose lumpy memorial guards the approach to Buckingham Palace. She is close to the record of King Bhumibol the Great of Thailand and only two years behind the all-time longest serving monarch, the Sun King himself, Louis XIV of France.

Longevity, however, is a fact of modern life, and the better off you are, the easier it gets. More than that, the Jubilee marks a real achievement: in all that time, not screwing up.

Yes, there has been a multitude of problems in the wider family but the Queen herself has reigned through crisis after crisis, bad times and good times, without saying or doing anything to cause embarrassment or political controversy. She has been calm, patient, dutiful. As the new century cartwheels forward, these relatively passive virtues seem ever more virtuous.

Neither they nor she are admired equally, either across the UK or across the generations. For older Britons, she is the country they have grown up in. She is a rare living link, and the most important one, to the Britain of the Second World War and the Attlee welfare state, as well as the last remnants of empire.

When she goes, many older Britons will experience trauma. Whenever it comes her death can hardly be a shock – she is 96. But for millions it will feel like the cutting of a living cord, a break in history. The United Kingdom faces so many challenges, including to its survival as a political unit, that when the second Elizabethan era ends the very ground will seem to move. Others, including many younger Britons, will wonder vaguely what all the fuss is about. Some will welcome the chance for a fresh start and to reappraise the institutions, hierarchies and social relations that the Queen's reign has conserved.

Modern monarchy, neurotic about threats to its survival, tries very hard to be apolitical, or "above politics". In the end, this is impossible. No matter how much the royals speak about diversity, the environment or mental health, the meaning of monarchy is inherently conservative. Any idea based on divinity and bloodline must be. Yet the Queen is not seen as a reactionary character. What has saved Elizabeth from being the gilded-bonnet mascot of the Conservative Party?

First, she clearly warmed to Labour leaders – Harold Wilson above all – and flinched from some of the more abrasive leaders of Tory radicalism – Margaret Thatcher in particular. Her genuine enthusiasm for the Commonwealth has made her less susceptible to the unbearable, condescending racism of so ▶



ANTHONY BUCKLEY / CAMERA PRESS

Framed: Elizabeth II wearing the mantle and star of the Order of the Garter, Buckingham Palace, 1960

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Warm relations: Elizabeth II with the prime minister Harold Wilson, June 1969

◀ much of the rest of elite British society. Travelling relentlessly across the UK, she saw the dismal realities of “left behind” communities more clearly and earlier than many politicians.

Thus, she has indeed been more popular, and for far longer, than any political or religious leaders – and far more so than you’d expect from someone so extraordinarily rich, and so sphinx-like in her public utterances. A recent poll for the organisation British Future found two-thirds of this very diverse country were interested in the Jubilee, and more than half felt it could bring the country together.

And so, across Britain, whatever can be done is being done – apparently 1,775 street parties and another 1,458 public events, from Shetland to Guernsey and Belfast to Bognor. What celebrity can offer is being offered, from Elton John to a rumoured Spice Girls reunion – all the fun of the fair to go along with bonfires, specially created puddings and Union Jack cakes. There will be a balcony, not with everyone on it. There may be bearskins.

And yet over this hangs an air of melancholy that will not quite blow away. The Queen is not, perhaps, well. On the increasingly rare occasions when she is seen in public, at the races or flower shows, and grins, a wave of positive feeling still breaks around the country.

Her Jubilee is a national hurrah. But it is also, surely, the last hurrah and everybody senses it. One of her favourite sayings about her role has been: “I must be seen to be believed.” Well, she will be seen. But not very much, and not for much longer.

What, then, has been the deeper meaning of her reign? There can be few people who take the monarchical principle as seriously as it pretends to insist on being taken. In 2022 how many in the crowds waving flags go home thinking that a divine creator has selected a single bloodline to intercede for, lead and represent millions of others; that the Queen serves at the command of God; and that she and her family are therefore inherently better than the rest of us? To write out the formal ideology of monarchism is to cancel it. It requires a belief in bred-in-the-bone hierarchy that is simply intolerable to the modern mind.

Yet the Queen means something. She summons up an emotional, almost instinctive, response in millions of people who believe themselves to be in all other respects modern and democratic. So, it is a call to – what?

Well, certainly, to a distant and a different way of being. Looking at the Queen’s life, it doesn’t take long to realise that she embod-

The Queen has been more popular and for far longer than any political or religious leader

ies instincts that are under threat in the contemporary world. Most of us are encouraged to express ourselves as vividly as we can. The highest good, we’re told, is to be as individual, as unique, as “me-myself-and-I” as we can make ourselves. I’m not saying this is a good thing; only that it is a ruling virtue in our competitive, consumerist world. And the Queen has been almost the opposite. She doesn’t express herself as herself. Hardly at all: as an individual she has willingly withdrawn into the pre-formed carapace of her role.

The British monarchy is wildly flamboyant. In its exuberant palaces, annual military rituals, gold-thread-splashed ceremonial clobber and even its regular exhibitionist displays of dysfunctional meltdown, it is one great show-off of an institution. But the Queen herself is almost silent, most often expressionless in public, strictly traditional in dress. She is intriguing because she doesn’t tell us, ever, who she really is.

We’d like to believe that behind the mask there is a droll, biting, highly opinionated woman. But there is no evidence of that. People tell you about her wit but when you ask for examples, they almost always cite things they have said to her, rather than the reverse.

In all this, she has been a survivor of earlier ways of being. British culture, like other European and Asian cultures, was long based on the subservience of the individual character to the role, or job, required. People were born to be farmers, or leatherworkers, mothers, shopkeepers, clerks or priests. Until modern times this was a caste society. The good life was a life in which you performed the duties and tasks which had fallen to you – while also, of course, trying to look after those around you, and obeying the laws of God and man.

Does that sound weird? Even a little creepy? Insofar as it is possible to think ourselves back into earlier consciousnesses (some historians insist it isn’t) this appears to be roughly how many people thought for many generations. It was a way of being that was only upended with the arrival of romanticism, socialism, feminism, Freudianism and the other modern “isms”. But the Queen is pre-ism. She has chosen to serve her role rather than her individualism. Yes, of course, it’s a very grand role. But it’s hard to find many other examples in the modern world – beyond a scattering of hold-outs in religious communities and rural people who have doggedly turned their backs on modern times.

Is it ridiculous to suggest that this is one of the secrets of her popularity – that, in the midst of the swarm and buzz of consumerist individualism, we want to recognise the value of other, earlier ways of being alive? Modern times are so frantic and solipsistic. Put it another way, all our eggs are in one basket. She is a lonely egg in a different basket. ▶

Cover Story

argued earlier that she has avoided being simply a symbol of conservatism. In a political sense that is true, and important. But it isn't true in terms of her values of self-abnegation, duty, restraint, lack of self-pity and then, at the end of a long day, one Dubonnet and a bit more duty. These are not Tory values, of course. But they are conservative ones.

Any vigorous, living society has a constant competition between progress, (new ways of thinking, new technologies, new social relations) and conservatism, or traditional wisdom. The tension is all-important. Unless new machines, relationships and ideas are tested against what came before, they can run away with themselves too quickly.

The secret of healthy growth is the countervailing force which helps avoid mistakes and social breakdown. We don't have a conservative political movement in the country, really, not in terms of values. These days it's a loose confederation of populists, millionaires and economic ideologues. But we do have a highly ethically conservative monarch.

This does not seem to apply to the rest of her family. She knows she cannot go on forever. So far, however, she has maintained a stubborn refusal to acknowledge old age except in its unavoidable physical manifestations. When, in 2021, the Queen thanked the *Oldie* magazine for offering her their "Oldie of the Year" award her private secretary wrote: "Her Majesty believes you are as old as you feel, as such the Queen does not believe she meets the relevant criteria to be able to accept, and hopes you find a more worthy recipient." It was an elegant refusal, the then 95-year-old was saying: "But I don't feel old at all."

Given what had happened to her recently this was extraordinary stoicism. She had lost her husband, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at the age of 99 in April, leaving her to rule alone. Prince Charles had been embroiled in financial controversy over the sale of access and honours. Prince Andrew, a friend of the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, was struggling (with the Queen's financial help) against a US lawsuit – later settled – alleging child sexual abuse in the case of Virginia Giuffre. Further afield, Prince Harry was continuing a life of insubordinate Hollywood liberalism with Meghan. He and his brother William, second in line to the throne, were reportedly barely speaking.

How much can this family continue to

unite the country? William, with his wife, Kate, is now seen as not just the heir but the saviour of the crown. The fervently monarchist British press agrees – Kate, sometimes with William, sometimes by herself, appears on almost as many front pages as Diana once did.

This cannot cheer up her father-in-law very much. Prince Charles was thinking hard about how to refresh the monarchy during the early 2020s as he began to focus on his accession as King. He had long wanted a smaller family to be the essence of "the firm". He had observed growing unease in public opinion about the sheer cost of financing so many people who required private aircraft, discreet and lavish accommodation and, not least, round-the-clock protection. The Prince of Wales and his advisers had sketched out a ground-plan for British Royalty 2.0. As King, he and Camilla would occupy relatively modest quarters in Buckingham Palace, with the public invited in even more regularly. William and Kate would stand alongside the new king. As he grew older, the young Prince George would be moved closer to the centre. Each core royal would concentrate on a major popular issue: the environment, mental health, support for women and children. But the rest of the family – Charles's siblings Andrew, Anne and Edward, their children and spouses, and all the uncles, aunts and cousins – would effectively be asked to retire to private life.

In many ways, this would be a welcome and long overdue modernisation. Monarchy today is so large and expensive, such a clattering, glittering, immodest spectacle, that it is becoming embarrassing. Charles's idea would be to hand over the monarchy to his son in leaner, fitter shape.

But when? It may be there are already tensions between Charles and William about the length of the former's reign: could Charles be persuaded to announce that he would abdicate by the age of 80, for instance?

And Prince Charles's idea for a more modest monarchy, appropriate to a much more modest country, contains its own dangers. Millions of British monarchists adore the

glitter, pomp and ceremony. For them, the gilt state coaches and intimidatingly large palaces are a large part of the point. Take all of that away, and how much authority remains?

The Prince of Wales might cite the residual popularity of other less grand royal families, perhaps particularly in the Netherlands. But Britain has been used to monarchy acting differently. Thousands of charitable bodies, hospitals, and quietly hard-working publicly minded people have become used to the idea that when a building, bridge or new wing is opened, or dinner is organised to raise money, a member of the royal family will be present. Those who have done (more than) their bit in helping will get their day at the palace for a gong, a dutiful kneel, and some memorable photographs.

That's how it is. Cut back the royal numbers too far, and there simply will not be enough bodies to go round. The institution will have to retreat from numerous unpublishable but much valued engagements and patronages; and that too will mean a loss of authority for monarchy as an idea.

When the Queen dies, the British monarchy will face a more general challenge to its popularity, one that is already evident even as the bunting goes up and the roads are closed for the Jubilee. The polling for British Future, mentioned earlier, also found that although nearly 60 per cent wanted to keep the monarchy for the foreseeable future, a sizeable minority – 25 per cent – wanted a republic declared as soon as the Queen died. Support for the monarchy is much less in Scotland. Among 18- to 24-year-olds, only 40 per cent backed it and among people from ethnic minorities, only 37 per cent. And consider, it may be easier to feel sentimental and romantic about a queen than about a king.

This is probably not the stuff of a republican revolt during Prince Charles's briefer reign, but it is evidence that as Britain changes, monarchism is not woven indelibly into our imaginations. She is. Millions dream about her. Her image is all around us every day, from money to post-boxes and stamps to a thousand glossy publications. (Though even here change is nudging; there is no image of the Queen on contactless payments, or when you press "send" on an email.)

Queen Elizabeth II has kept monarchism alive and well during her long lifetime. That is a real achievement. Back in the 1970s, in the run-up to the Silver Jubilee, how many people would have predicted huge lines of cavalry with swords aloft, massive street parties, and continued support for the monarchy running deep into the new century? She did that, no one else. But after her, if not the deluge, then, without doubt, the debate. ●



"Hi Your Majesty, last week I reached out to you about a fantastic opportunity for your kingdom, and I just wanted to touch base again to see if you had any questions..."

HELEN THOMPSON



These Times In her stoicism, perhaps only the Queen can navigate the puzzle of the Union

Elizabeth II's accession to the throne 70 years ago raised one of those anomalies of the Union to which there are no coherent answers. Why is she "Elizabeth II" when the Union has never had an Elizabeth as its queen before? While Elizabeth I reigned over England, Wales and Ireland, the monarchical Union between England and Scotland began only on her death in 1603, when her Scottish cousin James Stuart became king.

It was not the first time this problem of styling monarchs had occurred. In the early years of the Anglo-Scottish monarchical union, there was great sensitivity about the regal histories of the two kingdoms. James VI in Scotland became James I in England. In 1689, William and Mary were offered stewardship of the English and Scottish crowns separately. And while both kingdoms had once been ruled by a Mary, William III in England was William II in Scotland. By contrast, Queen Victoria's successor caused a major problem. In discarding the name Albert, which he had been known by when he was Prince of Wales, and becoming Edward VII, he ignored the fact that none of the six post-Norman Conquest Edwards had been king of Scotland, nor the first five the king of Ireland. As a result, he was often known simply as King Edward in Scotland.

As the daughter of the "spare" (George VI) rather than the heir (Edward VIII), Elizabeth was not born to bear the crown. Her accession in 1952 yielded an interesting legal case brought the following year by a Scottish nationalist, John MacCormick, who argued that she should not be titled Elizabeth II in Scotland. Although the Scottish Court of Session rejected the

claim, ruling that the royal prerogative covered the use of regnal numbers, the Lord President of the Court commented that he saw no reason that continuity in the parliamentary union ran through English but not Scottish constitutional history. Sixty-six years later, during the legal challenges prompted by Boris Johnson's proroguing of parliament, this vexed issue resurfaced, and could do so again in a future independence referendum.

But the monarchical union has been foundational to the Anglo-Scottish parliamentary union. The origins of that second union lay in a wartime crisis in 1704-06, which allowed the Scottish parliament to exchange consent to the future Hanoverian succession for participation in England's empire. But only when the Jacobite rebellion to reclaim the crown for the Stuarts was defeated in 1746 was the parliamentary union secure.

Now, the monarchical union persists while the parliamentary union has been partially severed by devolution. Since the Queen's accession, increasing numbers of people have identified as Scottish, English, or Welsh rather than British, while the Irish government has taken a formal role in the governance of Northern Ireland through the North/South Ministerial Council. But throughout these changes, the Crown and

The Crown and the military are still the most important symbols of Britishness

the military have remained the most important symbols of Britishness, a fusion long cultivated by the Windsors around the rituals of remembrance created after the First World War.

The Queen has done much to embody the plurality of the Union. As the granddaughter of the 14th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, and with a summer residence at Balmoral, her personal attachment to Scotland is obvious. After the IRA murdered Lord Mountbatten and his grandson in 1979, she is also no stranger to the Union's traumas. Rising to the symbolic demands of reconciliation, she shook hands with the former IRA commander Martin McGuinness 33 years later with a smile on her face.

Paradoxically, the monarchy has been of vital importance to the Union. This is partly because the SNP has historically recognised the distinction between the monarchical union of 1603 and the parliamentary union of 1707. Although support for the monarchy expressed in opinion polling is lower in Scotland than in England, the SNP has never committed itself to breaking the first union. In the campaign leading up to the 2014 independence referendum, Alex Salmond stressed that the "union of the crowns", which he said had "deep historical resonance in Scotland", would continue.

Quite simply, unionism needs the monarchy. The danger is that the present Conservative government is too overt in deploying the Cambridges – titled in Scotland the Earl and Countess of Strathearn – as a way to strengthen support for the Westminster institutions. This opens the Crown to the kind of attack on royal political interference launched by Salmond following Prince William's meeting with Gordon Brown in June 2021, shortly after Brown had set up a new campaign to protect the Union.

The Union rests on ambiguity. Symbolically, its unity is best rendered when the historical conflicts from which it emerged are acknowledged as part of that unity – as, for example, on Remembrance Sunday, when the music at the Cenotaph includes an 18th-century Irish rebel song and a Jacobite tune about Bonnie Prince Charlie's retreat to Skye.

Like the Union, the monarchy works best when it's allowed, in all its complexity, to simply carry on. In her stoicism, the Queen gives a near permanent sense that she accepts that puzzle, navigating between the different personas required of her. How well her temperament has served the Union will become clear once it is no longer there. ●



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Old centrists do not die, or fade away. They are forever rising from the grave, seemingly unaltered since they were last in public view. After incanting the defunct slogans of a previous age, they return to the dim afterlife of politics whence they came.

Tony Blair's plan for a "future of Britain" conference at the end of June is only the latest in a succession of such visitations. In September 2021, the anti-Brexit campaigner Gina Miller announced a new project, the True and Fair Party, aiming to achieve "greater transparency, accountability and competency" than existing parties. When the launch was held in January of this year it attracted 13 attendees, all of whom seemed to be journalists. (A spokesperson blamed Covid restrictions.) An earlier centrist vehicle – the pro-EU Independent Group for Change, later Change UK – was founded in February 2019, only to be disbanded less than a year later after each of its candidates lost their seats in the general election.

The Ur-version of centrism in Britain, the Social Democratic Party, was launched by a "Gang of Four" ex-Labour MPs in January 1981. Mistaking the past for the future as centrists always do, they did not mention Margaret Thatcher in their inaugural Limehouse Declaration, though she was the dominant political force for the rest of the decade and shaped politics for a generation. The SDP split, and most of it merged with the Liberal Party after it failed to break through the first-past-the-post system in the general election of 1983.

Blair's conference is, then, the fourth coming of British centrism. Its attendees include Luciana Berger and Angela Smith, who left Labour for the evanescent Change group, and Rory Stewart, still remembered for the British walkabout in which he continued his Afghan peregrinations and displayed a similar fluency in native languages. The Britain Project, with which Tony Blair's institute has teamed up to hold the meeting, finds inspiration in Emmanuel Macron's faltering En Marche movement. Macron has been invited, though it is unclear whether his regular sessions with Vladimir Putin will leave space in his diary. The perennial prince-across-the-water David Miliband is also reportedly involved.

Organisers of the meeting have been at pains to stress that it is an "ideas event", not a bid to found a new political party. Their reticence is understandable. Labour already has a centrist leader. What is there in this venture for him? We must wait till the great minds are gathered, but I would wager there will be much talk of the limitless possibilities of artificial intelligence, not least in a reformed – that is, further privatised – NHS.

JOHN GRAY



Lines of Dissent Centrism's fourth coming shows Tony Blair and his acolytes have learnt nothing

The centrism that emerges will be a blend of technological determinism with gung-ho market economics. So vaguely defined as to be almost contentless, Keir Starmer's centrism has moved on from this anachronistic agenda.

The core centrist belief is that all reasonable people share the same values. Unfortunately, many do not know their true interests, which have to be explained to them. Like Corbynism, Blair's centrism relies on an idea of false consciousness. For both, voters are there to be educated, not learned from. During his years in power, Blair was able to align Labour with majority attitudes on a number of key issues. His Thatcherite approach to the economy tempered by a strong commitment to the welfare state matched the values of many voters at the time. Iraq revealed the limits of his powers of persuasion as well as the dangers of his messianic self-belief. For an unrepeatable moment, though, Blair – like Thatcher – was the spirit of the age.

Even at the height of his popularity, Blair insisted voters had to be schooled in the need to adjust to unstoppable globalisation. The Corbynites took a similar line on immigration: a borderless world was the only acceptable future, and there could be no question of pandering to atavistic attitudes. If voters differed, such questions

should be fudged until the party was in power. Labour's backing for a second Brexit referendum joined the centrist disdain for the nation state with the left's contempt for millions of patriotic Labour supporters. It was an electorally deadly combination, and a Tory landslide duly followed in 2019.

What a deciding segment of the public wanted was a kind of left-conservatism, an intersection of Keynes-style economics with moderate anti-wokeism that Boris Johnson seemed for a time to embody. Now many of the voters who propelled him into power no longer believe a word he says. Inflamed by the cost-of-living crisis and new allegations regarding lockdown breaches, the scars of "partygate" risk festering into a fatal wound.

As things stand, Starmer could become prime minister from sheer Tory inanition. Johnson seems bent on continuing his lurch to defeat and a lucrative career impersonating himself in after-dinner speeches. Yet Labour could still be thwarted if Conservative MPs can rouse themselves from fear and torpor. Deposing Johnson and installing any one of his rivals would be a sign they are serious about staying in power. The prospect of some form of proportional voting for Westminster, which could lock the Tories out of government indefinitely, could be averted or postponed.

WB Yeats's poem "The Second Coming" foretold a time when the centre could not hold. A pitiless sphinx has indeed loosed a blood-dimmed tide in Ukraine, but Britain presents a less apocalyptic picture. The ghost of a new centrism is making another of its periodic appearances. Once Blair's gathering has dispersed, the visitant will return to the netherworld, and the life of politics will go on. ●

There will be much talk of the possibilities of AI, and gung-ho market economics

The making of a king

The world watched Prince William as he mourned the death of his mother, fell in love at university and spectacularly clashed with his younger brother. As the second-in-line approaches 40, what kind of monarch will he be?

By Tanya Gold

In Abergavenny, Wales, 31 years to the day since he performed his first public engagement in Cardiff, I find Prince William. It is St David's Day, and he is with his wife, Catherine. In 1991, he came to Wales with his parents, a yellow daffodil in his buttonhole. Diana wore a bizarre hat that looked like a felt spaceship. Did she yearn for space travel? William wore grey flannel trousers and a blue blazer with brass buttons, like the major in *Fawlty Towers* but small.

Abergavenny is *en fête* to meet him. In the covered market, fabric birds hang from the ceiling and Welsh dragons stare from flags. The traders look expectant in the way people do when they are trying not to. The market fills with middle-aged women, the elderly and babies. The babies hold daffodils like charms.

People have arranged themselves, without any prompting, into lines for a military-style inspection. Considering that we are dressed for a market – that is, casually – we look very weird. An official appears. He frets. He wants the appearance of a real market and, if we stand and gawp – which feels like the natural thing to do – the police will expel us. He says we must mill about, as if pretending William is not here – though presumably we may pretend to come upon the prince by surprise. “Anyone here bought stuff?” he asks. We hold up shopping bags. “You can stay,” he says. “The rest of you: get buying stuff! I want to see everything sold!” One or two people turn round and panic-buy Welsh cakes.

William enters with his wife and his protection officers, who are disguised as wealthy landowners. They are dressed to match William, who wears blue trousers, a blue shirt and a green waxed jacket. There is a daffodil in his lapel. The prince is good at costume. I see him as a man flying up and down the class system, mirroring us as best he can, a sort of Mr Benn or Eliza Doolittle: in a beanie hat, a flat cap, a hard hat that spells WILLIAM, in a crown. He has, in his time, been a farm worker, a soldier, a helicopter pilot and a banking intern. He is also, quite literally, a toy. You can buy a Prince William figurine, one eye sliding carelessly down his face; or a doll in his wedding finery; or a life-size cardboard cut-out.

When he approaches the greengrocer, people cheer as if to italicise a memory: *he approached the greengrocer*. Then he is opposite us and mouthing, “Hi, how you doing?” It is Joey Tribbiani's greeting in *Friends*, delivered in what Henry Higgins would call “Etonian mockney”. William's voice is getting posher as he ages – he is on an opposite trajectory to the Queen – but he is as much a victim of pop culture as anyone. He wouldn't last long if he sounded like the lead in a Terence Rattigan play. He lifts his hand and gives a tiny wave with his fingers, as if playing a tiny piano. ▶



ANJA SLIBAR

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◀ During public engagements, his grandmother moves like a ship, while his father resembles an unwilling participant in a comic opera. Here, William seems more complicated, both easy and uneasy: part soldier, part hostage. People hold up dogs for blessings.

The starting point for Prince William, says the actor Hugh Skinner, who plays him in the Netflix comedy *The Windsors*, “was speaking as poshly as I possibly could”. Skinner’s William is a Disney prince, a kind of gilded lifestyle coach, and the actor expresses that by “pretending I’m in *Hamlet* or *Dynasty*, and then eating Haribo”.

“A large part of it is having fun with the space between what we know and what we imagine,” Skinner tells me. “If William eats a burger, he eats a burger. But if it’s reported in a tabloid, it’s ‘He Eats a F***** Burger!’.” Skinner is right: it’s a life writ not in water but in ink, one where William exists somewhere between the ideal and the reality. While filming, Skinner says he would wonder what the real William was doing that day.

Monarchy is an anachronism, or should be. A century after most of Europe’s monarchies fell, ours still hangs on. At 96, Elizabeth II’s approval rating is 75 per cent. Prince Charles’s is only 50 per cent, but he is peevish and he hurt his first wife. Prince William’s is 66 per cent, a number which suits him. His role is to solve a riddle: to advocate for a just and happy society – he has chided Bafta, of which he is president, for its lack of diversity – while being one of the world’s pre-eminent examples of inherited power.

William is 40 this year: as his father shunts his wider family into sidings, his elder son is the future. Charles projects a crabby Hanoverian grandeur but he is 73, a placeholder king. It will be King William who must navigate the path between stability and progression.

What I call the Bafta dichotomy – a prince chiding another institution for its lack of diversity – suggests that people can want two entirely different things at the same time. The only convincing argument for monarchy is that it protects us from worse things. Perhaps we think that, with our comparative freedoms, we can afford a monarchy if it is superficially humble and visually pleasing? I think it is a feint which damages everyone it touches but I am in the minority, at least for now. Sixty-one per cent of the British public approves – although it collapses to 31 per

cent among the under-25s, of whom 41 per cent want an elected head of state. Still, time is on William’s side: he has centuries of custom to draw on.

There has not been an unkind biography of William – he has not seemed to merit it – but one feels pity when the hagiography is so fervid and consistent. *William & Kate: The Movie* (2011), a dramatisation of their romance, is gruesome. The many books – Penny Junor’s *Prince William: Born to be King* is the most perceptive – tend to take on the rhythms of religious observance: adoration; sympathy; love. A monarch is a pre-Christian object, a god, really, though one to be sacrificed at the end.

William’s early life was a tragedy in shape. He had a father who was all boundaries and a mother with none. Diana told her biographer Andrew Morton that she tried to kill herself when she was four months pregnant by throwing herself down the stairs at Sandringham House, and that the Queen found her. William was born at a time to suit his father’s polo engagements: “We had to find a date in the diary.”

In the early stories William was rude like a god: a real boy, but then he had a real mother who loved him – not the ghost, atrophied by tragedy. His nickname at nursery school was “Basher Wills”. He was so naughty at Prince Andrew’s wedding to Sarah Ferguson – he stuck out his tongue, dragged his cousin down the aisle and left with his sailor hat askew – the Queen suggested a stricter nanny. She had to run to stop him jumping under the carriage wheels as the bride and groom left.

Diana told Morton that, when he was four, William had said: “You’re the most selfish woman I’ve ever met. All you do is think of yourself.” When asked where he had heard this, he said, “Oh, I’ve often heard Papa saying it.” According to Diana’s healer Simone Simmons, he once pushed his mother over. Penny Junor relates the time Prince Charles introduced him to Bob Geldof. “He’s all dirty,” said William. “Shut up, you horrible boy,” said Geldof. “He’s got scruffy hair and wet shoes,” said William. “Your hair’s scruffy, too,” said Geldof. “No, it’s not,” said William. “My mummy brushed it.” He was a tiny Princess Margaret. When he was naughty, he wasn’t punished; neither parent was the type. Diana

William wrote his essays in the police station, as if longing to take up as little space as possible

would laugh or shout (both can be ignored), while Charles hid in the flower beds like a character from a Nancy Mitford novel.

William went to boarding school aged eight – to Ludgrove, then Eton – and changed. He was kinder. Diana called him “my wise little old man” and he rescued her in instalments, or tried. He placed tissues under the bathroom door when she cried. After his parents separated in 1992 (he was ten), he said he hoped they would be happier. He bought her chocolates when James Hewitt betrayed her, and flowers after her 1995 interview with Martin Bashir, even though he was furious that she had exposed Charles’s adultery. He told Diana he would reinstate her HRH status when he became king.

It was a wild childhood. Diana told Morton that, when Charles heard his son missed him at school, he sent long handwritten faxes and had trays of Highgrove plums delivered. When William was 13, and had photographs of the models Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington and Naomi Campbell on his bedroom walls, Diana invited them for tea. She practised the disguises she used to escape the press, and so her sons would find her wearing wigs. According to Simmons, Diana spent the night of a 1997 BBC debate on the future of the monarchy repeatedly pressing redial, voting for abolition, while William asked if the palaces could become homeless shelters.

I wonder, given all this, why he is sane, and the answer is likely the staff. He was raised by a succession of housemasters and police protection officers, who explain his ability to seem plausibly normal. The archetype is clear, however, through every biography: William is the parental child. These children have parents who cannot fully emotionally nourish them, and so become caregivers to their parents instead. The parental child is typically empathetic, controlling, private and untrusting; they tend to terrible anger when the burdens placed on them grow too large. When a photographer took pictures of Catherine without a bikini top on in France in 2012, William was, a palace source said at the time, “almost the angriest I’ve ever seen any human being”. The couple pursued the magazine who printed them, and were awarded £92,000 in 2017. The only job William chose for himself was as an RAF search-and-rescue pilot, flying into tragedy: a saviour.

After Diana died, he looked hunted: he was 15 and hid under baseball caps. His mother had said he was “appallingly embarrassed” and “uncomfortable” about his status, and her death magnified it. In a 2019 BBC documentary, he described it as “a pain like no other pain... you know that in your life it’s going to be very difficult to come across something that



Royal “wheel!”: Princess Diana in Highgrove House in Gloucestershire with Harry and William, 1986

is going to be an even worse pain than that”.

It was rumoured that William didn’t want the crown, so much so that he had to deny it in his 21st birthday interview. “It’s not a question of wanting to be, it’s something I was born into and it’s my duty,” he told the Press Association. “Wanting is not the right word. But those stories about me not wanting to be king are all wrong.” He was appalled by “Wills Mania”, which began when he was 16 and on a tour of Canada. His father had to coax him out of his room, to greet screaming girls.

William studied geography at St Andrews University – he switched from history of art (who needs it when you own the paintings?) – as well as how to be normal in the bourgeois style that is his settled self. He also learned to do things for himself. (In the film version of Mike Bartlett’s *King Charles III*, William, in his mid-thirties, eats toast when anxious, which feels right.) He shopped at the supermarket – I don’t think his father, who travels with his own toilet seat, ever has – and got 12 GCSEs to Charles’s five O-levels. He wrote his university essays in the police station, like someone longing to take up as little space as possible.

William obtained a 2:1 with a dissertation on the impact of indigenous fishing practices on the coral reefs of Rodrigues, and fell in love with Kate Middleton, his first serious girlfriend, an anti-Diana as careful and controlling as he. “We’re like sort of ducks,” he said in their ITV engagement interview. “Very calm on the surface with little feet going under the water.” No one has ever accused him

of having an imagination but, to be fair, he doesn’t need one, being the object of the collective imagination. He loved the closeness of the Middleton family – two parents, two sisters and a brother, like the Boleyns – and the fact that they ate together. It must have seemed exotic after the mediums and the plums. He called Mike Middleton “Dad”.

In the 21st-birthday interview, William tried to explain himself. “I’m not an over-dominant person,” he said. “I don’t go around and expect everyone to listen to me the whole time. I like to be in control of my life because I have so many people around me – I can get pulled in one direction and then the other. If I don’t have any say in it, then I end up just losing complete control... I could actually lose my identity.” One of the ways he exerted control was by taking up royal duties relatively slowly. The tabloids, with customary lack of sensitivity to the individual (they save their reverence for the institution), called it laziness: Workshy Wills.

If he is very controlling, he can also be very kind. One story is notable: Sandy Henney, his father’s press secretary, resigned in 2000 after an error over William’s 18th birthday photographs which wasn’t her fault. She told Junor that Charles never thanked her for restoring his reputation, but that William telephoned her repeatedly – and as he took his A-levels – to say how sorry he was that she was leaving.

William talks about problems – with the environment, conservation, mental health – but never, explicitly, their causes: he cannot

oppose the government even if he wanted to. But he is among the most litigious royals. When he thought his phone was being hacked – and it was, from 2005, by the *News of the World*: 35 times to Catherine’s 155 times – he went to the police.

William was furious that Bashir tricked his mother into the *Panorama* interview by faking bank statements that suggested people close to her were selling stories. “The interview,” he said in a statement last year, “was a major contribution to making my parents’ relationship worse and has since hurt countless others. It brings indescribable sadness to know that the BBC’s failures contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation that I remember from those final years with her.”

His lawyers at Harbottle & Lewis are kept busy. Skinner told me that in *The Windsors* there was a scene with William and Catherine in a sex shop. “We had to hold a dildo. The lawyers said, ‘You can hold it, but you can’t brandish it like a weapon.’” I wonder if this, too, is the prince exercising his control.

William rarely gives print interviews, but I was offered help by Kensington Palace for this profile: interviews with three men who know him well, in so far as he is knowable, and information about his movements. This information was later rescinded, apparently due to Covid-19.

The former Conservative leader William Hague, who runs the couple’s Royal Foundation, thrills with affection as he talks over Zoom. He calls “the convening power” of royalty “almost a unique thing in the world”, and describes how excited foreign dignitaries are to meet royalty, compared with mere politicians. Perhaps obliviously, he describes an anxious William. He calls him “practical. He really wants to achieve results. He’s very anxious that it is not just a show.” Hague says he never set out to chair the Royal Foundation; he was charmed into it, incrementally.

It is obvious that Charlie Mayhew, who runs the conservation charity Tusk, of which William is patron, really cares about him. “I often found myself having to pinch myself in remembering how young he still was [when they met]. He always seems much older than his years.”

Mayhew travelled to Africa with William and Harry in 2010, and tells a story about how they rode off into the bush and laughed at him because his horse wouldn’t move, and had to be led by the nose. He says the conservation community admires William’s work in persuading China’s President Xi Jinping to ban the domestic ivory trade. “There was a lot of ragging,” Mayhew says of that 2010 trip. “I always felt they [the brothers] were looking out for each other. I strongly believe” – and he ►

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◀ volunteers this: I do not ask – “that bond is strong enough that this recurrent issue will sort itself out.”

I'm not so sure. A parental child will protect a vulnerable sibling but on their own terms, and those terms will not include emotional exposure. Last year Harry told Oprah Winfrey: “I was trapped, but I didn't know I was trapped. Like the rest of my family are, my father and my brother, they are trapped.” It's impossible to know whether this is true – if even they know whether it is true: monarchy is narcotic – or if Harry is projecting.

Either way, it was a betrayal. Harry's line is that William's office briefed against him and his wife for small advantage, but Harry tends to paranoia. William's line is that Harry and Meghan upset the staff, and that is unacceptable. In *The Palace Papers*, Tina Brown notes that Meghan was sixth on the call sheet for *Suits*, while Harry is sixth in line to the throne. She believes they meet there, thwart-

ed, seeking to change their fates. The brothers exist on similar emotional lines to the Queen and her disappointed sister, Margaret: if one child must be good to be a sovereign, the other must be bad not to be.

Seyi Obakin, the CEO of the youth homelessness charity Centrepoin, of which William is patron, tells me a story piteous enough to be a fairy tale: of a prince who wanted to be a real boy for a night. In 2009 they slept on the street near Blackfriars Station in London to mark the charity's 40th anniversary. Usually, Obakin says, supporters are offered a “controlled” experience of rough sleeping. I don't ask what that is: a gazebo? But William said he wanted to do it “properly”.

“We found ourselves in a cul-de-sac that looked quiet,” says Obakin. “There were some big wheelie bins to cover yourself up. [If not] they [passers-by] spit at you, they throw things at you. He poked fun at me all night long, because I don't do cold very much.”

The next morning, they walked to Soho, William's beanie hat down over his eyes. “Not a single person recognised him,” Obakin says. He must have loved it, I say. Obakin laughs: “Yah.” He says William is an effective fundraiser and that the young people who use Centrepoin's services love him. One girl was silent with shyness, but they spoke for five minutes in the end. She later told Obakin that William had told her, to make himself seem ordinary, “Imagine me naked.” I'm not sure he'd say that now.

If you are a republican, you wait for it all to unravel. If you are monarchist, you hope the contortions are effective: that your god survives. William's Caribbean tour in March was disastrous, drawing calls for atonement and reparation for the transatlantic slave trade, as well as greater independence from Britain. The optics – William and Catherine standing in a Land Rover in formal clothes and clutching hands with Jamaican children through a wire fence – were too truthful; they were empire-core. This was not the “moderniser” prince who posed for *Attitude* magazine in 2016, who urged Bafta to diversify.

William released a swift statement of retreat, acknowledging that the tour had brought the Commonwealth's future into “sharper focus”: “In Belize, Jamaica and the

Bahamas, that future is for the people to decide upon.” The message was timely, but it expressed a congenital weakness. Monarchy is an ebbing dream: one day it will be an imprint on a wall. The dream is not a universal one, and for now William holds it up almost alone. That is the indelible image I have: the solitude of a boy writing his essays in a police station.

Perhaps even this is spin. “I'll be in the public eye all my life,” he has said. “I can't hide who I am because I'll be found out.” I wonder now if he wrote that himself. I think of Henney telling Junor: “If you ask him a personal question he will be as honest as he wants to be, but you will never get down, thank God, into the real root of William, because that's how he protects himself.” And then I think of Abergavenny, and how it doesn't matter who William really is, because we have invented him from the material to hand.

When William has gone, Abergavenny feels like a slowly deflating balloon: a town returning sadly to itself. I wander round the market, collecting testimony from people who spoke to him. The woman at the hat stall, wearing Welsh national dress, clutches the dregs of her delight. “He thought they were wigs, not hats! He said, ‘Oh wigs!’ I said, ‘They are hats, not wigs!’” The lady at the chocolate stall says Catherine asked if her husband is named Gareth. How did she know? Is it magic? “It says underneath, ‘Delicious delights made by Gareth,’” she explains. “They were happy with those.”

“He was interested in the Welsh cheeses,” says the woman at the cheese stall, offering the small scoop that his favourite cheese is actually a Swiss cheese. He can't speak Welsh, either, but a woman who spoke Welsh to him tells me, “He takes it all very seriously.” The next woman speaks the royal hagiography: that the people in the palace serve us. “He's got,” she says keenly, “such a servant heart.”

Outside I find an elderly woman weeping by the pub. She is standing with her son who brought her here: two soft faces with bright blue eyes. Her love tumbles out of her, unstoppable, as if William – or what he represents for her – freed something. “He just moves me,” she says. “It wasn't fake, it was true. They are so humble. That's it. I wouldn't put myself out there for many people, but he would. It made my day. It made my life.”

I have watched William for a year and, like that woman, I think he will be an effective king when his father dies (Charles will not abdicate), though not an interesting one. I don't think you can be both. A prince must be a mirror, and this woman loves the William of her invention. Other people will have other ideal princes, and he will let them. ●



His Caribbean tour was a disaster. This was not the prince who posed for *Attitude* magazine

JEREMY CLIFFE



World View

Shadows of the First World War loom over Germany's ambiguous response to Russia

Had Olaf Scholz misspoken or had he been misheard? When *Der Spiegel* reported that Germany's chancellor had declared "I am not Kaiser Wilhelm" at a private government meeting in April, it seemed an improbable quote. Not only was it later confirmed, however, but Scholz has gone on to repeat it, including in discussions with journalists during a recent trip to Africa. His point: unlike Wilhelm II in 1914 he will not let Germany slide into a major European war.

In early April I puzzled in these pages over why Germany – with its intensive culture of commemorating the Second World War – was not applying the lessons of appeasement to Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. Since then, Scholz's government has stepped up in certain areas (agreeing to send Ukraine heavy weapons and backing an oil embargo) but it is still providing less leadership, support and impetus than Germany's size and professed values ought to dictate. Its weapons deliveries are slow and patchy, the country continues to pay for Russian energy in roubles and Scholz appears unwilling to utter the phrase "Ukraine must win" in public.

Odd though it seems, his Kaiser Wilhelm comment sheds some light on this. It is clear that parts of the German elite see not the Second but the First World War as the more relevant parallel to the present moment. To grasp the three main lessons they draw from the 1914-1918 conflict is to better understand the country's actions – and inaction.

The first is the danger of stumbling inadvertently into conflict. Germany's current debates are studded with references to *The Sleepwalkers*, the 2012 book by the historian Christopher Clark, which charts

how Europe's pre-1914 alliance system dragged the continent's powers into what had started as a mere regional conflict. Scholz clearly alludes to its argument in his disavowal of Wilhelm II. Headlines proclaim "The New Sleepwalkers" and "The Return of the Sleepwalkers". Writing in *Der Freitag*, the commentator Christoph Schwennicke warns that heavy-weapons exports to Kyiv could become "the Sarajevo incident of a Third World War". It has fallen to Clark himself to point out the flaws in the comparison. "It turned out that [Putin] was planning a war all along," he told the broadcaster Deutsche Welle on 22 May. "So that's not like 1914, because in 1914 there is no single actor who just decides to invade another territory."

The second "lesson" is the danger of a Europe destabilised by prolonged conflict. Some German observers thus fear that arming Ukraine could lead to a yet more catastrophic attritional war in which neither Kyiv nor Moscow is capable of forcing the other to the negotiating table. "Soldiers holding out in muddy trenches and trying to destroy each other's positions with the help of mortars," ran a recent commentary for the Bavarian broadcaster BR. "This is fatally reminiscent of the bloodbath of the First World War."

The third supposed parallel concerns

Scholz appears unwilling to utter the phrase "Ukraine must win" in public

the severe terms imposed on the defeated. "Humiliated men and humiliated nations are dangerous," argues the feminist Alice Schwarzer: "Germany felt itself extremely humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles after 1919. We know the consequences." Others raising this point include Stefan Aust, the former editor-in-chief of *Der Spiegel*, who has insisted only a compromise giving Putin an off-ramp can supply a lasting peace. Various writers cite Max Weber's 1919 distinction between a "*Gesinnungsethik*" (a purist ethics of conviction) and a "*Verantwortungsethik*" (an ethics of pragmatic responsibility) to criticise what the leftist historian Gerhard Hanloser calls "*Gesinnungs*-ethical warmongers" promoting greater support for Ukraine.

Why is it that these historical lessons seem to eclipse those of the 1930s for so many influential Germans? One explanation is the federal republic's postwar tradition of treating Nazi crimes as an incomparable evil untethered from the "ordinary" flow of history. The Second World War is also complicated by a sense among some Germans of Russia as both victim and liberator in that conflict (a perspective that overlooks Ukraine's horrific oppression at the hands of both Hitler and Stalin). The First World War by contrast plays a less complex role in the country's remembrance culture, so is more easily appropriated for debates today. The collapse of the seemingly peaceful global order in 1914 feels resonant in a Germany that has thrived in the second, post-1989 era of globalisation which now seems to be buckling.

Such factors are not only influential on the old-school pacifist left, but also among the corporatist bastions of Germany's export industries and their political allies, and among older Germans who grew up in the shadow of Nazism's evils. But these arguments have much less sway among younger Germans, centrist Atlanticists, and many Greens shaped by their party's transformative battles over the country's intervention against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in 1999. Debates about whether Germany is doing enough to help Ukraine broadly follow these contours. Explicitly or implicitly, they amount to discussions about whether the Second World War or First World War makes a more salient parallel.

Those allies of Germany who rightly demand that it do more, including the UK, the US and states across Europe, would do well to understand this. If they want more principled *Gesinnungsethik* from Scholz, they could start by persuading him that he is at greater risk of going down in history as a new Neville Chamberlain than a new Kaiser Bill. ●

The hipster wars

Why the clash between progressive Brooklyn and transgressive Manhattan marks a new era in US politics

By Nick Burns

In American cultural and intellectual life, New York City sets the tone. As the main hub for the country's media and frequent originator of trends that percolate through US society, what's "in" with the New York scene today is often central to American culture tomorrow. And politics, too – as US conservatives never tire of noting – is often downstream of culture.

But New York City's intellectual landscape is increasingly split between two warring scenes, divided by geography, aesthetics and politics. Which of these prevails could affect whether America shifts right or remains where it is.

In Brooklyn, the borough associated with the "hipster" revolution from the late 2000s, writers energised by the Bernie Sanders campaigns in 2016 and 2020 retain their faith in left-wing politics through new "small" mag-

azines. But on the island of Manhattan, a self-consciously transgressive artistic and literary scene is brewing downtown. In podcasts, plays and literary journals, a different sensibility is being elaborated. Scornful of the "woke" sanctimony of Brooklyn-based media, some flirt with alternative ideologies, while others claim not to be interested in politics at all.

Who wins in New York's clash of cultures is high-stakes for the future of American political culture. One does not have to go far back to see how scenes deemed cool in New York often become political reality. During the Trump years, college students and struggling young professionals across the country looked to Brooklyn for the podcasts, publications and organising models of a new democratic socialism. This cultural energy soon took broad-based political form with

electoral victories in major primaries for figures such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Then came the pandemic. The Brooklyn-based cultural scene took the pandemic seriously, and in-person parties and events largely ground to a halt. Not so across the East River in Manhattan. Filling this sudden void in the city's culture was a nascent, mostly younger, twenty-something crowd centred on a gentrifying area of Chinatown sometimes known as "Dimes Square" (a portmanteau of Times Square and the name of one of the scene's preferred restaurants). The defining ethos was scorn for the hyper-cautiousness that reigned in Brooklyn – and more generally for the sanctimony of the "woke" left.

Even as pandemic restrictions have rolled back and Brooklyn has returned to life,



How late it was, how late: cast members rehearse a scene from *Dimes Square* at the playwright Matthew Gasda's apartment, March 2022

lower Manhattan has maintained an attitude of brash hedonism that aims to recapture earlier no-holds-barred eras in the borough's avant-garde. That attitude is on display at the scene's gatherings. At a reading launching the latest issue of *Forever* magazine, a publication associated with the new downtown Manhattan scene, a fist fight broke out over photographs of someone's girlfriend. The striking performance of one reader featured her critique of contemporary male sexuality for being insufficiently dominant – followed by five full minutes of untranslated Japanese.

Some critique the habits of the “professional-managerial class”, while others toy with converting to Catholicism. There is tech-sector capital sloshing around in the Manhattan scene, too. Some use the money from foundations that are attached to the

conservative venture-capitalist Peter Thiel to put on festivals of “transgressive” film. Supporters hail the resurgence of art that refuses to trade in its power to shock in exchange for adherence to political dogma. Critics see a scene that practises transgression for its own sake – or for mercenary ends – and warn about the consequences of flirtation with reactionary concepts such as the abandonment of ideals of social progress, Catholicism and an admiration for the aristocratic past.

But Brooklyn has not left the field of cultural battle. With the electoral fortunes of democratic socialism having ebbed after the defeat of Bernie Sanders's 2020 campaign – and as the Biden administration's progressive agenda has been largely neutralised by moderate

Democrats – the Brooklyn scene's political hopes are pinned on growing unionisation in companies such as Amazon and Starbucks, amid a red-hot labour market.

In recent years a number of new small magazines have been founded to replenish the intellectual energies of the borough's left. One of these is the *Drift*, founded in 2020 as the Sanders campaign collapsed and the country boiled over in mass protest over the killing of George Floyd.

The magazine is left of centre but takes a carefully calibrated distance from US liberal pieties – publishing, for example, a searching critique of Anthony Fauci, the public-health official who attained a cult status among American liberals during the height of the pandemic. The *Drift* editors are seeking to navigate the altered landscape on the “post-Bernie” Brooklyn left – ▶

Letter from New York

◀ adding playfulness, but without abandoning the political commitments. “We want to help the left arrive at the best versions of its own arguments,” founding editor Kiara Barrow told me.

Its staff is largely younger than the main stalwarts of Brooklyn-based left media, who are often in their mid-thirties and therefore vulnerable – rightly or wrongly – to accusations that their critique of Manhattan has more to do with their own failures and resentment of a new generation that is having more fun.

Tension is simmering between the two scenes, pitting left-wing Brooklyn against reactionary Manhattan. “There is nothing more pathetic than the New York ‘downtown’ scene today,” Noah Kulwin, a contributing editor at the *Drift*, wrote on Twitter. “Shitty art and selfishness.”

Barrow is less severe. “We are interested in these developments like everyone else,” she said. “There are always going to be people who are contrarian, looking for ways to feel like they’re in the avant-garde.” When, during the pandemic, the dominance of liberal and left opinion meant that even seeing friends felt radical, the development of something like the Manhattan scene was only natural.

Still, the battle lines are drawn, and not just on Twitter. In the queue outside a *Drift* issue launch party in March 2022, I was having a conversation about the Manhattan scene. At the mention of the phrase “Dimes Square”, a woman standing nearby promptly intervened: “Dimes Square? I hate those people!”

It is fitting, then, that the latest Manhattan cultural sensation is an off-off-Broadway play about the Dimes Square set – called, simply, *Dimes Square*. Performed in packed lofts across town – I attended a showing in an apartment belonging to the novelist Joshua Cohen, who was recently awarded a Pulitzer prize for his novel *The Netanyahus* – the play dramatises the petty rivalries and self-serving ambitions of the scene. The actors – including the veteran book critic Christian Lorentzen and Martin Amis’s daughter Fernanda Amis – are mostly members of the downtown set themselves, and play characters that sometimes resemble their own off-stage personalities or biographies (Amis’s character, for example, is the daughter of a famous writer).

The play’s author, Matthew Gasda, found himself in lower Manhattan during the pandemic for the same reason many others did – there was nothing else happening. Wasn’t the crowd there a little vulgar? Perhaps – “But they don’t judge,” he said. “They don’t cancel.”

Is there really a left-right divide between Brooklyn and Manhattan? “Manhattan seems more comfortable with a post-party, post-binary world,” he explained. “I didn’t vote in 2020.”

And taking money from Peter Thiel? His play doesn’t, but for those who do, “To me you haven’t done anything different from someone who gets hedge-fund money,” Gasda says. “This is historically always the issue with the patron class. Would we not want Michelangelo because the Medici were putting people in towers?”

A recent article in *Vanity Fair* drew connections between the lower Manhattan scene and a new brand of right-wing politics. Republican candidates on the ballot in Ohio and Arizona share with some Manhattan cultural figures the notion that elite institutions – in the politics, media, tech, and corporate worlds – are ideologically unified and function as a single unit.

The appeal of this idea is not hard to understand. In the run-up to the 2020 election, for example, a *New York Post* story about Joe Biden’s son was limited from being shared on major social networks, on the presumption that it contained misinformation – but later reporting showed key claims in the article were accurate, giving the impression that a political intervention had been made in favour of the Democratic candidate by technology companies.

On a recent episode of the podcast *Red Scare* – another focal point for the Manhattan scene – the hosts discussed the dominance of an ideological-material alliance



“I do believe him. I just think he was wrong”

between capital and the Democratic Party. Analysing the work of James Burnham, an influential 20th-century Marxist turned conservative, the *Red Scare* hosts sketched out a theory of politics in which being ruled by an oligarchy is inevitable and, without quite abandoning all hope, the main objective for individuals is to preserve some modicum of independence while acknowledging their broader submission.

Though a bit lacking in sociological substance, there is genuine appeal in this mix of realism and tempered hope. But the sense these Manhattan figures have that they are detached observers of an all-encompassing elite ideological machine underrates their own burgeoning influence on American culture. “Woke” ideas, after all, hold sway within institutions in the United States because they are in fashion with many of the people who staff those institutions. If the attitudes of lower Manhattan become more generalised – and some, speaking of a wider “vibe shift”, think they are spreading already – that could change.

This could be the case even if one accepts the idea that the sensibility of the new Manhattan scene is fundamentally apolitical. If, influenced by this sensibility, young people who are entering employment in elite media, tech and political institutions feel less intent on finding ways to apply ideas about social justice to their work, then this in itself would represent a major change in American politics.

If progressive cultural dominance turns out to be more fragile than it looks, and the Manhattan “post-binary” sentiment catches on in broader elite circles, that could prove the biggest threat yet to the pose of its originators. Instead of being detached observers, they could become instruments in the very kind of interlocking cultural-political machine they criticise. And then what?

But it is too early to be sure that anything like this will happen. The structural position of the American media class – matching economic precarity with cultural power – will continue to incline it towards a politics that is somewhere between the pro-corporate “wokeness” of Democratic-aligned capitalists and the democratic socialism of Bernie Sanders. That is the range within which the Brooklyn scene operates. And for now, the American university remains an influential inculcator of codes of behaviour that are based around “identity politics”, the siren songs of lower Manhattan renegades notwithstanding. The battle for cultural dominance in New York – and across America – rages on. ●

Nick Burns lives in New York and is an editor at *Americas Quarterly*

LOUISE PERRY



Out of the Ordinary Feminists must abandon the delusion that the sexual revolution benefited women

My first book will be published on 3 June. It's titled *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* and it pretty much does what it says on the tin. My argument is that the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s has mostly not been of benefit to women.

As I write this, the first reviews are being published, as well as several extracts, and the word "provocative" is coming up a lot, as I thought it probably would. The *Sunday Times* is running a very alarming poll on its website asking readers: "Do you agree with Louise Perry's opinions?" I gulped when I first saw this, but have since been pleasantly surprised to see that about three-quarters of respondents have so far answered "yes", suggesting that, if I am a provocateur, then I am not an especially outrageous one.

The level of interest that the book has attracted pre-publication has startled me, although there have been rumblings in the media for a while suggesting an imminent backlash against the excesses of the sexual revolution. My friend Katherine Dee – an American writer and expert on the history of internet culture – has for several years been predicting a swing against the dominance of sex-positive feminism in prominent spaces, and in recent months has found herself vindicated, with the *Guardian* announcing that Gen Z was "turning its back on sex-positive feminism" and the *New York Times* saying that the ideology was "falling out of fashion".

The plea of the mournful revolutionary, when faced with the terrible consequences of his utopianism, has always been that "real communism has never been tried". This, too, is increasingly the explanation for sexual revolutionaries who are dismayed by

where we find ourselves as a culture. If the consequences for women of sexual liberation have been more violence, more abuse and more unhappiness – as I argue is true – then their solution has to be yet more liberation, if the revolution is going to be waged right to its bloody end.

On paper, there seems nothing wrong with a school of feminism that's designed to maximise individual freedom and challenge the shame and repression associated with traditional sexual cultures. But in practice, pressing the "more liberation" button over and over again is never going to solve the problems that feminists are concerned with.

As the socialist historian RH Tawney wrote nearly a century ago, "freedom for the pike is death for the minnows". Tawney was writing about the rich and poor, but his remark applies just as well to sexual politics. Of course the factory owner supports free marketisation, and of course his wage slave disagrees – the pike and the minnow have different economic interests. This is true in the sexual marketplace, too, which has been rapidly deregulated in the last 60 years.

The playing field is not level because the sexually dimorphic nature of our species has produced certain important asymmetries between men and women. First, there is a substantial difference in strength and size, which means that almost

all men can kill almost all women with their bare hands, but not vice versa. And then there is the fact that only women can get pregnant, and it is therefore women who bear (literally) the potential consequences of any heterosexual encounter.

Contraception partially flattens this asymmetry, but unreliably. And even if the physical differences between women and men can be disguised by technology, we still cannot erase the psychological differences that persist despite our best efforts.

And we shouldn't try to eradicate them. I don't accept the idea that having sex "like a man" is an obvious route by which women can live happier and healthier lives. Nor do I think that encouraging women to behave more like men in every other area of life is necessarily to their benefit.

Kathleen Stock (who wrote the foreword to my book) has written critically of the "dream of gender abolition" and its sometimes troubling consequences: "In a real-life approximation of an attempt at gender abolition – that is, during Mao's Cultural Revolution – there were still sex-associated norms for women. These norms dictated that women should behave more like men. As the slogan went: 'Times have changed. Whatever men comrades can do, women comrades can do too'... In practice this norm meant that women under Mao faced the double burden of heavy agricultural work duties in addition to domestic and child-rearing ones."

One outcome of this historical attempt at gender abolition was that pregnant and postpartum women were given the same tasks and hours as their comrades, resulting in many cases of miscarriage and haemorrhaging. Men and women are not the same, and it is usually women who suffer when we pretend otherwise.

Sex-positive feminism is just one instantiation of a larger liberal movement intent on maximising individual freedom – which is a fine project, up to a point. But the push for ever greater freedom is butting up against the limits of our biology, and thus a feminist movement once concerned only with securing liberty for women finds itself in a futile war with nature.

It doesn't need to be this way. I think there is an alternative school of feminism brewing, one that has emerged out of the failed experiment of sexual liberation, and that takes seriously the hard limits imposed by sexual difference. Interviewers keep asking me what this movement is called, and I don't know what to tell them. "Post-liberal feminism", perhaps? Or "reactionary feminism", as my friend Mary Harrington (jokingly) calls it? I'm not sure. What I do know is that it can't come too soon. ●

The push for ever
greater freedom is
butting up against the
limits of our biology

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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.

By Geoffrey Harper

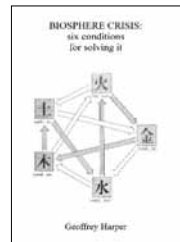
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THE CRITICS

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Books

The double life of Elon Musk

He survived childhood trauma to become the world's richest person. Where does the man end and the myth begin?

By Will Dunn



Man and boy: Elon Musk grew up in a wealthy but unstable household

In the sci-fi novel *Excession* by the late Scottish writer Iain M Banks, a black sphere appears orbiting a remote star. Like Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* painting, which shocked Russian audiences when it was first exhibited in 1915, the object defies understanding. Its impenetrability gives it power: without moving or reacting – simply by being impossible to fathom – it gathers civilisations around it, and brings them to war.

Most wealthy individuals use small companies called family offices to manage their money and legal affairs. Elon Musk's family office is called Excession, LLC. Perhaps this is simply a nod to the sci-fi novels Musk has enjoyed since he was a boy, but perhaps it also indicates something about how he engages with the world. If he is impossible to understand or predict, then he is unassailable. He can move through the markets like a perfect black sphere, impervious to criticism or doubt.

The latest biography of the world's richest person (at time of writing) finds plenty of reasons why someone such as Musk might develop an obsession with invulnerability. Michael Vlismas, who attended the same school in Pretoria as Musk, mixes his own experiences with accounts from Musk's childhood friends, acquaintances and teachers to present a picture of South Africa's education system in the 1980s – a world of uncompromising discipline, social division and vicious bullying. When he was 12 years old, Musk was kicked in the head by an older boy with enough force to propel him down a flight of stairs; the group of boys then picked up their victim and beat him so badly he spent two weeks in hospital. The school's principal later reflected that at the time, "Bullying was accepted as part of growing up."

Musk's parents, Maye and Errol, divorced when he was eight years old. Maye was a former model who became engaged to Errol against her will. Errol arrived at her house unannounced and proposed to her; when she declined, he announced their engagement to her parents anyway. In her own book, *A Woman Makes a Plan*, quoted by Vlismas, she describes her nine-year marriage as a "hell" of anger, controlling behaviour and infidelity.

Two years after their split, the ten-year-old Elon moved in with his father. South Africa's economy, in contrast to others, boomed in the 1970s as the price of gold increased almost 15-fold. Errol was an engineer with multiple business interests, and the Musks were wealthy. Maye suggests this could have been behind Elon's decision to move from her one-bedroom flat to Errol's house, where he was given science-fiction books and comics – and, most importantly, a computer.

Such luxuries came at a price, however; Musk's father is recalled as promiscuous and unstable. Errol has admitted in interviews to having shot and killed three intruders who broke in to the family property (he was acquitted on the basis of self-defence) and to having made the one-off "mistake", aged 72, of fathering a child with his 30-year-old stepdaughter,

whom he had helped raise from the age of four. Elon Musk has described his father in interviews as “a terrible human being”.

The online persona of Elon Musk – the late-night toilet-tweeter, the billionaire who smoked weed live on the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast and who picks fights with the US government – suggests he inherited a certain unpredictability from his father. He definitely inherited an aptitude for making money. The younger Musk sold his first piece of software, a video game called *Blastar*, at age 12. The code for the game was published in the magazine *PC and Office Technology*, and Musk was paid the equivalent of \$500. He began investing in the stock market as a teenager. In 2009, he told an interviewer that aged 15 or 16, he “made a few bets that did pretty well” on the South African market, rapidly tripling his initial stake. Practically all of the wealth he has accrued since that point has been not so much earned as socially agreed, in the form of investment from the venture capitalists, banks and retail investors that bought in to his promise of a future in which technology would solve everything.

Musk had ambitions to leave South Africa, but on finishing school he enrolled to study financial management at the University of Pretoria. This might well have been a safeguard against conscription – the apartheid government was fighting the Namibian independence movement, and needed a ready supply of teenagers for the battlefield. Those who refused to join the South African Defence Force could face years in prison. It’s not clear to what extent Musk actually attended the university; within months he left, aged just 17, for Canada, where his mother was born and where he was entitled to a passport that would get him into the United States. His father told him he would be back in South Africa within three months.

Here and there, Vlismas picks up an echo of Errol Musk in his son’s behaviour. At university in Canada, Elon asked a female student out for ice cream; when she cancelled the date to study, he showed up at her desk, cones in hand. When Musk arrived in Silicon Valley – having transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, he moved to California in 1995 – he wanted a job at Netscape, then the most recognisable company in the emerging business of the internet. After his application was ignored, he went to the company’s building and stood in the lobby, waiting to see if success would arrive simply because he’d shown up to collect it.

The ice cream worked: the student in question, Justine Wilson, became Musk’s first wife (she would later recall that during their first dance he whispered into her ear: “I am the alpha in this relationship.”) But in the Netscape lobby, no one gave him a second glance, so Musk and his younger brother, Kimbal, started their own company, an online business directory called Zip2.

For Musk, the most contentious point about the start of his business career has been whether it was made financially possible by his father, whom he has

described as “irrelevant” to the expensive process of studying and then setting up a company in the US. In 2019, he did acknowledge that his father made an investment in Zip2, but claimed that this was part of a “much later” funding round that “would have happened anyway”.

If Musk is plagued by insecurity and a need to be seen as a success independently of his father, it shows in his obsession with overwork. At Zip2 he kept overheads low by sleeping in the office and showering in a nearby YMCA; at Tesla, the electric car company he bought into in 2004, and SpaceX, the rocket and satellite business he founded in 2002, he began working 120-hour weeks, using sleeping pills to get a few hours of rest in the office before beginning another exhausting day of being a visionary architect of the future.

It sounds like a joyless and pitiable existence. It might also have been a form of escape. In 2002, shortly after Musk sold his second successful business (the online payments platform PayPal), he and Justine lost their first child, Nevada, at ten weeks old. They would go on to have twins, then triplets, but in Justine’s blog posts Vlismas finds an account of a husband who had become dismissive and belittling. They divorced acrimoniously in 2008.

In a 2016 TED talk on storytelling, Justine spoke about how trauma can become, for some people, a driving force: “We create a parallel world to escape the world that rejects us or which we find too painful to live in,” she observed. Some people, she continued, were so effective at this that their escapism changed everyone else’s reality, allowing them to “move between worlds”.

Musk’s greatest ambition is to accomplish this literally, by creating a new civilisation on Mars, and his stated reason for doing this is the same as his reason for creating a new market for electric cars: to save humanity from extinction. Perhaps this is a messiah complex, perhaps it’s a well-worn technique for shifting a few more cars – the automotive industry began adding tail-fins in the late 1940s, as space rockets entered the public consciousness. What’s certain is that he has been aided in this vision by financial markets, which, like Musk, hit a low point in 2009 but emerged from it at a gallop. Fourteen years of low interest rates and nearly \$27trn dollars of quantitative easing produced the longest bull market in history. More than anyone else on Earth, Musk is a creature of the great boom in equities. Through calculation or conviction, he offered the most exuberant promises in a market that already brimmed with confidence. At its peak, in the autumn of 2021, Tesla’s market capitalisation reached over \$1.2trn, and Musk became the first person with a fortune valued over \$300bn.

He was never really the richest person in the world, though. The greatest single reserve of wealth on Earth is probably the 250 billion barrels of oil beneath Saudi Arabia – worth roughly \$25trn, if you could sell it all at today’s prices – and the main beneficiary is the country’s autocratic ruler, Mohammed bin Salman. ▶



**Elon Musk:
Risking It All**
Michael Vlismas
Icon, 272pp,
£14.99

Musk was kicked in the head and fell down a flight of stairs. The boys then beat him so badly he spent two weeks in hospital

◀ As Vladimir Putin (with Russian oil reserves equivalent to 80 billion barrels) can attest, there is still no job that pays like that of the petrol-powered despot. Fossil-fuel-derived wealth is as solid as national borders, whereas Musk's is a fortune that can never be spent: were he to sell all his shares in Tesla, the confidence of the market would evaporate – and with it, his wealth, which is composed mostly of equity in his own companies.

Like Henry Adams, the protagonist in Mark Twain's *The Million Pound Bank Note*, Musk has an illiquid fortune, but the mere fact of it – his celebrity, as ostensibly the world's richest individual – brings yet more money his way. Through his erratic and combative presence on Twitter, he was able to send meme stocks and niche cryptocurrencies soaring in the frenzied gambling that reliably precedes a crash. As inflation arrived, however, central banks reined in their bond-buying and raised interest rates, and the dollar value of speculative promises on humanity's long-term future began to tumble.

The rational response (or rational, perhaps, for a megalomaniac) was to launch a bid to buy the platform that had given Musk so much leverage in the first place, using debt secured against the many million-pound notes of his Tesla stock. In doing so, however, he crossed a line that everyone but him could see. No one minded the wacky billionaire Elon Musk being one of the loudest voices on Twitter, and few people cared when he became the company's biggest shareholder. But when Musk announced he wanted to own and control it to preserve "free speech" on the platform, large numbers of people – and more importantly, investors – thought this sounded like a bad idea. Twitter's value – already on a downward trajectory, with the rest of the market – has fallen by almost \$10bn since Musk agreed to buy the company, leaving him legally committed to the hugely expensive purchase of something other investors increasingly don't want.

His response has been to do what many people do when they look up from their phones and find themselves confronted by an uncomfortable reality: he switched to alternative facts, and claimed that Twitter was mostly "bots". Like many Remainers in 2016 and Donald Trump supporters in 2020, he simply denied that the people opposing him could really exist. Personal criticism and serious allegations about his conduct towards employees became "political attacks", orchestrated by the Democrats (whom he now refers to as "the party of hate") and possibly Bill Gates.

In writing a generous biography of Musk – the book contains 32 instances of the word "genius" along with seven instances of "visionary" – Michael Vlismas contributes to the myth of the exceptional individual, a figure that is useful to the narratives that drive markets in the good times. But in revisiting the family members, friends, investors and collaborators who made Musk, he also gives the reader a glimpse of the living person who was used to create that persona, and an opportunity to ask: was this really what they wanted? ●

The NS Poem

The estate agents take a tour Rebecca Farmer

Ladies follow me I would
love for you to see
the spectacular gardens.
Like long-legged spiders
we weave past bowls of red
amaryllis and scented candles.
Our fixed smiles and matte
lipstick give nothing away.
We glide through studded doors
into the still scented air.
Here she asks us to admire
the permanent planting strategy
bound by hedges of evergreen
from which nothing can escape.
Our guide demands we appreciate
how it echoes Bridget Riley
with its movement in squares.
Ah Bridget Riley! we repeat.
Our dark suits coordinate
with the water feature's slate
we pay attention to fragile
etched lines – a homage to
London's lost rivers – London lost.
On past a Phantom Rolls which
may be a sign that someone
drove here, might live here
though we see no one apart
from men in uniform who sweep
the imaginary leaves which fall
from the imaginary trees.

*Rebecca Farmer's pamphlet "Not Really"
is published by Smith/Doorstop*

Reviewed in short

His Name Is George Floyd: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice

by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa

Bantam Press, 432pp, £20

On the second anniversary of George Floyd's murder by the former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin, the *Washington Post* journalists Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa pose two pertinent questions: who was George Floyd? And what was it like to live in his America? This deeply reported biography explores the circumstances of the life and the aftermath of his murder, which reignited the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020.

Vivid storytelling drawn from interviews with family and friends reveals how the clouds of poverty, addiction and racism that preside over America often loomed over and got the better of Floyd. Throughout his life as a Texan high-school athletic sensation, a twenty-something college dropout yearning for purpose (and often ending up on the wrong side of the law), and in his attempts to start a new life in Minneapolis, systemic prejudice failed Floyd – and ultimately led to his death aged 46. This is a sobering and essential work in which Samuels and Olorunnipa also provide a harrowing window into the thinking of Miss Cissy, Floyd's mother, who often reminded him that as black man in America, he "already had two strikes" against him.

By Harry Clarke-Ezzidio

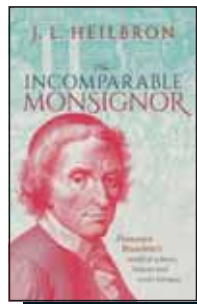
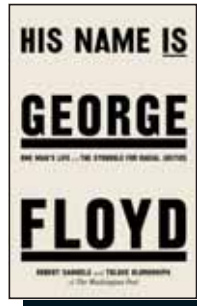
Finding Me: A Memoir by Viola Davis

Coronet, 304pp, £20

Viola Davis, the star of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences*, has collected nearly every accolade an actor could wish to receive: two Tony Awards, an Emmy, and an Oscar. Her success is striking, but with knowledge of her traumatic early life, it is also astounding. In her new memoir Davis reveals the cycle of poverty that her family was trapped in, the effects of which left her parents ill-equipped to provide their six children with a safe home in Rhode Island. She recalls rats eating away at her doll's face, and the humiliation of being taught how to wash by a school nurse. Davis later discovered acting and made it to the Juilliard School in New York, where her world burst open – professionally and personally.

This memoir has pacy, cutting prose, and feels as if Davis wrote it almost in defiance of her own success. She is determined to be honest about the years before the photoshoots and red carpets, where she grafted for poorly paid roles and was exploited by an industry entrenched in racism and misogyny. It's this rawness that makes *Finding Me* a searing read, leaving you in only greater awe of Davis's life and work.

By Christiana Bishop



Held in Contempt: What's Wrong with the House of Commons?

by Hannah White

Manchester University Press, 224pp, £12.99

Published as the repercussions of partygate continue to be felt in and around Westminster, *Held in Contempt* is depressingly prescient. Its author Hannah White – the Institute for Government's deputy director, who has worked in Whitehall on standards in public life – is a vital voice in translating parliament's mysteries for an untrusting public. Packed with recent examples of both high-profile and subtle overreaches of power, this book is nevertheless slim and accessible.

White tracks how the government increasingly undermines MPs (take Theresa May and Boris Johnson trying to prevent them having a say on Article 50 and prorogation, or the government only letting them scrutinise the 2020 Christmas lockdown ruling in the New Year), and dissects how MPs themselves damage parliament's reputation. A feeling of "exceptionalism" among some politicians, she writes, exacerbates bad behaviour and declining public trust. She concludes that perhaps only the Palace of Westminster going up in flames would prompt the reform that is needed. The building is dangerous, crumbling, and – as per the short-termist incentives for those within its mouse-ridden corridors – nowhere near being fixed.

By Anoosh Chakelian

The Incomparable Monsignor: Francesco Bianchini's World of Science, History and Court Intrigue

by J.L. Heilbron

Oxford University Press, 336pp, £20

Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729) was one of those polymathic figures with which the past seemingly abounded. He served three popes; was instrumental in reforming the calendar; was an astronomer of note who helped build a solar observatory in the Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome; he was an archaeologist of the ancient city (who badly damaged his leg in an excavation accident); and a diplomat. A pan-European figure, he was elected to the Royal Society in London when proposed by Isaac Newton, who thought Bianchini one of the world's "candid seekers of truth". For good measure, he later joined the court of James Stuart, the Old Pretender, in Rome.

The historian J.L. Heilbron's new work does justice to this multifarious man and his fascinating career. As Bianchini did himself, he balances the life's constituent parts while shedding light on everything from the politics of the Curia and the Stuart court in exile to the desired length of the best telescopes of the day.

By Michael Proddger

This is hoard-core

In raking over his formative possessions, Jarvis Cocker contends that he was never as cool as you thought

By Kate Mossman

Who are those people who throw nothing away? What primal insecurities are they acting out? Rock music has many self-confessed hoarders, among them Queen's Brian May, Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and the late David Bowie. Rock hoarders are doing something very specific: they are building an archive of the self. As young people they had a cast-iron belief that someday everything they ever touched would be of great interest – so they carefully stashed it away with a view that it would be laid out, eventually, in a large exhibition in the V&A. But while Paul McCartney has a warehouse of huge proportions for his possessions, Jarvis Cocker has a loft space in London three feet high, with a sloping roof “like a Toblerone packet”, a kind of emotional rubbish tip crammed with “psychic lint”: hundreds of things that mattered to him and to the story of his band, Pulp.

The premise of this book is that Jarvis will go through his attic deciding whether to keep or chuck the things he finds, and hopefully discover himself along the way. This format is not strictly adhered to, thank God, because the first three things he finds mean nothing to him, and he can't remember where they came from, so the book takes a few pages to get off the ground – rather as his band did.

In Cocker's loft are dolls' faces, a ballerina alarm clock, a plastic apple and reviews of his first show at Sheffield's celebrated Leadmill venue, among many other things. One of the most interesting items is the label from a bar of Imperial Leather, with a little bit of soap still attached to it. Jarvis saved this label because he was so upset when the soap's logo was redesigned – he has always, he says, had a profound aversion to change. In the 1970s, the TV advert for the soap fascinated him, depicting a family aboard the Trans-Siberian Express, enjoying a luxurious sunken bath in their carriage. Cocker's paternal grandparents lived above a post office near a railway line: as a boy, at night he would look out the frosted window at the trains, lather his hands with Imperial Leather and turn

the hot tap ever so slightly so that the pipes juddered violently with a noise like a goose “being tortured in an airing cupboard”. Bingo: his own Trans-Siberian Express. This sliver of soap has as much relevance for him as his chit for the *John Peel Roadshow* in 1981, when he managed to give Peel a demo tape of Pulp. And this is where Cocker differs from other rock hoarders. He designed Pulp in a science exercise book at the age of 14, before he had any bandmates or could play an instrument. There is no dividing line between him and his band.

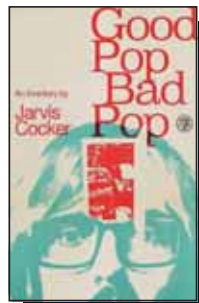
Everything Cocker has done, he has done slowly – he often mentions, in *Good Pop, Bad Pop*, the fable of the tortoise and the hare. Pulp had their first hit in 1994, but they were formed by punk in 1978. In the extreme makeover he gave himself at 16, Cocker's glasses were modelled on Elvis Costello, and his hair on Ian McCulloch from Echo and the Bunnymen. He did not get famous till half a dozen other musical movements had swept Britain; as a boy he planned that Pulp would break into the music business and restructure it for independent labels: by the time he got there, the independents were becoming – or being swallowed by – majors. On his teen face Cocker is also wearing a tiny strip of beard: he had taken inspiration for this from a photo on the back of a record by Hugh Cornwell of the Stranglers. It is only when returning to the record, for the purposes of his book, that he realises the “beard” was just a shadow in the cleft of Hugh's chin. The book explores, in a relaxed way, the idea that objects might be full of a talismanic significance which, years later, is revealed as illusion.

I was irked at first by Jarvis's obsession with style – he worked backwards with Pulp, planning their look first, with no idea how he wanted them to sound. For anyone else as bored by the story of punk as I am, there is little joy in reading about how liberating it was to be in a band without being able to play your instruments (“There was more to music than ability; in fact, ability was part of the problem”). Jarvis describes his coming of age, through pirate radio and John Peel, as though he was the first teenager ever to be inspired by punk's ethos: I have unreasonably angry notes in the margins of my review copy reading “No shit” and “You're not the only person to have ever existed!” In his attic, he finds a piece of paper noting the guitar chords to John Denver's distinctly un-punk “Annie's Song” and sadly, *still*, at 58, he writes: “Credibility. Blown.” Cocker's focus on style is a huge part of him; he's like a walking Wes Anderson movie. He's hardly vacuous, though, and there is something genuinely different about him. But what is it that sets Cocker apart, if his influences are so obvious? What is this strange paradox he has achieved, finding the original in the unoriginal?

As his memoir progresses, his dogged commitment to self-styling is touching, and his uniqueness begins to make sense. Cocker was not exactly kicking against his environment. His school – the City School in Sheffield – seems to have been a jolly place, with a maths teacher recording Pulp's gig in the assembly hall and a chemistry

Good Pop, Bad Pop

Jarvis Cocker
Jonathan Cape,
368pp, £20





In his sixth-form photo, every 16-year-old is grinning – and Jarvis smiles a smile you rarely saw later on

Lofty sentiments: Jarvis Cocker stores his mementos in an attic space shaped “like a Toblerone packet”

teacher providing a light show with burning magnesium; in his sixth-form photo, every 16-year-old is grinning – and Jarvis smiles a smile you rarely saw later on.

Back home, he is very close to his sister – she makes him trousers for the stage. His mother, a former art student and later a Tory councillor, is a hugely present figure from whom he shyly hides his Hugh Cornwell album and his earliest experiments on the guitar: “I was trying to find my own voice without being overheard.” His maternal grandparents live next door and share the same phone line: his granny answers the call from John Peel’s producer, after the roadshow, inviting Pulp to London to record a radio session before they’d even left school. Only his father is absent: he walked out when Jarvis was seven and moved to Australia. Adults lie, adults forget, Cocker says. Mac Cocker would always write birthday cards with the message “I’ve put your present in the post”, but the presents never arrived. No wonder there is so much stuff in Jarvis’s attic.

A picture emerges of a young punk formed not by rage and alienation but by pop dreams and a predilection for picking away at jumble sales alongside old ladies: “Sifting through the debris to find an alternative to the official narrative. Using second-hand items to tell a brand a new story.”

You wonder if Cocker would have revealed the beloved contents of his loft at the height of Britpop. You suspect not. As a schoolboy he made an acronym of his band: “Pure Unpretentious Loveable Pop”, but that is not quite the Pulp we came to know. Despite his band’s huge popularity in the 1990s, Cocker now says there was something about them that people got wrong. He was never, ever trying to be ironic: he swears it. Can this be true? With songs like “Help the Aged” and “Common People”? With his NHS specs and pursed, unsmiling lips, Cocker was the face of ironic detachment.

But after reading this book, I started to believe him – and it has something to do with those jumble sales, with his attitude to pieces of a discarded past. If Jarvis wore a lime green tank top on *Top of the Pops* – and I’m not sure he did, this is hypothetical – he was not saying, “Isn’t this tank top gross and hilarious?” He was saying, “I genuinely love this tank top, even if others may think it is gross.” Irony ruled the 1990s, but we used it brutally: it was insecure, and negative, and kept real enthusiasms hidden. Jarvis has, I think, spent his whole life being much more enthusiastic and loving of things than he appeared to be. He always withheld something, and perhaps that made him look cold. In turning out the contents of the loft, he has let the warmth back in. ●



Age of Elizabeth: a lady stands outside her front door in Fulham, west London during the Queen's Silver Jubilee year, 1977

Raiders of the lost past

The statue wars are nothing new: illusory and contested golden ages have haunted Britain since medieval times

By Richard J Evans

In 2016, the *Washington Post* declared that the vote for Brexit showed that Britain was determined to “cling to imperial nostalgia” and “delusions of empire”. The *New York Times* saw it as “England’s last gasp of empire”. “Britain’s imperial fantasies,” concluded Gary Young in the *Guardian*, “have given us Brexit.” Boris Johnson claimed that leaving the EU would enable the British to “go back out into the world in a way that we had perhaps forgotten over the past 45 years: to find friends, to open markets, to promote our culture and our values”. The Tory MP Grant Shapps optimistically predicted that Britain would rediscover the “swashbuckling spirit of the 19th century” and become “Global Britain” once more – “the world’s greatest trading nation”, as it once was in the Victorian era.

As Hannah Rose Woods points out in this intelligent and eminently readable book – her first – this was a classic example of nostalgia, of looking back in time to something that had been lost and could never be recreated. It was, she suggests, “nostalgia for the spoils

IAN BERRY/MAGNUM PHOTOS

of imperialism (both psychic and material) without the wish to run an empire – an insistence on having one’s cake and eating it, taking moral credit for having decolonised while retaining the bullish superiority of an imperial power”. What was important, Johnson said, was to rekindle the spirit of empire, the “soft power” of British influence extended across the globe, “not to build a new empire, heaven forbid”.

The desire to reclaim the memory of the empire as an inspiration for Britain in the post-Brexit era has also led to furious denunciations of those who dare point to its negative features. Defenders of the empire complain that history is being “erased” in the process of “decolonising” the British past and its representations in the current campaigns to remove statues of imperial heroes such as Cecil Rhodes, or return colonial loot from Britain’s museums to the peoples from whom it was stolen. But it’s their romanticised image of our imperial past that constitutes the real erasure. We should, apparently, celebrate Britain’s part in abolishing slavery but forget entirely about its role in creating the transatlantic trade in the first place. “We are,” Woods says, “in a strange position where each call for remembrance is recast as forgetting.”

An altogether different nostalgic legend, she says, is to be found in the oft-repeated claim that plucky little Britain “stood alone” against a host of powerful enemies in the two world wars, a myth that conveniently ignores the role of Canadian, Australian and other soldiers from the empire, including many from the Indian subcontinent, fighting at the Somme or on the Normandy beaches. Imperial nostalgia and imperial amnesia go together in so many ways.

Many of those who vaunt their pride in Britain’s imperial past also want to think of it as entirely white, forgetting both its legacy of non-white immigrants from the colonies and their presence in Britain as racial minorities over a long period of time, above all in port cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool and London. When the historian Mary Beard pointed out that many black soldiers served in the Roman army when it occupied Britain, she faced “a torrent of aggressive insults” and accusations of “rewriting history” (which is, of course, the historian’s job).

Instead of celebrating the historic multiculturalism of the English, whom Daniel Defoe called a “mongrel half-bred race” that “receiv’d all nations with promiscuous lust”, modern-day racists have glorified the days when the British considered themselves, as the Edwardian politician Joseph Chamberlain put it, “the greatest of the governing races that the world has ever seen”. The shameful recent treatment of the Windrush generation forgets that Caribbean immigrants came to the UK after the war at the invitation of the British government, and passes over the enormous contribution they have made to British life since.

Nostalgia, however, wasn’t the monopoly of Leavers in the Brexit debates. Some Remainers argued that Britain had rescued Europe from tyranny in the Second World War and shouldn’t abandon it now. In similar fashion, Remainers in the 2020s indulge in nostalgia when they fondly recall the

decades when the UK was part of the EU.

Nostalgia isn’t the prerogative of the political right, either: many on the left now look back with longing to the 2012 London Olympics, when patriotism and multiculturalism came together in a celebration of what the *New York Times* then called “a nation secure in its own post-empire identity”. The moment was short-lived, and within a few years, fresh “culture wars” had broken out in the British media. Even in 2012 there were those who thought that Danny Boyle’s opening ceremony was “left-wing posturing” and, as one Tory MP described it at the time, “multicultural crap”.

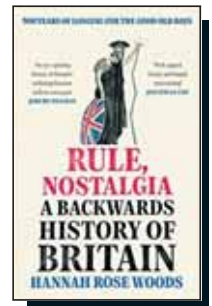
Although today’s culture wars are the starting-point and inspiration for *Rule, Nostalgia*, Woods sets them in a far longer temporal context, going back chapter by chapter to the 16th century. Telling a story backwards in time is a difficult feat, and sometimes (as, for example, in Martin Amis’s 1991 novel *Time’s Arrow*) the technique threatens to overpower the content. It works here because this is less a book about causation, which has to be analysed through a forward progression in time, than about continuity, which does not. The object and expression of nostalgia may change, but its basic features remain much the same: people lamenting that things weren’t what they used to be in the good old days.

The longing for a lost past was as hotly disputed and heavily criticised in the 17th or 16th centuries as it is today. When we interrogate what Woods calls “nostalgia’s perpetual backwards glance” we find that the object of nostalgia itself harboured its own idealisation of an even more distant past. Each era had its paradoxes too: while some in every age pined for an imagined past of peace and plenty, others lamented the luxury and self-indulgence of the present, and harked back to when times were tough, but people got through them in a spirit of pulling together for the common good, as they did during the Blitz, when they were exhorted to “keep calm and carry on”.

Nostalgia, Woods shows, has often provided people with “cultural comfort food”, giving them a sense of permanence in an time of change. The postwar determination to provide a better future led to widespread slum clearance, but it also produced a plague of high-rise apartment blocks that rapidly deteriorated into a new kind of slum.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Rose Woods writes, “Anything Victorian, in particular, was likely to be vilified as symbolising an outdated age of industrial pollution, squalor and chaotically unplanned development.” Rather than renovate Victorian terraces, architects and town planners swept everything away in the name of progress. Yet many people in London welcomed their move from East End grime to the New Towns that emerged after the war, to clean, airy settlements such as Harlow, Stevenage or Crawley.

Resistance to these trends at the time was often dismissed as cultural conservatism, and mocked as unhealthy resistance to progress. It was seen as a yearning for the old hierarchical society depicted in radio soap operas such as *The Archers*, with the



**Rule, Nostalgia:
A Backwards
History of Britain**
Hannah Rose
Woods
WH Allen,
394pp, £20

People in every era pined for a time of peace and plenty, while others lamented the luxury of the present

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◀ tranquil village community of Ambridge presided over by Squire Lawson-Hope and its central figure, the traditionalist farmer Dan Archer; or master-and-servant television shows such as *Upstairs, Downstairs* and its later counterpart *Downton Abbey* (scripted by Tory peer Julian Fellowes).

But it wasn't necessarily so: the Labour Party sociologist Michael Young, for example, in his 1957 work on Bethnal Green, widely regarded as an East End slum, lamented the loss of close-knit working-class communities as people were moved out to the new Essex suburb of Debden. The rise of the heritage industry, meanwhile, could be seen as a reaction against the destruction of the urban environment by capitalists or, worse still, corrupt local politicians like T Dan Smith ("Mr Newcastle"), jailed in 1974 for taking bribes from the architect and urban designer John Poulson, who was also sent to prison for corruption.

Nostalgia for a lost rural idyll fuelled earlier progressive developments such as "garden cities" and the Arts and Crafts movement, pioneered by radical figures such as William Morris. Making way for the motor car may have been the guiding principle behind the modernist devastation of cities such as Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s, but the automobile also provided new opportunities for exploring the English countryside to those who could afford it. (When my father bought his first Morris Minor in 1959, we would go out from our suburban home every Sunday for a "spin", visiting quaint Essex villages such as Finchingfield or Stock: this new pastime gave rise to the derogatory epithet "Sunday driver" for those who dawdled through the lanes rather than whizzing along the highways.)

As urbanisation and industrialisation transformed Britain in the 19th century, the Victorians too found solace in nostalgia for "England's green and pleasant land", rediscovering folkloric traditions and looking back to the lost age of "Merrie England". Writers such as Thomas Carlyle and Benjamin Disraeli lamented the loss of the supposed stability offered by the feudal system, while architects pushed forward the gothic revival, and the pre-Raphaelites looked to medieval art for inspiration.

There were counter-currents, of course, which expressed that most Victorian of beliefs: faith in progress. The Middle Ages after all were a time of plague and poverty, as well as piety and paternalism. Gothic novels painted a picture of horror and violence, while Charles Dickens, writing *A Child's History of England* (1851), denounced the medieval period as one of "great oppression". For Dickens, the Tudors were just as bad, with Henry VIII ("a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature") and his successors presiding over a country "in which people were constantly being roasted to death".

In the Tudor and Stuart periods, the debate turned on dramatic religious and political changes, as Protestants and Puritans claimed to be restoring Christianity to its original purity and throwing off the "Norman Yoke" that had supposedly destroyed the old



**Rule Britannia:
a map of the
world from 1886
with the British
empire marked
in red**

freedoms of Anglo-Saxon England in 1066. At the same time, their critics mourned the suppression of ancient folk festivities and the dissolution of the monasteries, with the many services they had provided to travellers and local communities alike.

What lessons are to be learned from this romp through the history of nostalgia and its critics? One is that toppling statues and "rewriting history" are far from novel. In 1643, for instance, parliament established the wonderfully named Committee for the Demolition of Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry, while the iconoclasm of the 16th-century Reformation can be vividly experienced in the desecrated remains of the medieval statuary in the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral.

The centuries of argument discussed in *Rule, Nostalgia* make it clear that attitudes to the past have never been uncontested. The claim that it is wrong to apply present-day moral standards to imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes or slave traders like Edward Colston ignores the many critics who condemned them in their own day. Nostalgia can serve many purposes. It can be left-wing as well as right-wing, progressive as well as reactionary.

The culture wars of the early 21st century are not a new phenomenon. We can confidently expect them to continue, even if they are sure to take different forms of expression in the future. ●

Richard J Evans is the author of, among other books, "In Defence of History" (Granta) and "Altered Pasts" (Little, Brown)

**Nostalgia can
serve many
purposes.
It can be
progressive
as well as
reactionary**

The Everyman of anxiety

How Edvard Munch turned his personal fears into universal symbols

By Michael Prodger

Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and his slightly older peer Vincent van Gogh are commonly characterised as the twin exemplars of turn-of-the-century psychological painting. In a neat south-north division, Van Gogh expressed his turbulent inner life through the interiors and landscapes of Provence while Munch did the same through the bourgeois homes and fjord shores of Norway. Both men were near exact contemporaries of Sigmund Freud and, helpfully for biographers and interpreters of their paintings, they also left written indications of their mental states.

This, nevertheless, is a reductive reading. Projecting their lives and work as symbolic of universal unease with the human condition subordinates the origins of their art. In Munch's case this involved a fervid period of stylistic experimentation before he settled on a method that he called "soul painting".

Munch indeed had an overburdened soul to express. He famously said of the travails of his childhood that "disease, insanity and death were the black angels that stood by my cradle", and they kept him company for the next 45 years of his life too. It meant that painting was for him an "attempt to explain life and its meaning to myself". The ways in which he sought this explanation are laid out in the superb exhibition of his work at the Courtauld Gallery in London.

During its recent three-year refurbishment programme, the Courtauld lent some of its Cézannes to the Kode Art Museums in Bergen in Norway, and they have reciprocated with a loan of pictures by Munch from the collection founded by the painter's most important patron, the milling industrialist Rasmus Meyer. Munch may have been a prolific artist

Edvard Munch: Masterpieces from Bergen
The Courtauld Gallery,
London WC2
Runs until
4 September

Soul painting: Edvard Munch's *Man and Woman* (1898, top right) and *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892)

– the new Munch Museum that opened in Oslo last year alone holds 1,200 paintings – but there is a paucity of his work in this country, with the Tate owning just a single picture, so the opportunity to see 18 in one place is exceptional.

Meyer's paintings span the years 1884 to 1909 and show how Munch rapidly developed as an artist as he absorbed and experimented with a series of idioms – realism, impressionism, post-impressionism, and symbolism – before finding his own autograph manner. There are echoes throughout of Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and even in his large canvas *Women in Three Stages* (1894) of Sandro Botticelli. But Munch's progression, needless to say, was not seamless and his pictures brought down the ire of conservative critics who objected to both their subject matter and lack of conventional finish.

Munch, at his father's urging, initially trained as an engineer, but bouts of illness interrupted his teaching and he decided to become an artist instead. By the time he entered the Royal School of Art and Design in Kristiania (now Oslo) he was already filled with a slew of difficult emotions. His mother had died of tuberculosis when he was five; his favourite sister Sophie died of the same disease nine years later. Munch's father, a military doctor, was afflicted with a morbid religiosity and there was a strain of mental illness in the family that re-emerged in another sister, Laura, and that the painter feared was lurking within himself: "I inherited two of mankind's most frightful enemies," he wrote, "the heritage of consumption and insanity."

The anxiety this induced would later be reflected in bouts of brawling, drug taking and heavy drinking which, in 1908, culminated in a nervous breakdown. He had more than enough self-knowledge, however, to realise that this permanent sense of apprehension was also the source of his paintings: "My fear of life is necessary to me, as is my illness. They are indistinguishable from me, and their destruction would destroy my art."

One of the paintings in the exhibition is a self-portrait of 1909 made in a private "nerve" clinic in Copenhagen run by the psychiatrist Daniel Jacobson, where Munch sought treatment after his breakdown. There his regime comprised rest, healthy eating, fresh air, tobacco-free cigars, the companionship of "poison-free women" – as an antidote to his history of sexual entanglements – and mild electrical stimulus. Munch stayed for eight months and the portrait, composed of stripes of primary colours, with only the face properly worked up, shows something of the emerging stability he found there. Each paint mark is a part of the process through which he put himself back together and the man who stares out has a confident, direct gaze: the fears that haunted and drove him have not fully gone but they are under control.

The painting's dashes also derive from the influence of the French artists such as Georges Seurat whom he had studied on trips to Paris in 1885 and 1889. Their example found expression in his pointillist *Spring Day on Karl Johan Street* (1890), a picture of a scene that made him "shiver with pleasure" in which he substituted ▶



◀ one of Oslo's main streets for the Parisian boulevards to make an optimistic sun- and crowd-filled mood painting. The style earned him the nickname "Bizarro" from the critics but – perhaps fearing to be too derivative, and perhaps also wary of the science that underlay pointillist optics and the difficulty of using it to express emotion – he quickly moved on.

In fact he had already discovered the beginnings of the manner he would ultimately adopt. In 1889 he had painted *Summer Night: Inger on the Beach*, a portrait of his sister by the sea at Åsgårdstrand, the port town on the Oslofjord where he would later buy a holiday home he referred to as the "Happy House". In the picture there is no horizon, only the sea utterly still behind Inger, and she poses contemplatively in white, her own simplified form mirroring that of the boulders among which she sits. For the first time Munch endows the surroundings with the charged sentiment of the main figure. It is a grave painting, very different from the sweetness inherent in thematically similar pictures by the contemporary Skagen Painters of Denmark, such as Peder Severin Krøyer, whose beach scenes emit *douceur de vivre* rather than the heft of life's cares.

There is a hint of prescience to the painting too. At the end of the year Munch's father died. The pair had often been at odds over Edvard's art and Christian Munch had destroyed several of his son's paintings. Nevertheless, he had given him both financial assistance and also a vital psychological bolstering that teetered into severe depression with his death: "I live with the dead," Munch wrote, "my mother, my sister, my grandfather, my father..." before stating chillingly: "Kill yourself and then it's over. Why live?" The answer was that he needed to support his siblings, and he adopted the financial responsibilities of the pater familias.

By this point, Munch already had the beginnings of a reputation as a coming man and controversialist, and in 1892 this growing renown led to an invitation to exhibit in Berlin. His exhibition at the Architektenhaus lasted just seven days after the director of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts claimed the paintings were degenerate and insisted that the show be closed to the public. Although the painter delighted in the "great commotion" of the "Munch affair", the real effect of his years in Germany was that it was there that he developed his ideas for *The Frieze of Life*.

The *Frieze* started as an idea for a book illustration and grew into an amorphous project for a series of paintings depicting such topics as love, illness and death – the gateway moments of existence – that was to preoccupy him for the next 20 years. *The Scream* (1893) was part of the project. The exhibition has several paintings from the scheme, including the profoundly unsettling *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892), an image of the same street he had painted so joyously only two years earlier. Here though it is night-time, the colours are now throbbingly sombre purples, dark blues and greens, and Munch himself is down among the crowds that walk towards him as if he were a rock parting the waters in a river, their faces pale, skeletal masks.

Munch recalled (in the third person) once searching the street for a woman who obsessed him and finding

himself in a throng: "The people passing him looked so strange and unfamiliar and he thought they were looking at him – staring at him – all these faces – so pale in the evening light." If his own initial impulse was sexual, he transformed it here into something quite different – an image of urban alienation, a non-specific disquiet, a fretfulness at life itself. Munch said that *The Scream* emerged when, strolling under a blood-red evening sky, he found himself unable to walk on and "stood there trembling with anxiety – and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature". These people, in the midst of their haunted promenade, have heard it too.

This disturbing ability to transmute the intensity of his own private emotions into images that resonate universally became the defining quality of Munch's art. In *At the Deathbed* (1895), his traumatic memories of the death of his sister Sophie show how the blank despair of grief afflicts every loved one of every age. It is a depiction of the psychology of mourning in which the deathbed witnesses pray or clench their fist in impotence at mortality or stand numb, their sallow mask-faces expressionless. The body is no more than a shape on the bed but the red colour with which Munch paints the sickroom flows above the watchers as the soul departs.

In *Man and Woman* (1898), post-coital tristesse is turned to despair as a naked couple are poleaxed by the distance that has suddenly opened between them after the intimacy of a moment before. Munch had difficulty with relationships – "The struggle between man and woman that is called love" – and here the woman has red hair, his symbol for the femme fatale that he used in several works, a sign of the imbalance he felt when his emotions were stirred.

A year after he painted this work Munch started a relationship with a woman named Tulla Larsen: he painted her with red hair. It floundered because she wanted marriage, while he believed "his sick and nervous home had given him the feeling that he had no right to get married". They stumbled on regardless but at one point a fracas occurred in her bedroom and Munch accidentally shot himself in the hand. It cost him a finger – the bullet and shattered finger can be seen in one of the first medical X-rays ever taken, which would have fascinated Munch, a keen photographer – and he literally cut Larsen out of his life when he sawed in two a double portrait of them he had painted.

What gives Munch's pictures their charge, however, is not simply the subjects and colours but the energy of his paint. There is rarely calm in his application, rather the picture surfaces are alive with whorls, scrubbings, abstract patterns, and pigment applied as if he couldn't cover the canvas fast enough. Something of this urgency transmits itself to the viewer and adds immeasurably to the pictures' immediacy.

Munch once stated that: "My art is rooted in a single reflection: why am I not as others are?" What this exceptionally choice exhibition proves is that in painting his own fears and anxieties he painted those of the mass of humankind too. He was much closer to others than he thought. ●

A fracas occurred in Tulla Larsen's bedroom and Munch accidentally shot himself in the hand. It cost him a finger

Film

The ghosts of Ingmar Bergman

This film within a film, set on the director's island home, sounds intolerably meta – but it's not just for cinephiles

By David Sexton

So here we have a film about a couple, Tony (Tim Roth) and Chris (Vicky Krieps), who are both film-makers, going for an extended stay on the island of Fårö, off the Swedish coast, where the great doom-laden director Ingmar Bergman lived and worked and a "Bergman Center" commemorates him.

Both Tony and Chris are working on scripts, and midway through *Bergman Island*, as Chris explains the outline of her new project to Tony on a walk, it becomes the film we are watching – punctuated by brief cutbacks to the pair, as he reacts unenthusiastically.

This second film, "The White Dress", is the story of another couple on Fårö: Amy (Mia Wasikowska) had an affair as a teenager with Josef (Anders Danielsen Lie) that she never quite got over. Now 28, a film-maker, married with a child, Amy sees Josef again on the island for the wedding of a mutual friend. They rekindle their relationship before realising it is too late for them; they are set on different paths.

Taking the story up to this point, Chris admits she doesn't know how to end it. "Do you think it's a movie?" she asks Tony. Tony, who has previously suggested that if she finds writing so difficult she might consider becoming a full-time housewife, unhelpfully tells her: "It's up to you. I mean, you look at something long enough, it becomes interesting." Their relationship may be in search of an ending, too.

In a final section, as if the connection between ▶



Me times three: Mia Wasikowska gives a fragile portrayal of a film-maker in *Bergman Island*

◀ these stories was not evident enough, it is underlined. Shooting her film, Chris seems to take on the part of Amy and to engage with Josef (or Lie).

Summarised thus, *Bergman Island* sounds a hopeless prospect for a night out, intolerably self-reflexive, no entertainment for anyone except cineastes, getting off on every Bergman reference. Novels about novelists writing novels, films about film-makers making films – it's not hard to understand why there are so many of them. But, mercy, isn't there a world elsewhere?

That said, *Bergman Island* is captivating, one of those films that leaves you feeling better for having seen it, as if you have been secretly enlightened about elements of your own life – relationships changing, decisions taken and avoided, irrevocability. Its writer and director, Mia Hansen-Løve, has made a series of terrific works close to events in her own life, including *Goodbye First Love* (2011) to which the film within a film here is evidently a kind of coda. *Eden* (2014) was about her brother's life in the French house music scene of the 1990s; the magnificent *Things to Come* (2016) cast Isabelle Huppert as her philosophy-professor mother lucidly coming to terms with late-life divorce.

Hansen-Løve has never made a film literally about her life “but they are all transpositions”, she says. *Bergman Island* evidently draws on the end of her long relationship with the director Olivier Assayas – 26 years her senior – which began when she was 20 and lasted for 17 years. It, too, is a transposition, not a transcription. Although Assayas is a Bergman buff, they never went to the island together, for example.

So, already a double-layered film, this is actually triple-layered, Amy not only being a version of Chris, but Chris a version of Hansen-Løve herself. Yet it is so fluently made, so light in its touch (contra-Bergman), so enjoyably shot (in widescreen scope, opening up the landscape, again an escape from Bergman's harsh framings) that its texture is never oppressive, and just as clear and charming as any of the moral tales of Eric Rohmer, Hansen-Løve's most obvious influence.

Throughout, the film drolly satirises the literalism of Bergman's devotees – taking the “Bergman Safari” by bus, and keeping his special chair free in his screening room. It's one of the ways in which it claims its own freedoms. Vicky Krieps, cast after Hansen-Løve saw her in *Phantom Thread* (she's not so incidentally 23 years younger than Roth) is excellent, veering between spontaneity and reserve, laughing and crying unexpectedly, as she reaches tentatively for independence. Wasikowska is appealing too: fragile, nervily desirous. In comparison, the men, Roth and Lie, cruise along less communicatively.

Bergman Island (Hansen-Løve's first English-language film) could so easily have been insufferably self-regarding. Instead, it's delightful and persuasive in the way it shows where fiction comes from, how it can illuminate more than the facts can, and even offer emancipation from them. Still, on general principles, looking ahead, if any creatives can leave off creating mainly about being a creative, it'd be a help. ●

“*Bergman Island*” is in cinemas now

Television

From Midwich to Midsomer

By Rachel Cooke

The Midwich Cuckoos

Sky, 2 June, 9pm;
now on catch-up

What's wrong with Sky's new adaptation of John Wyndham's strange and influential 1957 novel, *The Midwich Cuckoos*? For a while, I thought there was nothing wrong with it at all. But then Sam West appeared, in one of those establishment-type roles that he does so well, and I perked up so much, I knew something was amiss.

I'm not being mean. West is a fine actor; he burnishes even the ropiest scripts. In this instance, though, my relief was completely disproportionate. “Hello, Sam!” I thought happily, as his character – a bigwig in the Home Office – looked grave and said something strict about the Official Secrets Act.

You will know the story, of course. A strange happening occurs in Midwich, a small town somewhere in the Chilterns. People fall unconscious, and when they wake up some time later, every woman of childbearing age finds herself pregnant, even those who were single. How did this happen? When the babies are born, it's clear they are not wholly human. The physical growth of these sinister cuckoos is hugely accelerated, they are telepathic, and they are able to



Uncanny valley: David Farr's adaptation sets the 1957 novel in the present day

control the actions of others even from afar. The novel, whose author is revered by Margaret Atwood (his earlier novel, *The Chrysalids*, influenced *The Handmaid's Tale*), has twice been made a film, most famously *The Village of the Damned* (1960), starring George Sanders.

People my age tend to feel a bit proprietorial about Wyndham. As children, we watched a terrifying and incredibly successful adaptation of another novel of his, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951; killer plants!), after which we eagerly read all his books for ourselves (or at least I did). Is this playing into my resistance to this series? Perhaps. It's by David Farr (*The Night Manager*), and he has chosen to set it in the present day, something that makes the story seem less freighted, somehow: babies without fathers were an altogether different thing in 1957 than today. It's a decision that leaves Farr with some work to do. For instance, he has had to write in a scene where several of the women decide, as they inevitably would in 2022, to have a state-sanctioned termination (I won't say what happens, though you can probably guess).

In the end, though, these plot points probably matter less than the mood overall, which is so *Midsomer Murders*-like – all cricket pitches, leafy lanes and illicit affairs – you half expect John Nettles to appear. I almost wish he would. Instead, we have Max Beesley as DCI Paul Kirby, the Midwich copper whose job it is to keep an eye on this, erm, developing situation, and I find him a bit unsympathetic. In the novel, one of the most important characters is an elderly man called Gordon Zellaby. But elderly men – in fact, all older people – are tacitly forbidden in sexy Box Set Land, so Farr has created Dr Susannah Zellaby, a family therapist, played by Keeley Hawes, whose daughter is among the impregnated. I like Keeley Hawes a lot, but she is completely wasted here. Her character's existence is just too convenient. I mean, she made her living talking to children before the happening, and now here is she is, ready and waiting for the Home Office to use as a spy-come-shrink, talking first to the mothers and later (I presume; I'm only a few episodes in) to their alien offspring. She spends a lot of time looking Very Worried, and trotting out reassurances that sound like they've been lifted from *Teach Yourself Therapy*.

I'm trying to work out to what degree, ultimately, Farr will be unfaithful to Wyndham. Dr Zellaby's talk, pre-happening, of "the wave of anxiety" that is crippling the nation's young makes me wonder if he isn't more interested in psy-fi than sci-fi. I think he might be going for the Giant Metaphor Approach, which would certainly explain his decision to set *The Midwich Cuckoos* in our own time.

In fact, now I think about it, I couldn't help but notice how the people of Midwich seemed to be greatly more perturbed by their phones not working for a while than by the discovery that their womenfolk have fallen mysteriously, even miraculously, pregnant. Unexpected alien babies? Okay, call Deliveroo and order the Pampers. No mobile signal and ten unanswered text messages? Someone needs to bring in the army right now. ●

Radio

What's the point of a poet laureate?

By Anna Leszkiewicz

A Laureate for Elizabeth
BBC Radio 4,
31 May; now on
catch-up

Over the course of Elizabeth II's seven decades on the throne, there have been seven poet laureates. There is something pompous, obsequious and, to use Mary Beard's term, "naff" about poems written in honour of the monarchy – and yet, of course, some of Britain's greatest poets have held the post. Thankfully, there is nothing fusty about this radio show presented by William Sieghart, who freely admits that a royal commission does not a good poem make.

Take John Masefield. He got "a bit carried away", Philip Errington of the John Masefield Society admits with a grimace of Masefield's odes on Elizabeth II's travels. His 1957 poem "On Our Lady's Western Journey", which reflects on "those distant states/To which you go as sovereign, or as guest/In both our speech and law are manifest", is read out over a comic brass band. Ouch. Cecil Day-Lewis, a former socialist, "modernised" the role in 1968. His poem for the 1969 investiture of the Prince of Wales was not straightforwardly reverential, describing the "proud and fiery" Welsh public who had come to "take the measure of their prince".

Ted Hughes, in his deep Yorkshire burr, explains how the laureate "produces a poem, now and again, for some national occasion, as the muse dictates..." His work for Prince Harry's christening, "Rain-Charm for the Duchy", has a worthy environmentalist message and a memorable description of the "blobby tears" of raindrops, but does remind me of a journal entry by the 18-year-old Sylvia Plath: "It is raining. I am tempted to write a poem. But I remember what it said on one rejection slip: After a heavy rainfall, poems titled RAIN pour in from across the nation."

Sieghart ends, movingly, with the present laureate Simon Armitage's reading of his response to the Covid-19 pandemic. "Through the hospital window/she said to me/she'd forgotten the name of her special tree,/and forgotten the name/of her favourite bird./ Through the hospital window/I mouthed the words:/ the song thrush and the mountain ash". ●

Ted Hughes explains how the laureate "produces a poem, now and again, for some national occasion, as the muse dictates"

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THE BACK PAGES

Food



Felicity Cloake

The origins of coronation chicken are clear, but its popularity is mysterious

If your attitude to the Jubilee celebrations mirrors that of Margaret Duchess of Argyll, who, when asked how she was marking the Silver Jubilee, replied, “Of course I’m very happy for the Queen and her family, but with the country in its present state I don’t think it’s the time for a great celebration,” then you’re in good company. In fact, the British attitude to such bashes has long been a little less inclined to forelock-tugging patriotism than the Palace might wish.

As the historian John Baxendale explained in 1995, when the country was gearing up to mark half a century since VE Day, our approach may have something to do with the lack of communal revelry in the modern ▶



◀ British calendar: “Nowadays we celebrate festivals like Christmas much more privately at home, so we like an excuse for a knees-up... An early example was the Relief of Mafeking, when people flooded into the streets and got drunk... I’m sure it wasn’t because they were all that bothered by the Boer War.”

And drink is always a feature of such occasions; newspaper coverage from the coronation suggests that the street parties were mostly aimed at “the kiddies”, as the *West London Observer* put it, who “packed away all the sandwiches, cakes, jellies and ices until they could hardly move”. Later, their parents “with dancing and singing, kept up the party spirit until midnight”.

Twas ever thus. The coronation feast for George IV ended in a drunken riot, while in 1902 the Mayor of Newport, on the Isle of Wight, found himself petitioned by local clergy to replace the pint of ale at a coronation dinner “for the poor, aged and infirm” with ginger beer, as they felt alcohol would be “detrimental to the highest welfare of the people, and especially so on this festive occasion”. In 1953 many working men’s clubs supplied free beer for their members on the big day – an astonishing 14 pints for unmarried men in Normanton near Wakefield – and the Savoy was said to have laid on 3,000 bottles of Champagne for its coronation charity ball: 2.5 for every guest.

Booze may have been prominent, but beyond the cakes – such as the spectacular “two-tier confection... surmounted by the figure of the Queen in Coronation robes” at the Brunton Road and West Street party in Lancaster – there is surprisingly little mention of food in the archives, and certainly none of that now most indelibly associated with the day, coronation chicken.

In fact, as my father recalls, in 1953 chicken was still a

luxury, “to be eaten mostly at Christmas” – though his family, like many, did purchase their first television for the occasion, which meant sausage rolls round the set rather than a sit-down lunch. Indeed, that guru of mid-century British cooking Marguerite Patten suggested a coronation menu that could be prepared ahead, so the hostess missed as little as possible of the action – though curried chicken salad does not feature.

Its origins are, of course, well documented. The Cordon Bleu cookery school was asked to cater for 350 foreign guests at Westminster School, while the real VIPs dined down the road at Buckingham Palace. The brief, according to Angela Wood, a student who helped develop the recipe, was “something that had a bit of flavour, but not too much” and could be prepared in advance and served cold. (It is sometimes claimed that their creation was based on a dish served at the Queen’s father’s jubilee in 1935, but evidence for this is scanty.)

What is mysterious is why a dish from a minor banquet has come, in recent years, to be so associated with the coronation. While the original recipe, with its red wine and apricot purée, was published by the Cordon Bleu’s Constance Spry in 1956, it didn’t really enter the national consciousness until the 1980s. There’s no coronation chicken in Delia’s 1982 *Complete Cookery Course*, but by 1988 it was well known enough to be dismissed as rather old hat in Jilly Cooper’s *Rivals*.

This surge in popularity surely can’t be due to its being one of Margaret Thatcher’s favourites, so who on Earth is doing coronation chicken’s marketing? If any readers have inside knowledge, please get in touch. And in the meantime, have a great long weekend, whatever you’re celebrating. ●

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.

Badly Drawn Boy

A town councillor has resigned due to ongoing allegations that he is the artist Banksy.

Cllr William Gannon, of Pembroke Dock’s Bufferland Ward, is stepping down with immediate effect due to rumours that he is secretly the cult street artist, whose net worth has been estimated to

be \$50m. Cllr Gannon said the claims are undermining his ability to work on the council. *The National* (Kate McIntosh)

Our location? It’s up in the air

Air passengers have been left panicked and confused after a “Welcome to Luton” sign appeared near Gatwick Airport. The 60m sign is visible on the approach to Gatwick, which is about 60 miles south of Luton.

The stunt has been claimed by the YouTube prankster Max Fosh, who apologised if “anyone has been seriously thrown”. *BBC News* (Daragh Brady)

Sour puss

A sign has been put up in a hotel window to reassure passers-by that a “screaming” cat is happy and well looked

after. Arya loudly yowls for attention from Harlington Hotel in King’s Cross.

The cat was rescued from a dumpster in southern Italy by her owner Giulia Ranu. Pet lovers have been stopping into the hotel asking about Arya’s welfare because of her unusual meowing timbre.

“She’s very vocal and she likes to talk,” said Ms Ranu, who works in the hotel. “I had to put out the sign because people were coming in asking if I was torturing her.”

Camden New Journal (Amanda Welles)



Off the Record



Ailbhe Rea

The grief caused by the Troubles lives on. I know – I’ve spoken to the victims

Kathleen Gillespie is replaying the night she and her children were held hostage by the IRA. She remembers sitting in a corner of her living room, with her daughter on her lap, as her husband, Patsy, kissed them goodbye under the watch of IRA gunmen. She remembers what he said, too: “Everything will be alright, girl. I’ll be home soon.”

You can hear the moment it dawns on me. “So this is where it happened,” I say into my Dictaphone. “This is where it happened,” Kathleen replies. We are sitting, in August 2021, in the same living room in Derry where she and her children were held at gunpoint by the IRA in October 1990.

Patsy never came home. He was chained to the steering wheel and foot pedals of a van filled with 1,200 pounds of explosives, and forced at gunpoint to drive into a nearby British army base. The IRA remotely detonated the bomb, blowing up Patsy and five soldiers, and badly injuring 27 more. Kathleen, a tiny, fierce Derry woman, is now one of Northern Ireland’s most arresting peace and reconciliation campaigners.

I had heard the story of Patsy’s brutal murder retold only a few days before, while sitting hundreds of miles away, in the press gallery of the House of Commons. Brandon Lewis, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced his plans to introduce a “statute of limitations” – an effective amnesty – for all killings during the Troubles. “Will the Secretary of State come with me and explain to [Patsy’s] widow Kathleen why he wants to protect his killers from prosecution and even investigation?” Colum Eastwood, the leader of the SDLP, asked Lewis, the tension and emotion palpable.

This was one of the biggest decisions to be taken in relation to where I’m from since the Good Friday

Agreement in 1998. I counted how many people present on the green benches or in the gallery were from Northern Ireland: just five. I felt the privilege, and the responsibility, of being there to bear witness to it. I knew I wanted properly to tell the story of this landmark legislation, which cut off a route to criminal justice for victims of the Troubles forever.

It was the beginning of a journey that has lasted nearly a year. It began at the *New Statesman* while I was political correspondent, and ends in my new role, hosting the *Westminster Insider* podcast from *Politico*. I went from Lewis’s announcement home to Northern Ireland, meeting Kathleen and other victims, and speaking to the leaders of all the main parties. Nearly a year on, the legislation is only now being introduced. After fierce opposition, it’s been modified to make immunity conditional on cooperation with an information recovery body. But it remains controversial.

This is the story of the pain of Kathleen, and thousands like her. It is also the story of Northern Ireland itself since the peace was brokered – its serious, often dysfunctional politics in the wake of decades of terror. I am lucky to be a child of the Good Friday Agreement, from a generation who grew up in Northern Ireland without knowing the sound of a bomb. My early childhood was peppered with *Forrest Gump*-style cameos from world leaders: Bill Clinton addressed a crowd in Belfast in 1995 when I was a few months old, strapped to my mum’s chest. Aged three, I met Cherie Blair and Mo Mowlam when the former popped into my daycare to spend a penny during a visit to a park next door, in the happy aftermath of the peace agreement. The Troubles were in the past: a story told on murals around the city.

Working on this story changed my understanding of that past. I had goosebumps interviewing Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair’s chief negotiator with the IRA, when he described how the peace deal nearly didn’t happen. But the most meaningful part was meeting Kathleen Gillespie and others like her. The Troubles aren’t just something in the past, but a living and ongoing grief and trauma that is still carried by thousands of people across these islands, unresolved. ●

Ailbhe Rea is the host of the “Westminster Insider” podcast from Politico. Tracey Thorn is on sabbatical



“This is where it happened,” Kathleen says. We are in the same living room where she was held at gunpoint by the IRA in 1990

Down and Out



Nicholas Lezard

I enjoy parties, but I don't need them like Boris Johnson needs them

A few weeks ago, Radio 4 was running a series of programmes looking back at the Nineties. I didn't listen intently – apart from the one about the rave collective Spiral Tribe, because I knew them at the time – but had it on as a kind of background noise in which, from time to time, I would lose myself in reverie. Ah, the Nineties. I suppose that was my decade. Fond memories of the Groucho Club. Scraping novelists off the toilet floors after they'd passed out. Keith Allen stealing my Zippo and being made to turn his pockets out. Telling Alex James how to make a proper martini while pissed out of my mind. Frankie Howerd making a huge pass at me. And not just the Groucho, of course, but all the book launches, the raves in abandoned warehouses, schools shut for the holidays, the endless ingenuity of the party planners...

"Oh Nina, what a lot of parties... Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, circus parties, parties where you have to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and nightclubs, in swimming baths and windmills." That was from Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, published in 1930 and which, presciently, ends, an unspecified time later, "on a splintered tree stump in the biggest battlefield in the history of the world". That's not how the parties of the Nineties ended up... not so far, at least.

I thought of all these parties, and the hedonistic days of the Nineties, as the revelations kept coming in about partygate. A couple of years ago no one was having any parties. Oh, except at one address. Now, *that* was Party Central. (There's an accidental party in

No 10 in *Vile Bodies*, and that makes the papers, too.) I will not add to the general outrage at and contempt for the Prime Minister because I don't think I can take much more of it. Every day Boris Johnson provides us with something to disgust us a little more than the day before, and don't tell me a continuous sick and impotent feeling about him for nearly three years isn't going to have an impact on the soul. No: I'll think instead about his psychology.

I think I have some insight into his character, or what passes for it, because I am only a couple of years older than him, and we were brought up in roughly similar environments. I went to a less posh school than he did, and not Oxford but Cambridge, but we both had, or in my case have, artistically inclined mothers and English fathers, although unlike his parents mine remained together until my father's death. His parents' divorce, and his father's character, I think, account for a good deal of what is wrong with Johnson, although his siblings are not as visibly affected by it. If at all. But photos of Johnson as a boy almost comically suggest a child who will grow up to be – how best to put this? – a suboptimal human being. As for me, I want to abolish the public schools, believing them responsible for a huge number of the things that are wrong with this country; he is the living embodiment of them.

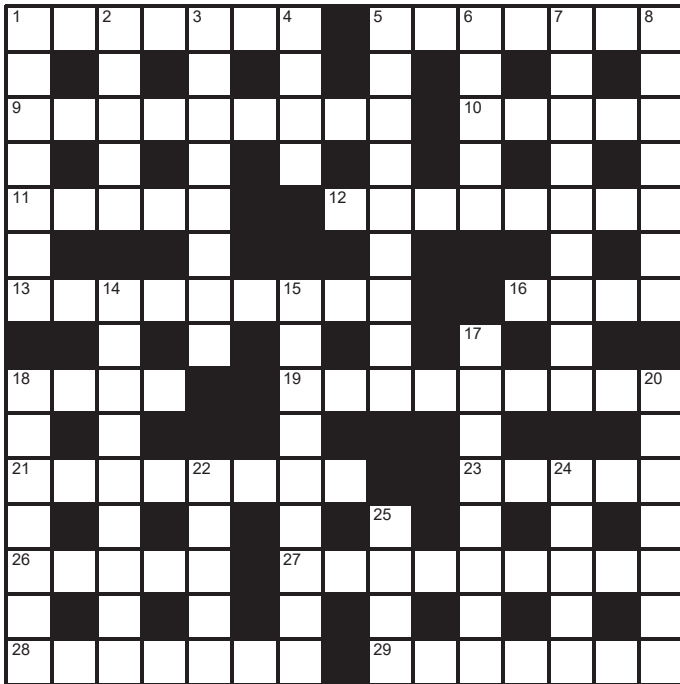
But boy, does he like a party. As do I, but, unlike the Bullingdon Club, to which Johnson belonged at university, my idea of fun never involved reportedly trashing a restaurant in tails or burning £50 notes in front of the homeless. I wonder if his bulk is down to not only his insatiable appetite (have you seen photos of him eating? To quote PG Wodehouse, an author I think he professes to like: "Have you ever seen Spode eat asparagus?" 'No.' 'Revolting. It alters one's whole conception of Man as Nature's last word.'" Spode, by the way, wants to be a fascist dictator), but to a love of alcohol that may even exceed my own.

Johnson wants to possess everything: women, power, and – almost heartbreakingly – the affection of others, and he will do anything to achieve this. One of the reasons people give parties is to make other people like them, and what better way than to let them have regular beanos (I bet you that's the term he uses) at your place, which also happens to be your staff's workplace? Maybe it's not the most tactful thing to do while absolutely no one in the country is allowed to have a party, because of, you know, a dangerous and highly contagious disease, but who thinks about tact when they're drunk? (I shall remind you in passing of last year's discovery of traces of cocaine in 11 out of 12 toilets tested in parliament buildings, which makes you wonder: who was using the 12th?)

Of course, if you try to seek affection, people who feel they haven't received enough will mistake it for affection themselves: hence some of his popularity. And now, as I write, the Chancellor has announced £400 off everyone's heating bills. And I imagine the members of the Bullingdon Club, casually writing a cheque to the owner of the restaurant they have just destroyed, before they move on to the next one. So that's all right then. ●

Photos of Johnson as a boy almost comically suggest a child who will grow up to be a suboptimal human being

**The NS Crossword 586:
I'm In Charge by Mace**



P represents the same word throughout.

Across

- 1 Staff of the French P (7)
- 5 Widow's affair on punt (7)
- 9 A team with English links worries (9)
- 10 First man and son Ps (5)
- 11 Dog barking outside home? (5)
- 12 P killed cat (8)
- 13 Vote loser potentially P (9)
- 16 Flatten completely or elevate, they say (4)
- 18 P's primarily too fleshy, on reflection (4)
- 19 P's erstwhile authority in UK (9)
- 21 Drinks from a large company dad's behind (8)
- 23 P asked half-heartedly (5)
- 26 P's allowance (5)
- 27 Known successor with gifts that may be chosen (9)
- 28 Sister adopting dead queen's retro colours (7)
- 29 P travelling in style (7)

Down

- 1 Ramble in daughter's shabbier clothing (7)
- 2 No working P (5)
- 3 I'm told to consider joinery tools' blemishes (8)
- 4 A thirty-second P? (4)
- 5 Take down books feeble earl's holding (9)
- 6 Dock horse ridden by fighting force (5)
- 7 Country fete pulling in a mute vagrant (9)
- 8 Writer's career to fade (7)
- 14 Chair initially in a transept during service (9)
- 15 Codes hen's price wrongly (9)
- 17 New strangely mutable sedative (8)
- 18 Control agent's rent discussion? (4,3)
- 20 Where felon held a long time after dropping? (7)
- 22 P installed (5)
- 24 Time to stop society gal's mounting arrears (5)
- 25 Tax Balkan currency and yen (4)

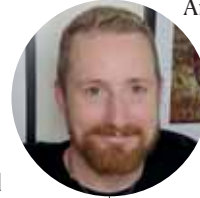
This week's solutions will be published in the next issue.

Answers to crossword 585 of 27 May 2022

Across 5) Unarm 6) Queen 9) Oak tree 10) Gone for 12) Stephanie 13) Jodie 15) Zola 17) Cilla 18) Eric 19) Robin 20) Valentine 23) Heather 24) Deborah 25) Nigel 26) Knead
Down 1) Instep 2) Freelance 3) Yukon 4) Penelope 7) Bartholomew 8) Louisianian 11) William 14) Madeleine 16) Alistair 21) Thomas 22) Xebec

**Subscriber of the Week:
Alexander Neumayer**

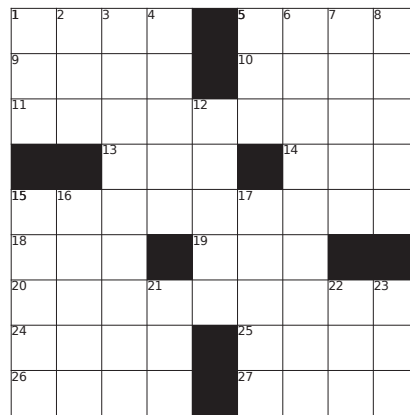
What do you do?
Hairdresser by day, classics and philosophy student by night.
Where do you live?
Hackney, London.
Do you vote?
In the current political climate, I vote.
How long have you been a subscriber?
Only a year.
What made you start?
Shame over my natural political phlegmatism.
Is the NS bug in the family?
My boyfriend will flick through copies which are lying around. I catalogue every single one.
What would you like to see more of in the NS?
Radical political philosophies



of the past? Perhaps the 21st century is the right time to up-cycle them.
Who are your favourite NS writers?
Bruno Maçães, Louise Perry, Andrew Marr.
Who would you put on the cover of the NS?
Charles Fourier.
With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?
Jacob Rees-Mogg would just be too awkward to bear.
All-time favourite NS article?
"Living in Fernando Pessoa's world" by John Gray – it was interesting and unexpected.
The New Statesman is...
The world at my fingertips.

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

**The NS Crossword In Brief 35:
by Miriam Estrin**



Answers to crossword 34 of 27 May 2022

Across 1) Lisp 5) Bebe 9) Etta 10) Idea 11) Goalposts 13) Sorer 14) Hay 15) Loose 17) Sri 19) Scent 22) Page Three 24) Achy 25) Wake 26) Mete 27) Anon
Down 1) Legs 2) I, too 3) Starlight 4) Paleo 5) Bio 6) Ed Sheeran 7) Beta 8) Easy 12) Prost 16) Schwa 17) Spam 18) Race 20) Neko 21) Teen 23) Eye

Across

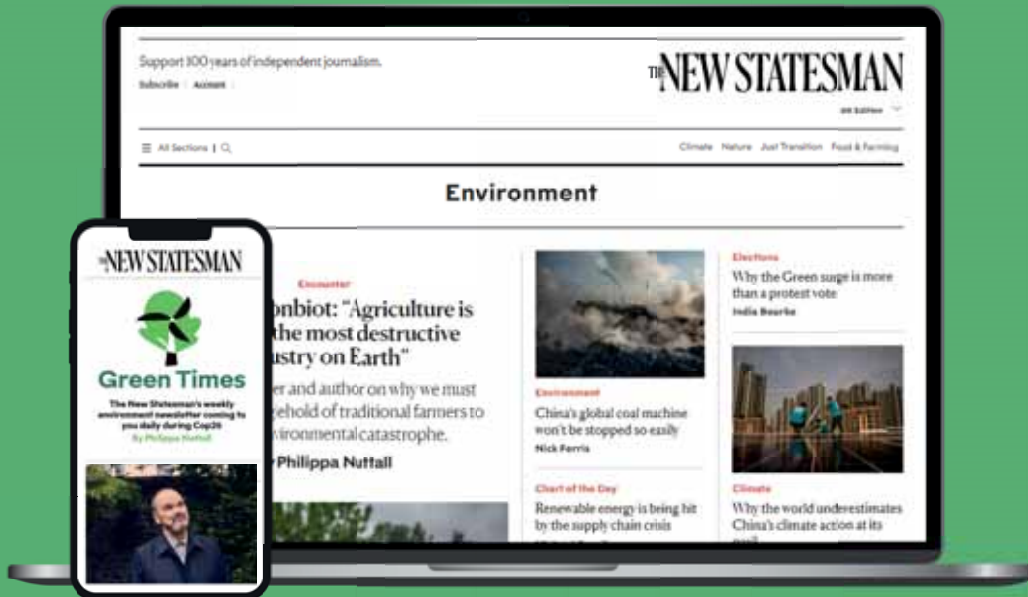
- 1 Black or White performer
- 5 Jazzy James
- 9 Healing plant
- 10 Astonishes
- 11 "Have at it"
- 13 UK prime ministers, pre-1979
- 14 Lance Cpl, eg
- 15 Ncuti Gatwa role
- 18 "UK, ___?" (*Drag Race* hit)
- 19 Met Gala month
- 20 Eurovision winners Kalush ___
- 24 Apple or cherry
- 25 Nincompoop
- 26 Speakers' Corner park
- 27 "Have ___!"

Down

- 1 Moderna offering
- 2 Pub offering
- 3 Began
- 4 Vandalised a car
- 5 ___ de parfum
- 6 Part of a *Catch* phrase?
- 7 Supermarket chain
- 8 Titanic casualty John Jacob
- 12 Garden ornament
- 15 Ibis-headed Egyptian god
- 16 Get cracking
- 17 Registers a vote
- 21 ___-haw
- 22 Outer edge
- 23 Fell, with "it"

Green Times

The *New Statesman's* weekly environment newsletter



The politics, business and culture of the climate and nature crises

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State of the Nation

Highlights from the NS's online data hub

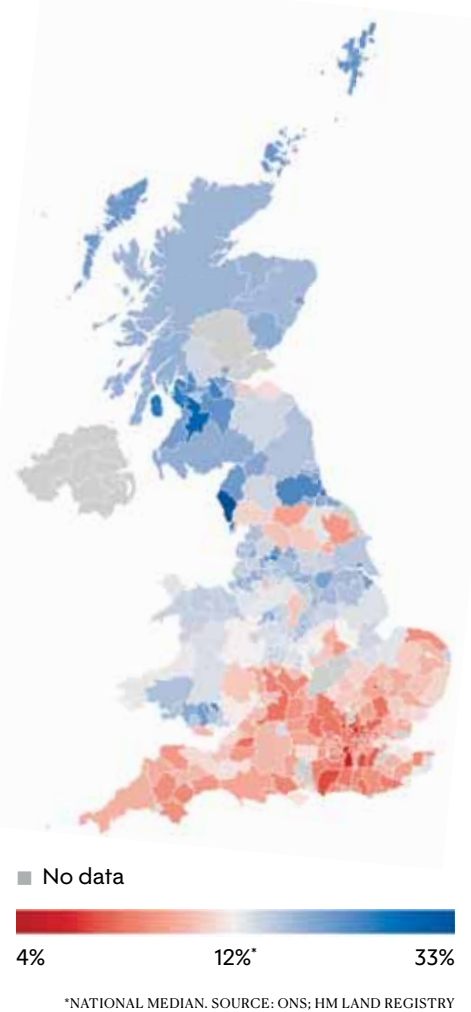
How does the UK compare to the rest of the world?

	GDP forecast for 2022 (%)	Inflation rate (CPI, %)	Most recent unemployment rate (%)	GDP generated per hours worked (US\$)	Change in GDP generated per hours worked since 2010	Number of privately owned firearms per 100 persons	Homicide rates from firearms per 100,000 persons (2019)
Great Britain	3.7	9.0	3.7	57.4	+4.2	2.8	0.04
Brazil	0.8	12.1	11.2	-	-	8.6	20.80
Canada	3.9	6.7	5.2	56.9	+8.5	34.7	0.50
China	4.4	2.1	5.8	-	-	-	0.02
France	2.9	4.8	7.4	64.2	+5.2	15.0	0.32
Germany	2.1	7.3	2.9	63.4	+5.8	32.0	0.08
Italy	2.3	6.0	8.5	53.1	+2.2	11.9	0.35
Japan	2.4	2.1	2.6	45.2	+4.5	0.6	0.02
Russia	-8.5	17.8	4.1	27.7	+4.3	12.3	0.72
Spain	4.8	8.3	13.3	51.2	+3.5	10.4	0.13
US	3.2	8.3	3.6	73.4	+5.5	120.5	4.12

SOURCES: IMF; OECD; IMHE; GLOBAL BURDEN OF DISEASE

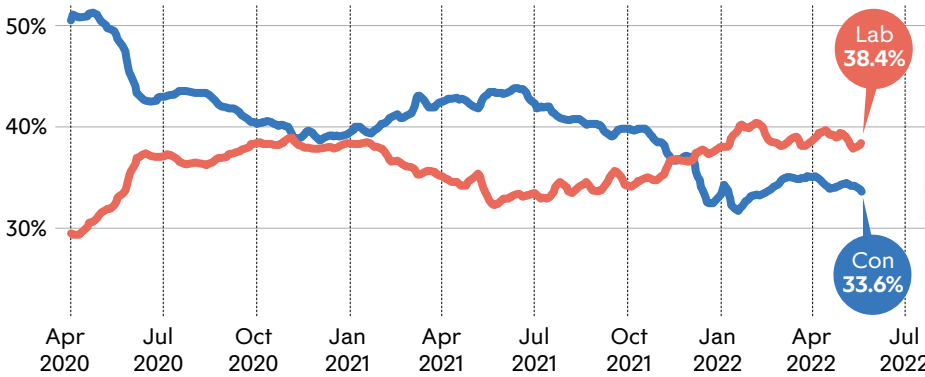
Can you afford a house?

Average incomes as a share of average local house prices



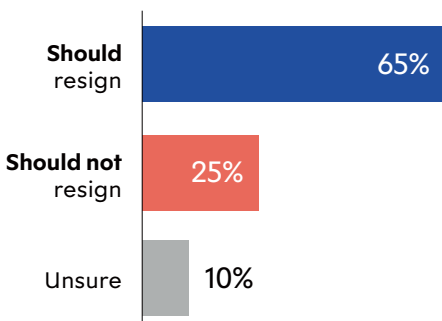
Britain Elects: Westminster voting intentions

How popular is the Labour Party compared to the Conservative Party?



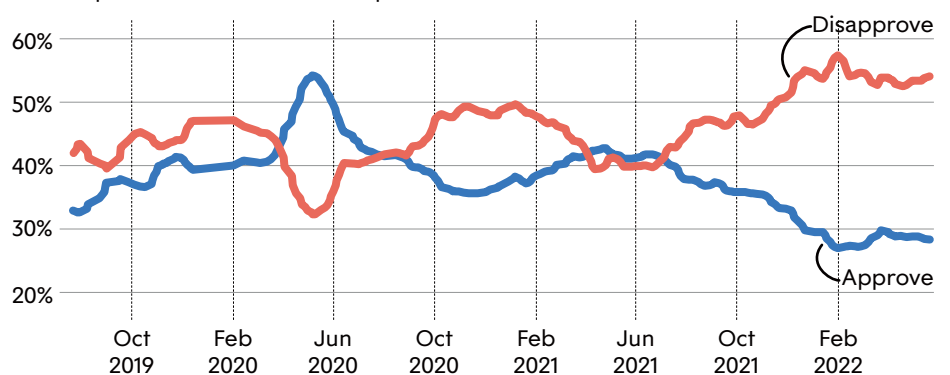
Two-thirds want Boris Johnson out

The Prime Minister...



A leader's decline and fall

Public opinion of Boris Johnson as prime minister



The NS Q&A

“Pull handles on push doors
make me feel like an idiot”

Hannah Fry, mathematician



Hannah Fry was born in Harlow in 1984. She is a professor in the mathematics of cities at University College London and a podcast presenter whose shows include *The Curious Cases of Rutherford & Fry*.

What's your earliest memory?

I was in playschool and there was a woman looking after us who had blue eyeshadow on, all the way up to her eyebrows. I clearly remember looking at her eyes and thinking: what is going on there?

Who are your heroes?

As a child it was Michael Schumacher because he was totally committed to his goal, which I thought was very impressive. As an adult: Jess Phillips. She doesn't take any shit but is genuinely trying to leave the world better than she found it.

What book last changed your thinking?

Being Mortal by Atul Gawande, which includes the idea that for most of human history death has been a part of life. It's only in the last couple of generations that we've had the luxury of not being surrounded by it at all times. By not having death ever present, we are more scared of it.

Which political figure do you look up to?

Rory Stewart. I don't agree with him on everything, but he approaches debate with real respect and empathy.

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

I just got back from Las Vegas. In the 1950s, because the city is quite close to the Hoover Dam, it had access to limitless electricity, which is why residents started

putting neon lights up everywhere. I really love the idea of going there in the Fifties and it feeling like nowhere else on Earth.

What would be your “Mastermind” specialist subject?

The Formula One career of Michael Schumacher – I mean, ask me anything. I know all of it like the back of my hand.

What TV show could you not live without?

The 1990s BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. It's my comfort blanket. The on-screen chemistry between the two main actors is amazing. Colin Firth is so hot in it.

Who would paint your portrait?

MC Escher. I love the way he plays with dimensions and impossible spaces.

What's your theme tune?

“Let's Get Ready To Rhumble” by PJ & Duncan, which is the first record I bought.

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

Lauren Laverne told me: “The days are long but the years are short.” When I've got a screaming child and a deadline to meet, I imagine that it's ten years in the future, and think about what I would give to be back where I am now.

What's currently bugging you?

Pull handles on push doors. I feel like an idiot every single time. But it's the design of the door. It's stupid. And rude.

What single thing would make your life better?

Getting up earlier. I'm envious of those people who are on time in the morning. I think those people are superior.

When were you happiest?

Now. I had cancer last year. I've come out the other side of it and the little things that used to stress me out just don't bother me.

In another life, what job might you have chosen?

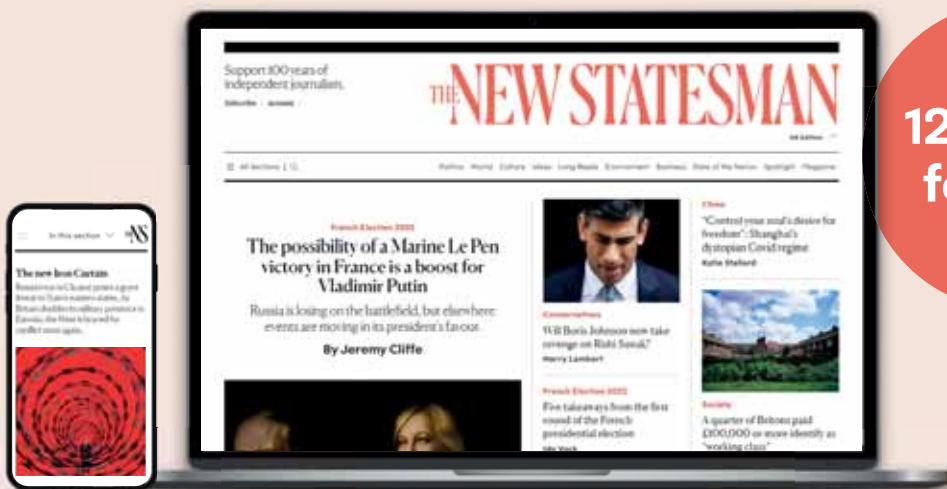
A beautician, which is what I wanted to be when I was 14. I still remain obsessed with doing my make-up and hair.

Are we all doomed?

I like to think that civilisation is going through a period of teenage angst. I hope that over time we'll come through the other side and mature into a much more decent society. ●

“*Making Sense of Cancer with Hannah Fry*” is available on BBC iPlayer

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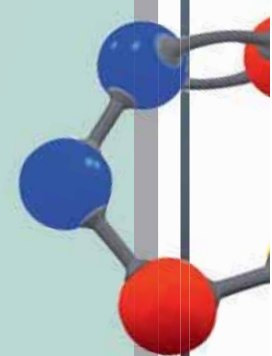

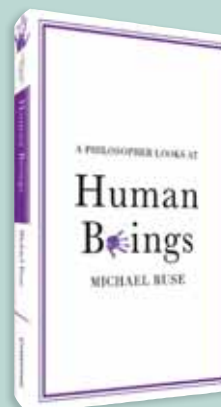
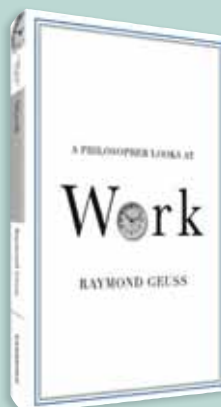
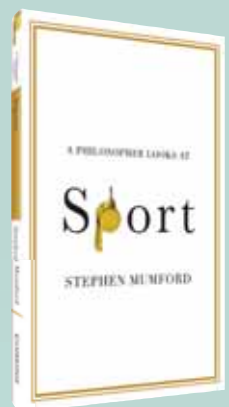
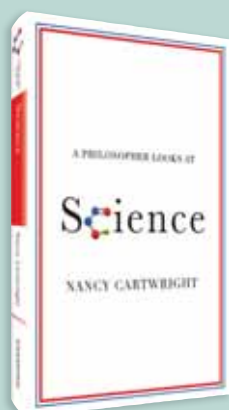
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