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# THE NEW STATESMAN

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# The birth of a new political era

**T**he Conservative Party is politically and intellectually exhausted. This summer's leadership contest has only confirmed as much.

Britain has profound problems: falling living standards, overwhelmed public services and a broken constitution. But rather than grappling with these issues, the Tories have embraced a parodic form of Thatcherism.

Liz Truss's principal proposal is to cut taxes by more than £30bn, which includes abandoning the planned corporation tax rise from 19 to 25 per cent. Yet there is no reason to believe this would lead to the economic renaissance that she promises. Rather than stimulating business investment, past corporation tax cuts have been squandered on shareholder dividends.

Rishi Sunak has denounced his opponent's plan as economically reckless, but this is a difference of degree rather than kind. The former chancellor has also vowed to cut taxes once inflation and the national debt have fallen. Ms Truss and Mr Sunak merely offer variations on the same dogmatic, free-market theme.

There is, of course, a case for reducing taxes on the low-paid at a time of surging inflation. But to believe that the UK's main problem is its tax burden is a profound misdiagnosis. The reason Britain has fallen further behind competitors such as the US and Germany over the past decade is its parlous productivity growth (output per hour rose by just 0.7 per cent between 2009 and 2019). Investment in skills and infrastructure, not poorly targeted tax cuts, is the best remedy.

At one time, the Conservatives appeared to understand this. When she became prime minister, Theresa May vowed to address the UK's "burning injustices" and, for a period, Boris Johnson championed "levelling up" as a means of reducing regional inequality. But Ms Truss and Mr Sunak show no interest in translating such rhetoric into reality.

In other respects, too, the candidates do not represent the choice this country deserves after three years of Mr Johnson. Unlike earlier Tory leadership candidates, such as Jeremy Hunt and Tom Tugendhat, both served in Mr Johnson's cabinet. They are irrevocably tainted by the man



**Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak do not represent the choice this country deserves after three years of Boris Johnson**

who so debased political and public life. Indeed, Ms Truss has unashamedly offered herself as Mr Johnson's ideological successor.

Both candidates are also ardent Brexiteers – Mr Sunak by conviction, Ms Truss by conversion – but they have learnt the wrong lessons from the Leave vote. Rather than an appeal for ultra-Thatcherism, Brexit reflected the public desire for a more protective state as well as a new political and economic settlement.

After the Conservatives won their biggest parliamentary majority since 1987 at the 2019 general election on a crude pledge to get "Brexit done", many anticipated a new era of Tory hegemony. But the party's grip on power is precarious. The decline has been rapid.

For the UK's opposition parties, this is an unexpected opportunity. At no time since the Conservatives returned to office in 2010 has their defeat been more conceivable.

As we have argued before, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens should embrace tactical voting as a means of dislodging the Tories. But rather than waiting to be gifted power, the opposition needs a programme worthy of these times. The UK needs transformative economic, social and constitutional renewal. This should include electoral reform, the abolition of the House of Lords and more devolution from Westminster to the nations and to the regions of England.

Ever since the 2008 financial crisis ended the long post-Cold War era of ideological consensus, voters have issued a series of warnings: the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, Ukip's surge at the 2015 general election, the SNP's dominance at Holyrood, the 2016 Brexit vote, the rise of Corbynism, the hung parliament of 2017. Rather than addressing the root cause of this discontent, Mr Johnson offered a succession of populist distractions – and his project inevitably unravelled.

Now Mr Sunak and Ms Truss summon the chimera of market prosperity and a shrunken state, raising yet more false hopes. The British electorate deserves far better. But in an era of mediocre leadership, does any politician have the courage – and the vision – to break Britain's impasse? ●



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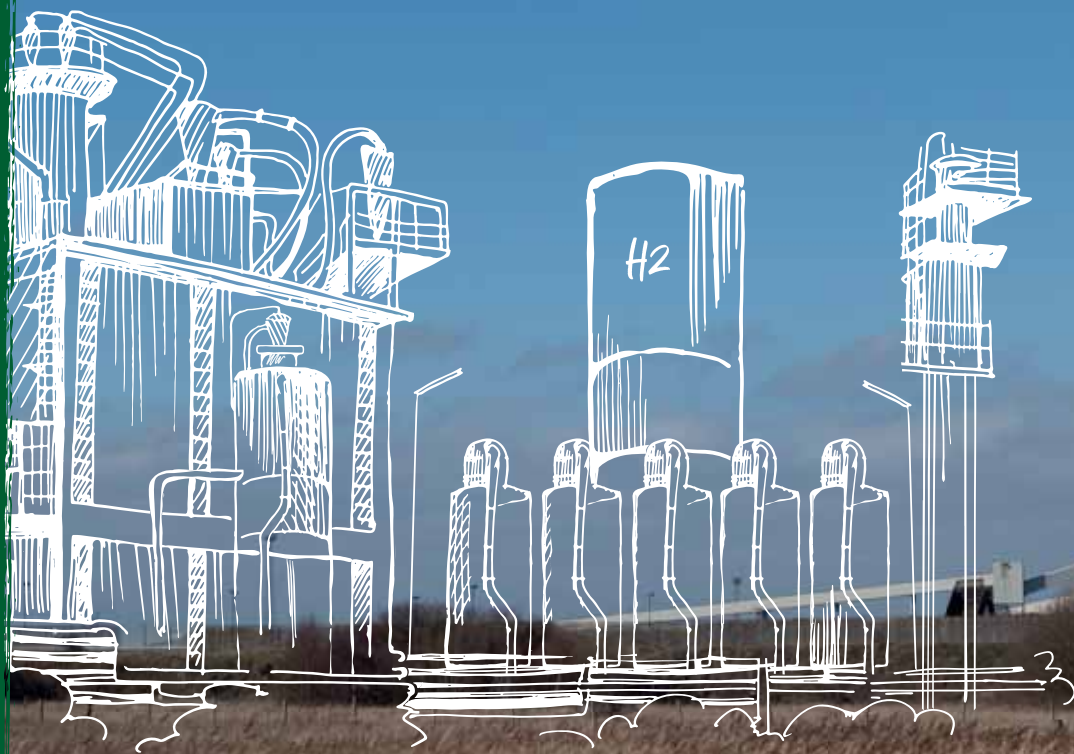
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### Comment



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Thatchermania won't save the Conservative Party



**Jeremy Cliffe**  
What a Giorgia Meloni government would mean for Italy

**Rachel Cunliffe**  
Boris Johnson's departure is a reminder that classics is not just for the elite

**Emma Haslett**  
Welcome to One Hyde Park, the building that remade London

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# JASON COWLEY



## Editor's Note

### An inspirational teacher – and what Sunak and Truss are getting wrong about Brexit

The Conservative Party has one purpose above all others: to win and hold power, at which it excels. Most Tories are shape-shifters and Boris Johnson was a particularly dangerous opponent for liberals and the left because he didn't really believe in anything. He was non-ideological, flexible and, though he promised to "level up" and "get Brexit done", he had no governing mission. So long as he was at the centre of the political drama, he was content to raise taxes and expand the role of the state.

Those competing to succeed him are, in one sense, running against his legacy. Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak are both self-styled Thatcherites. They ultimately want to reduce taxes, limit the role of government, roll back the state, and embrace the opportunities presented by Brexit, as they see them. But the ideas and policies associated with "Thatcherism" were a response to a particular historical moment as the postwar social democratic settlement unravelled; over time they hardened into a universal belief system, neoliberalism.

Sunak and Truss seem to have learnt the wrong lessons from Brexit, which for many was an expression of mass disaffection. In his book *The Future of Capitalism*, Paul Collier likens the vote for Brexit to a mutiny driven by social divergences. "Think of the most famous mutiny: on HMS *Bounty* in 1789," he said to me in 2018. "What happened to those sailors was that they ended up on an island in the middle of nowhere. That wasn't their objective when they mutinied. They didn't mutiny with a view to the future but because the conditions they were living in had become

intolerable. Mutinies are angry reactions to neglect." In James Graham's film *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, Dominic Cummings (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) speaks about people's "wells of resentment, all these little pressures that have been building up, ignored over time". He goes on: "We can make this about something more than Europe. Europe just becomes a symbol. A cipher. For everything. Every bad thing that is happening, has happened."

Theresa May expressed similar sentiments when she became prime minister in July 2016 and identified seven "burning injustices" that were destabilising British society. No senior Tory speaks like this today; the moderate Europhiles have been banished and the communitarians are silent. In their race to the right, Sunak and Truss are seriously misreading the times; fearful about economic collapse, people are not looking for some neo-Thatcherite social revolution but to the state for protection and security. Whoever becomes prime minister will inherit a mess; the wells of resentment will be overflowing.

\*\*\*

While visiting Sir Frederick Gibberd College, a new state school in Harlow with an academic sixth form, in September last year, I was introduced to a young classics teacher called Chris Pilcher. After graduating from Bristol University, he'd worked as a multimedia journalist before changing career and, together with his colleague Harrison Moore, asked many interesting questions about the *New Statesman*. As a trainee teacher he was part of the pioneering group who helped

establish the school after it was founded in 2019. He was working with Classics for All – which supports state schools, many in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, to introduce or develop the teaching of classical subjects – and he qualified in 2021.

Sir Frederick Gibberd College, which is named after Harlow's chief architect and planner, is on the site of the former Passmores Comprehensive School, opposite the flat my grandfather lived in after he retired and moved from east London to the Essex new town so that he could be closer to his son, my father. I know this area of Harlow well. As Dee Conlon, the estimable head teacher, took me on a tour of the school's new classrooms, I looked out from high windows across rough tracks and woodland, through which I'd once run in an inter-school cross-country race, and down on sports fields where I'd played football for my school. I felt a sharp tug of longing for something irretrievably lost.

Mr Pilcher, who also did some sports coaching, told me about his ambition to make classics fun and accessible for children who in different circumstances might never have had the chance to learn Latin. ("SFG", as staff and pupils call it, is the only state school in the town to teach Latin; 26 per cent of the children there receive pupil premium funding.) He was originally from the south-west and had attended the independent Taunton School. What attracted him to SFG was what he called its "mission". Later, as it began to rain, I stood with him as children waited in lines for their mobile phones to be returned at the end of the school day. They were tired but the process was orderly and calm.

\*\*\*

Sometimes you encounter someone, however fleetingly, who leaves a deep impression. Since meeting Mr Pilcher, I have often thought about him – his decency, gentleness, his sense of mission. A few weeks ago, during a meeting on Zoom about the school, I discovered that Mr Pilcher had died suddenly while taking part with two other SFG teachers in the Hackney Half Marathon. They were running to raise money for the mental health charity Mind in West Essex. The school remained in a state of mourning and one of the staff began to cry when Mr Pilcher's name was mentioned.

"Our SFG family has lost a beloved member and words fail to describe our grief," Dee Conlon said. She is right – sometimes there are no words. I met Chris Pilcher only once, but I shall never forget him or what he represented and wanted for the children he taught. ●



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# THE NOTEBOOK



MARCUS BASTEL / MILLENNIUM IMAGES, UK

## Comment

What English summers  
taught me about loss

By **Tomiwa Owolade**

**T**hree in every 100 people in the UK are believed to suffer from seasonal affective disorder (Sad), a depressive condition that is triggered by a change in the seasons. We typically associate it with the onset of autumn and winter, but 10 per cent of people who suffer from the disorder do so in the summer months as well. Symptoms of “reverse Sad”, or the summer blues, can include irritability, anxiety, fatigue, loss of appetite and insomnia. I am not personally afflicted by the condition, but I understand its force: no other season so perfectly evokes the sensation of loss.

For me, summer is England’s saddest season – but that wasn’t always the case. My earliest memories of England are tied to summer, and they were innocently blissful experiences. Before I moved to London from Osogbo, south-west Nigeria, when I was nine, I spent three summers in the capital. I visited the London Eye, Madame Tussauds and London Zoo. I ate crispy fish fingers and

◀ warm sausage sandwiches. In Nigeria, by contrast, I had experienced the country's two seasons: wet and dry. English summers, fleeting and intoxicating, were new to me.

When I became a resident of the capital, in Charlton, Greenwich, I saw how summer brought out the best in London. I played football in Charlton Park from dawn to dusk with boys whom I'd barely spoken to before; in the magic of those few weeks, we became a convivial pack. I relished the bustle of outdoor activity – in shops and parks, on public transport – as the city eased and became more sociable. Liberated from the daily routine of school, my mind could be lax and loose, too.

In "The Whitsun Weddings", Philip Larkin captured the expansive feeling of summer: "All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense/Of being in a hurry gone." But looking back at my early, carefree childhood in the capital, it is diminution, not expansion, that I feel.

English summers, fleeting and intoxicating, were new to me

My first London summers felt long and open-ended. But gradually, as I became an adult – and more rapidly over the anxious period of the Covid lockdowns – I came to realise that the English summer is a false dream.

Much of the art I associate most closely with the feeling of loss is also about summer: *500 Days of Summer*, *The Virgin Suicides*, the films of Richard Linklater. I think of Lana Del Rey's "Summertime Sadness", Gershwin's "Summertime" – and Don Henley's 1984 song "The Boys of Summer". Henley describes a man driving through his old neighbourhood – "Nobody on the road/Nobody on the beach/I feel it in the air/The summer's out of reach" – remembering a girl he once loved: "I can see you/Your brown skin shining in the sun/You got your hair combed back and your/Sunglasses on". Later in the song, though, he ruminates: "Those days are gone forever/I should just let them go." But the seductive allure of summer won't let him go, even as the reality of his loss presses in.

There is a Portuguese word, *saudade*, which roughly translates as a yearning for a time or place of sweet happiness. *Saudade*, expressed most potently in the musical tradition of *fado*, can refer to something both real and imagined. It is a continual longing for moments of happiness, and the accompanying fear that such precious moments, once experienced, can never be fully recovered.

When I think of playing football with friends in the English summers of my childhood, I am struck by the painful knowledge that I will never have those experiences again. I remember stretching out on the grass at the end of the game, the light purple clouds announcing dusk, and gently nudging my crumpled socks down to my ankles and opening a bottle of Lucozade. The world felt wide open before me.

A few weeks ago, I was walking through a park on a dry, hot day on my way to a party. The park, with its scorched patches of mud, set against a landscape of tower blocks and council estates, reminded me of the Charlton Park I knew as a child. A group of boys were playing football together and the ball escaped in my direction. I controlled it with my right foot and passed it back to them. Immediately after doing so, I felt a swift and powerful desire to join in with them so as to reconnect to those old memories, as one might after bumping into a former lover. But I kept walking – I was already late for the party.

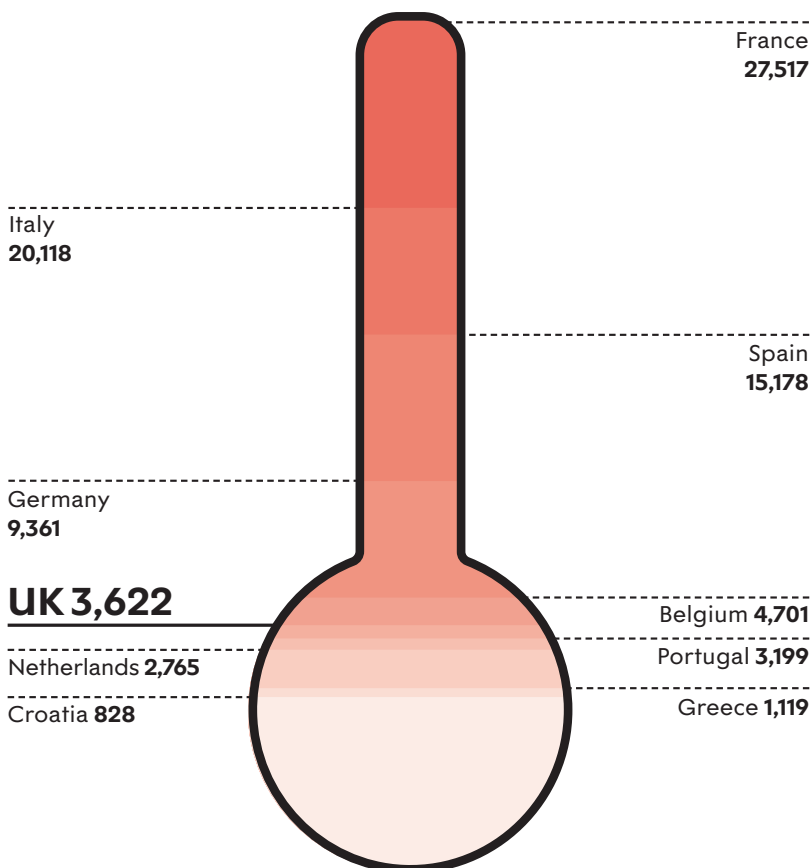
Larkin's "The Whitsun Weddings" starts with a striking description of a "sunlit Saturday" and ends: "We slowed again,/And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled/A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower/Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain."

For me, as for many of us, summer is the saddest season because I still cling to the sunlit days of my younger self. Those days are out of sight and somewhere the rain is falling. ●

See Philip Larkin at 100, page 58

## Chart of the Week

**France has experienced the most deaths due to extreme heat in the EU**  
Deaths from heatwave disasters in EU countries and the UK, 1985-2020



SOURCE: EM-DAT

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# The Diary

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## The talented Mr Pooter, suburban literature, and a run-in with Jeffrey Archer

By Ian Hislop

I have spent the week rereading *The Diary of a Nobody*, which is probably not a very good idea when writing a diary for the *New Statesman*. The fictional diary of Charles Pooter is a masterpiece of boring, pompous and mundane entries. It is very difficult not to feel a bit Pooterish when contemplating one's own week. Pooter writes: "Mustard and cress not come up yet. Today was a day of annoyance. I missed the quarter to nine bus into the city."

I was thinking of writing: "Very hot. Today was a day of annoyance. Boris Johnson has not left No 10 yet." But I thought better of it.

### An author's self-own

Pooter, however, has no self-awareness at all, and says: "Why should I not publish my diary? I have often seen reminiscences of people I have never even heard of – and I fail to see because I do not happen to be a Somebody why my diary should not be interesting." Pooter does have a point and the writer, George Grossmith, is actually making a joke at his own expense.

George (and his illustrator brother Weedon) created *The Diary of a Nobody* as a column in *Punch* magazine. George was not only a comic writer but a very famous actor and singer who was the star of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operettas. He was very much a Somebody and he wrote a book about his life called *A Society Clown: Reminiscences* in 1888, the year he started writing Pooter. These reminiscences were not very successful. This was a good joke, but then of course the joke got much better as the years passed and the life of his deliberately dull comic creation proved much more interesting than his own



John Major was dull – in retrospect an attractive trait for a Conservative leader

glamorous theatrical career. Posterity now remembers Grossmith almost entirely because of *The Diary of a Nobody*.

### Cul-de-sac comedy

Grossmith's novel features heavily in a series I have been making about art made in the suburbs for BBC Radio 4 to be broadcast in August. From Charles Pooter's home at The Laurels, Brickfield Terrace, to Harry Potter's home at 4 Privet Drive there is a wealth of suburban literature, much of it comic, that emerges from these archetypal suburban homes. And you can trace the influence of Charles Pooter's diary right through the next century to Adrian Mole's *Secret Diary* and, of course, to the knock-off parody diaries that appear in *Private Eye*, such as that of John Major. The idea of that diary was that Major was dull and Pooterish – which in retrospect seem very attractive traits for a Conservative leader.

### Spiked champagne

On the hottest day of the year I was busy doing media interviews trying to persuade people to go inside to go to the theatre. The play I am trumpeting is about another great comic writer and performer, Spike Milligan, and I co-wrote it with *Private Eye* cartoonist Nick Newman. It is called, with great originality, *Spike*, and starts a nationwide tour in September.

The great thing about doing interviews on Milligan is that they can't go worse than the interview I once did with him on the Radio 4 programme *Midweek*. I was in my twenties and was allowed to do the odd birthday interview, which meant that I interviewed the guests live. In those olden days the BBC offered a bottle of champagne to the birthday guest. So there I was, interviewing one of my heroes, and I was so nervous I opened the champagne and it went all over my notes. These were in green felt pen and they dissolved so that there was only a green soup floating on my notebook and I was lost for words. Spike, who had seemed quite grumpy up to this point, was absolutely delighted and thought that this was hugely funny. He then started interviewing himself, which was much better than me doing it. I realise now that what he loved was the chaos, the chance to improvise and be spontaneous. At the time I was just incredibly grateful that he had rescued me.

### Heaven vs Lewisham

I also interviewed Jeffrey Archer for *Midweek* and had a furious row with him when I questioned his commitment to public service and suggested he was motivated by a desire to be centre-stage. This caused a lot of trouble at the time, and Archer was outraged by my perceived insolence. I was delighted then to discover this week a new Spike joke that I had not heard before. Everyone knows that Milligan's tombstone reads: "I told you I was ill" – though it is written in Gaelic as the church did not think it was appropriate. But he had another joke about death, recorded by a resident in a local paper. It goes as follows: "I would like to go to heaven, but if Jeffrey Archer is there, I want to go to Lewisham." ●



## Encounter

“Green capitalism is its own form of denial”  
Adrienne Buller on why markets won’t save us  
By George Eaton

The acceptable face of capitalism is today a green one. Bill Gates, Mike Bloomberg and Mark Carney all insist that markets are the key to saving the planet. But as the climate crisis becomes ever more inescapable, should anyone believe the hype?

In her new book *The Value of a Whale*, Adrienne Buller exposes what she calls “the illusions of green capitalism”. The title is a reference to the price that the International Monetary Fund recently assigned to great whales: \$2m per specimen on account of their contribution to eco-tourism revenue and their capacity for carbon sequestration.

“It captures the most absurd elements of this project,” Buller, 28, the incoming director of research at the Common Wealth think tank, told me when we met at London’s Natural History Museum, where a blue whale skeleton (named Hope) hangs from the ceiling. “The idea that you would try to conserve nature by finding a way to put a price tag on great whales – porpoises and dolphins are excluded, by the way, because they aren’t important enough to carbon sequestration. That captures how meaningless a lot of these approaches can become if we don’t stop to think about exactly what we’re doing, which is separating out individual species from the environment they’re in.”

Though Buller writes movingly of her first

TOM JAMIESON FOR THE NEW STATESMAN

encounter with a whale as a seven-year-old in British Columbia – “the distinct feeling that I had just had the curtain lifted on another world” – her book is not that of a romantic liberal. Rather, it is a deeply researched account of why green capitalism is self-defeating.

Buller concedes the intuitive appeal of ideas such as carbon offsetting before exposing the tragic and sometimes farcical reality. “A lot of carbon offsets based around reforestation have actually gone up in flames in climate-related wildfires in North America,” she said, including land claimed for green purposes by Microsoft and BP. Others were never offsets to begin with.

In September 2020, the energy firm TotalEnergies claimed that a \$17m shipment of liquefied natural gas was “carbon neutral” on the grounds that it paid local volunteers and workers to clear the underbrush of a Zimbabwean forest as a wildfire preventative measure. “What this does is justify further emissions under the guise that, somewhere down the line, they will be removed. A lot of the time that isn’t what happens,” said Buller. She gave the example of Shell’s net-zero plan, which would require an area of land for reforestation three times the size of the Netherlands by 2030. “If you apply that kind of logic to all the world’s major polluters, or consumer decisions, you pretty quickly run out of land,” Buller wryly observed. “This is the inevitable outcome of an offset regime that’s based on enabling consumption to go on unchanged among the affluent.”

What of ESG (environmental, social and governance factors): the buzz phrase beloved of green capitalists and the City? “It’s become a scapegoat on the right and the irony is that I agree with that assessment – a lot of it does represent green- and woke-washing,” she said. In other words, an ethical facade that masks a less appealing reality.

“Many of the ESG products that are being offered are devoid of any kind of investment in a green future,” Buller said. “They take a mainstream fund such as the S&P 500 and slightly change the weighting so that you have less exposure to airlines and fossil fuels and, most likely, much higher exposure to Big Tech companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Facebook.

“It’s hard to argue that Amazon, for example, has a particularly great standard on labour rights or that there haven’t been issues around exploitative supply chains for a number of those companies.”

But is the fundamental problem the entire notion of green capitalism, or simply that it isn’t being tried properly? “The argument I make is that green capitalism is a contradiction in terms,” Buller told me. “Because it’s predicated on systems and dynamics that are not reconcilable with a sustainable planet, whether that is the idea of constant and unending growth entirely decoupled from material resource use or the fact we’ve sustained Western lifestyles off the exploitation of invisible people and places around the world.

“Eventually you run out of cheap labour to exploit, you run out of land to use for offsets and you run out of resources to exploit for all of us to have our own shiny new electric vehicle.” Green capitalism, in short, is “its own form of denial,” she said.

Buller was born in Vancouver and politicised by her surroundings. “I spent my childhood running around temperate rainforests and swimming in the Pacific. But Canada is also an intensely resource-extractive economy and some of my most powerful early memories are of massive clear-cut forestry projects.”

For her, the country’s progressive image is at odds with its regressive economic model. “We just have very good PR. Justin Trudeau is a case in point. The man will walk at the head of student climate marches but then the country has to collectively own a pipeline.” (The Trans Mountain pipeline was bought by the Canadian government for C\$4.5bn in 2018.)

Buller comes from a medical family – her mother is a healthcare CEO, named as one of Canada’s most powerful women, her father is an interventional cardiologist – and her first degree was in life sciences at McGill University. She moved to the UK in 2017, at the height of Corbynism, and studied global governance and ethics for her master’s at University College London, subsequently becoming co-director of the campaign group Labour for a Green New Deal.

When asked what she makes of Labour’s post-Corbyn trajectory under Keir Starmer, Buller is withering. “It’s completely misjudged that Labour has moved entirely away from the pledges that he campaigned on [during the 2020 leadership election] and that includes a robust commitment to tackling the climate crisis,” she said. “I do think that has been a big betrayal and I will stand by the word betrayal. There has been a betrayal of the activist base that I don’t think even Keir Starmer would deny and that has been an explicit strategy to differentiate himself from his predecessor.”

Part of a new generation of transatlantic left thinkers, Buller was drawn to socialism by “a much more honest conception of freedom around our collective emancipation, rather than my freedom necessarily being reliant on exploitation of others”. Her forthcoming second book, *Owning the Future* (published on 23 August), is co-authored with Mathew Lawrence, the director of Common Wealth, and will argue for “a new era of democratic ownership: a reinvention of the firm as a vehicle for collective endeavour and meeting social needs”.

In *Four Futures* (2016), the US writer Peter Frase explored four possible scenarios for life after capitalism: luxury communism (equality and abundance), rentism (hierarchy and abundance), socialism (equality and scarcity) and exterminism (hierarchy and scarcity). Of these, it is the final one that Buller regards as most likely, at least for now. “There will be pressures around the world for necessary climate migration and my greatest fear is that we have a society that becomes comfortable with creating an even harsher ‘Fortress Europe’ and that designates huge parts of the world as sacrifice zones.

“It may not be viable in the long term because eventually you undermine the conditions for that zone of safety. But things will have to get worse before they get better,” she said. ●

Starmer’s move away from his campaign pledges is a “betrayal of the activist base that I don’t think even he would deny”

# PHILIP COLLINS



## Politics

### If the leadership race produces an Asian PM, we might have something to celebrate

In the prologue to *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen's meditation on how we see ourselves, the economist recounts being scrutinised by a passport official as he returned to the UK through Heathrow Airport. Quizzically looking at his home address, "Master's Lodge, Trinity College, Cambridge", the official asked if Sen knew the master well. He couldn't conceive that this slight, polite Indian man standing before the counter might just be the master of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Sen's subtitle *The Illusion of Destiny* counsels us against ascribing singular identities to anyone. Take Rishi Sunak, for example: he is the son of a GP and a pharmacist from Southampton, and a former Goldman Sachs analyst with an MBA from Stanford University. He is a husband and a father and enjoys drinking a lot of Coca-Cola of many varieties. He is also a Conservative of a throwback Thatcherite kind. Like all of us, he contains multitudes.

Indeed, all my reasons for not liking Sunak are that he also seems such a typical English Tory: he was head boy at Winchester College and went on to read philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University (a background that may give some context for his bad-tempered, charged performance in the BBC debate with Liz Truss on 25 July).

In addition to these many layers of identity, Sunak is also a man from a family of Indian heritage, from the Punjab via the Kenyan protectorate to Southampton. He might just become Britain's first Asian prime minister.

Anticipating the inevitable tumult that would, rightly, encompass a Sunak premiership – about the cost of living, about the slow degradation of public services, about the tortuous, denied consequences of Brexit – it is worth dwelling for a moment on an optimistic note. A prime minister from an ethnic minority would not rival the election of Barack Obama as US president in 2008; the US's racial divide is another matter. But it would be an event that is hard to conceive of in, for example, France, in which the country's next presidential election may well bring to office a candidate determined to send people back from whence they came long ago.

In the troubled passage towards living together in a multicultural democracy, a prime minister of Indian heritage would be something to celebrate. Plus, there were six non-white leadership contenders at the beginning of the leadership process. Credit where credit is due. David Cameron interfered in Conservative selection procedures to bring diverse candidates to selection lists. The Cameron legacy to Britain was thought to be Brexit alone. Perhaps the first Asian prime minister might be an achievement to set beside that disaster.

**Sayeeda Warsi has repeatedly said that the Tories have a problem with Muslims**

This is not to say that all is therefore well in the nation, nor that all is even well within the Conservative Party. Clearly, it's not. The Tories still only have 21 MPs who are from an ethnic minority, around 6 per cent of the party's total. Labour has 41; around 20 per cent. The public is still waiting for the report from the inquiry into the Conservative MP Nus Ghani's allegation that the former chief whip Mark Spencer used anti-Muslim language when he explained why she was being sacked as transport minister.

The former co-chair of the Conservative Party, Sayeeda Warsi, has repeatedly said that the Tories have a problem with Muslims and, indeed, research from the Economic and Social Research Council showed that a quarter of all Conservative Party members thought there were too many Muslims in Britain. One in six Tory members think there are "far too many".

As a wealthy man with a connection by marriage to one of India's great computing companies, Sunak falls on the right side of a class prejudice that interacts with religion, nation and race to define some people as in and some as out. The Indian community in Britain is, relative to other ethnic minorities, educated and well-off. Ever since Ramsay Macdonald and Clement Attlee took a strong interest in Indian affairs in the 1930s, the Labour Party has thought of India as one of its issues. When Labour's sister party, Indian National Congress, had strong support in India, Indian immigrants living in the UK voted Labour in large numbers. It is reported that this, however, has begun to change.

Not that his coming from an Indian family should be the reason that anyone votes for or against Sunak. The reason he ought to beat Truss was plain for all to see during the first leadership debate. The instant reaction was all about his tendency to interrupt her. Maybe he was a bit quick to stop Truss talking, but then she was talking a lot of nonsense. Judged on the content of what they said, and how they said it, Sunak was overwhelmingly the better of the two candidates. Of the pair, only one looks like they could cope with being prime minister.

Truss would, in all probability, be an easier opponent for Keir Starmer. She would make a Labour government more likely. Yet there are two reasons to cheer on the apparently unlikely prospect of



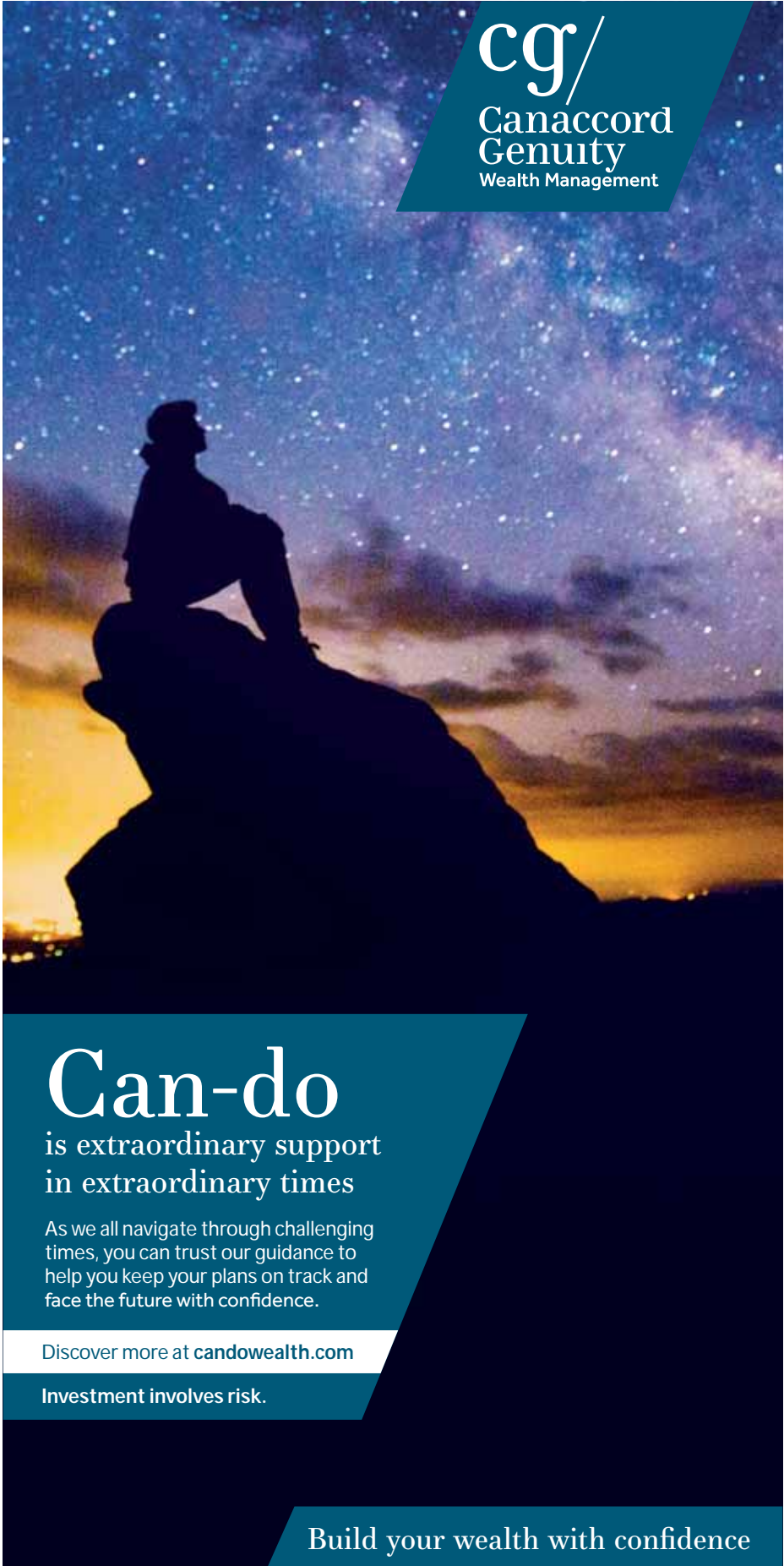
a victory for Sunak. The first is that we are all citizens of a country whose institutions matter. Boris Johnson's premiership was a disgrace principally because he had no respect for the explicit treaties and tacit conventions by which a democracy reproduces itself.

I doubt that there would be much I would approve of during a Sunak premiership. But there is some chance it might, at the very least, return to the bounds of decency and respect for norms. In her somewhat frenzied desire to please the Conservative Party membership, Truss is liable to revel in her reputation as the candidate who would press ahead with breaking the Northern Ireland protocol.

On which point, it was a shame that the BBC debate did its best to steer away from substantive issues. There was nothing beyond a yes-or-no question about the queues at Dover, or about the consequences of Brexit. The debate did not touch on immigration and the policy of sending migrants to Rwanda. There was nothing on education beyond the usual platitudes about skills being necessary for economic growth and – although Sunak has declared the backlog in healthcare cases a national emergency – almost nothing on the NHS. Instead, Chris Mason, the BBC's political editor, devoted plenty of time to a tweet by Nadine Dorries about the relative cost of Truss's earrings and Sunak's shoes. It was depressingly trivial.

This contest has made it more obvious than ever that the job of choosing a prime minister should not fall to the members of a political party. The identity of some of the candidates offers the only ray of optimism. There have been accusations that the British people would not countenance a prime minister from anything other than vintage Anglo-Saxon stock but, even if Truss does emerge as the winner, that does not seem true.

More than a quarter of all Britons believe that having an ethnic minority prime minister would make things better for them, and the majority say it doesn't matter either way. In a sense that judgement is wrong. Britain will not become a utopia of liberal tolerance if there were a prime minister of Indian descent in No 10, just as prejudice against women has not disappeared because we have had two female prime ministers. But it matters all the same and, in a largely dismal process, it might be the only moment to cherish. ●



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# CORRESPONDENCE

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## Letter of the week

### Creating climate resilience



From beneath sweat-soaked eyebrows on Britain's hottest day, Andrew Marr (Politics, 22 July) wrote, "We need a beady focus on the hard science of climate change... In specific terms, we may now need a department for national resilience, looking at everything from transport networks to flood plains."

It's a good idea. Until now, the focus of climate politics has been on reaching net zero, but many climate shocks are already

locked in. By 2050 there could be 59 per cent more winter rainfall, some rivers could have 80 per cent less water during the summer, and summer temperatures could be up to 7.4°C hotter. I hope the government will consider asking the Treasury to commission a review of the economics of resilience. This would consider the costs and benefits of resilience measures and the balance between public and private investment. Its conclusions would help establish a national ambition for climate resilience, embed it in all government departments and enable us to reach net zero.

After all, if construction does not properly consider rising floods and extreme heat, low-carbon infrastructure could become prematurely obsolete.

*Emma Howard Boyd CBE, chair of the Environment Agency, London SW1*

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### Dousing the fire

Your Leader ("A planet on fire", 22 July) concludes, "The world is already burning. It is not too late to change." Yet it also refers to Andrew Marr's less optimistic assessment (Politics, 22 July): "The [Tory leadership] candidates... don't want to talk about climate change." In any case, mankind is not united behind the principle of immediate de-growth – the only change that would put out the fire. A global green party could act decisively and quickly enough to save the planet, but support for green policies is minimal. The world is consumer led. Growth is the *sine qua non* of capitalism, and mankind is headed towards bourgeoisie capitalism everywhere.

*David Clarke, Witney, Oxfordshire*

While I commend Andrew Marr's discussion (Politics, 22 July) of the greater impact that climate change will have on poorer households, he writes that Extinction Rebellion's problem "is that by blocking roads and railway lines they simply make other people angrier". All successful social movements (eg the suffragettes, civil rights) are disruptive in order to get the topic on the agenda. While people value their contributions now, they were hugely unpopular at the time.

*Lawrence Howarth, Bristol*

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### Tory malaise

It was a tribute to his character that David Gauke wrote of the challenges facing the next Tory leader without any sign of

rancour (Inside Westminster, 22 July). A Tory party that has no place for Gauke and former government colleagues such as Dominic Grieve and Justine Greening, while promoting loyalists unlikely to have progressed to junior management anywhere else, highlights his restraint. It's some years since David Cameron described Ukip as being made up of "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists mostly", but many of those people have found a home in the Johnsonian Conservative Party.

*Les Bright, Exeter, Devon*

Many fear that Boris Johnson's use of American idioms – "deep state", "*Hasta la vista, baby*" – in his valedictory speech suggest he is tempted to "do a Trump" and launch a popular comeback.

But there is another reading of his new-found enthusiasm for contemporary Americana over classical Latin. He was born in New York. That makes him eligible for US citizenship – and the presidency.

What better way to prepare the ground for a new role as Trump's natural successor?  
*Robin Johnson, Falmouth, Cornwall*

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### A place of greater safety

Ken Worpole's observation that a library is "a godsend to refugees and asylum seekers" (The Critics, 22 July) is borne out by a recent Refugee Council report. At the start of the pandemic the government began housing asylum seekers in hotels and, despite promises to move people out, in 2021 the number almost tripled, including over 2,500 children. Hemingway's "clean, well-lighted place" that, in Worpole's words, "offers sanctuary in the lonely city" might help provide a very welcome change.  
*David Murray, Wallington, Surrey*

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### Ode to Shelley

I found Frances Wilson's article (The Critics, 8 July) on Percy Bysshe Shelley reductive. Shelley's contrarian beliefs and behaviour were the true expression of his being, not publicity-seeking. I inherited a love of the lyric poems from my mother, and nurtured it at school. All who care about nature – the burning issue of our times – should also care about "Mutability", "The Woodman and the Nightingale", as well as "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Skylark".  
*Ann Lawson Lucas, Beverley, East Yorkshire*

## Rent accommodations

Pippa Bailey (Deleted Scenes, 15 July) writes that “my current rent – although already 60 per cent of my monthly income – is below market rate”. I recently bought the social history book *The Compositor in London*, which details a weekly budget for a family living in London in 1810.

On wages of about £2 a week, rent of six shillings was 15 per cent, leaving 85 per cent for food, lighting, heating, household goods etc. Little wonder there is a cost-of-living crisis.

*Terry Pitt, Freshford, Somerset*

## @ philharding

*Phil Harding, journalist and broadcaster*

Some of the most perceptive writing about the current state of the Conservative Party is coming from @DavidGauke. Well worth reading his article in the current @NewStatesman.

**“How the Tories lost their way”,**

**David Gauke, 20 July**

## @ catherine\_mayer

*Catherine Mayer, author and president of the Women’s Equality Party*

It’s taken a German journalist @annettedittert to write the most clear-eyed assessment yet of the UK’s political and economic catastrophe. People will try to dismiss her words or ignore them. Don’t make that mistake.

**“The post-Johnson era is already a nightmare”, Annette Dittert, 19 July**

Write to [letters@newstatesman.co.uk](mailto:letters@newstatesman.co.uk)

We reserve the right to edit letters



**A sensible sun hat for the most optimistic climate scenario**



## Commons Confidential

**By Kevin Maguire**

**Blue-on-blue culture warrior** Nadine “Mad Nad” Dorries and her hitman special adviser Rob “the Ox” Oxley hope machine-gunning Rishi Sunak will save their jobs if puppet Liz Truss is installed as Boris Johnson’s successor. The string-pulling pair have the subtlety of cartel enforcers. One trembling Tory recalls being advised to call Dorries and apologise when she threatened retribution against him for daring to question a decision in the culture department. “She told me I now knew who had the power,” he whimpered.

**Dorries, who once boasted** about owning £6,000 diamond earrings, has form using wealth against fellow Conservatives. She denounced David Cameron and George Osborne as “two arrogant posh boys” who didn’t know the price of milk. After Dorries contrasted Sunak’s £3,500 suit with Truss’s £4.50 earrings, an exasperated Tory MP moaned, “Nad’s so mad, next she’ll want Liz to dress like Pat Butcher.”

**It was a very different Liz Truss** who stood unsuccessfully as a Conservative candidate for Calder Valley, West Yorkshire, in the 2005 general election. Back then, she was Elizabeth, who was happy to boast that Daddy was a Leeds University professor and that Mother was a nurse and teacher – rather than playing down her comfortable middle-class background. “Elizabeth enjoys playing tennis and home improvements, although she is finding time for this scarce during the campaign,” a local website was informed.

**Brextemist Remain voter** Truss confessed to European Research Group members that she was arm-twisted into backing the pro-EU side in 2016’s referendum by George Osborne’s PowerPoint presentation. Inconveniently for Sunak, his team have found precious few video clips of him campaigning for Brexit during the Leave campaign – enabling Truss apologists to label the former chancellor a shallow “Bino”: Brexit-in-name-only.

**Keir Starmer’s public-ownership train wreck** isn’t the first time he’s come off the tracks and faced a shadow cabinet revolt. My snout whispered that at least three members – Lisa Nandy, Louise Haigh and Jonathan Ashworth – ignored commands from his office to condemn the recent rail strikes. Inheriting the lowest number of Labour MPs since the parliament of 1935-1945 puts the brakes on dismissals for disobedience, with so few bodies to fill unexpected vacancies.

**Labour’s most prominent ginger peer**, Stewart Wood, was mistaken again for Ed Sheeran, this time in Suffolk, on a stag night for Feargal Sharkey – the former lead singer with Northern Irish punk band the Undertones. Wood, a one-time adviser to Gordon Brown, still gets a teenage kick out of being mistaken for the “Shape of You” singer. Somewhere in the US, a couple are peering at a holiday snap thinking Ed Sheeran looks much younger on TV than that day they met him outside parliament. ●

*Kevin Maguire is the associate editor (politics) of the Daily Mirror*

**Labour peer Stewart Wood was mistaken once again for Ed Sheeran – this time on Feargal Sharkey’s stag night**

# The silence of the seabirds

By Helen Macdonald

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Visiting a seabird colony in summer is a full-on assault on the senses. Loud, crowded and malodorous, the air above shivers with wings as birds return from the sea to feed their chicks and depart again, the ground beneath packed with birds preening, calling, displaying and squabbling over territory.

These colonies are one of Britain's most beloved examples of biological abundance: cliffs full of razorbills and guillemots, offshore rocks whitened by gannets and their guano, islands dotted with terns, grassy headlands riddled with the burrows of nesting puffins. Deserted in winter while birds live on the open sea, the sudden transformation of coastal cliffs and islands into a profusion of life is one of our most thrilling seasonal miracles.

I've spent enough time in big seabird colonies to know that visiting them isn't merely a sensory experience; it can be deeply emotional. Their inhabitants seem bizarrely tame, challenging our assumption that wild animals always view humans with fear (despite putting up with our proximity, nesting seabirds can be highly stressed by it). Most of all there's a poignant joy in standing amid so many living creatures. I'd almost forgotten the swarms of wasps in childhood gardens, the smoke-dark unspooling flocks of winter lapwings, the clouds of butterflies on farmland verges – but after I returned from a month on remote Midway Atoll in the Pacific, where two million albatrosses and petrels nest among the ruins of an American naval station, I remembered

them all, and spent weeks grieving the comparatively empty silence of Britain's woods and fields today.

Seabirds are various creatures and we've recruited them to symbolise many things. Gulls are a placeholder for social anxieties: reviled as invading thugs in the tabloid press, their crime seems little more than failing to treat humans and human spaces with due respect. Other seabirds, like penguins and puffins, fall into the anthropomorphised category of cute little guys, Instagrammable avian *kawaii*. And oceanic specialists like shearwaters and petrels spend so much of their lives at sea, visiting their nesting burrows in darkness, they seem barely part of our world at all: the Other rendered in feathers.

But in my lifetime, seabirds have symbolised one thing above all: pollution. News photographs of guillemots thickly coated in crude oil horrified me when I was young; their gluey silhouettes are still seared into my brain. Washed up on the coast after tanker spills, people flocked to help them. After the Torrey Canyon disaster, when an oil tanker ran aground off the western coast of Cornwall in 1967, thousands of guillemots were rescued and lathered with detergent. Back then our understanding of how to treat oiled birds was in its infancy: survival rates were so low the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust eventually suggested that the best way to proceed would be to humanely kill badly oiled birds rather than attempt to rehabilitate them. But the urge to help was real, and those doomed birds

spurred in many a keen and long-lasting environmental consciousness.

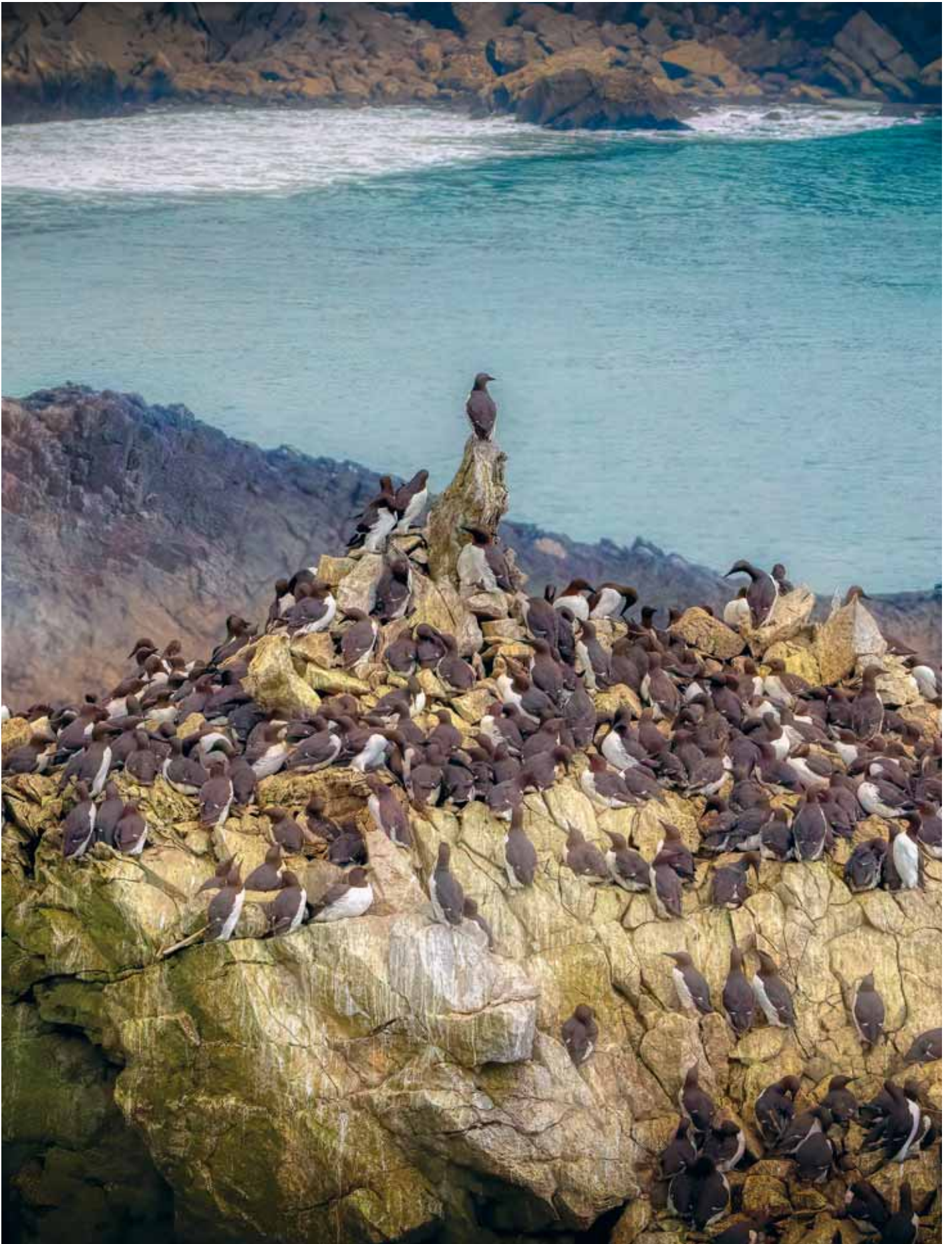
This summer, photographs of dead and dying seabirds are back in the news. This time, we can't attempt to save them. Pollution isn't the culprit, but we're just as responsible for their deaths. A virulent strain of avian influenza that arose in poultry farms has spread to wild birds, hitting seabirds, waterbirds and raptors particularly hard. It has wiped out colonies from Scotland to the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, and it continues to spread. Gannet corpses slumped in surf, guillemots sprawled on beaches, whole nurseries of terns wiped out in weeks. Once-thriving colonies are now empty and silent.

Colonial nesting brings many advantages, but their close-packed nature means that disease can spread through them like wildfire. Britain has internationally important seabird populations – around eight million in all – and some species are directly threatened by this outbreak. Scotland has around 60 per cent of the world's population of great skuas, for example, and hundreds have already died.

The helplessness of witnessing this avian pandemic chimes with the helplessness of watching another wave of Covid hit the UK: hospitalisation rates have tripled here since the end of May. I'd avoided Covid until I came down with it a month ago, spending a week in bed and another fortnight so exhausted I could barely summon the energy to move. Despite rising infection rates, masks are a rare sight in our high streets, and we're mostly living as if Covid is over.

Both pandemics arose from the interaction of wild animals with human food chains. Covid was a consequence of the disturbance of ancient natural ecosystems; this form of avian flu emerged from industrial poultry operations infecting wild, mobile birds. Experts on both pandemics are concerned by the lack of a coherent response to match the present reality – in the case of bird flu, the RSPB has called for increased surveillance and testing, and the disposal of carcasses that readily infect carrion-eating birds like gulls.

Photographs of today's dying seabirds not only recall those old images of oiled guillemots, but also force a recognition of the differences between them. Oil slicks are horrifying, devastating events, but they are discrete disasters, not global ones. They first hit public consciousness at a time when the systems of the world still seemed stable and eternal. Right now those systems do not. We recognise the reality of climate breakdown and large-scale ecological devastation, and faced by such vast terrors, it's hard to summon the sense of hope and agency of the kind that animated those early rescuers of oiled seabirds. But in the face of all that is, we owe it to the world and to ourselves to try. ●



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And so, the Johnson administration ends as it began, in absentia. Just as Boris Johnson started his election campaign ducking out of challenging interviews and into an emergency fridge, so it now ends: in the middle of a war, a climate crisis, a cost-of-living meltdown, an ongoing pandemic and a housing shortage, with him burrowed away in the countryside like a wounded badger. The Prime Minister who vowed to fight to the bitter end, left instead at the bitter beginning of the end.

Absence was also the defining state of his years in office, as more and more people left, resigned, got fired or ran away. From Dominic Cummings to ethics advisers, from junior ministers to chancellors, from Sajids to Javids, a hollowing out of government took place, with the PM convinced that his great office of state could still stand and function without them. Boris Johnson may be the first prime minister to have played Jenga with people's lives.

The rules of the game now set, every participant has followed the lead. Priti Patel no longer turns up for Home Office scrutiny in the Commons, emergency Cobra meetings about the hot weather are practically phoned in from Sandals resorts across the Caribbean; our whole government has gone missing in action, though I use the term "action" very loosely here. In an act of mass desertion, secretaries of state who knew they weren't going to end up in charge concluded there's really no point showing up in demeaning posts like home secretary and deputy prime minister.

But then absence is what drives politics these days. Say nothing other than who you are not. Do nothing that may be used against you. Speak nothing when in front of a voting audience. Shut down hostile interrogation, get out of debates, delete Twitter posts from the past. In fact, pretend there has never been a past – and if there was, that you were never part of it, since the past is only there to taunt you.

Today, Nothing is the new Substance, and the winner shall be the one who says Nothing loudest. Costed policies, and thoughtful, stress-tested initiatives are replaced by biographical videos wrapped in flags and grandparents. It's the evisceration of substance and the victory of emotion in contemporary political argument.

The message of each candidate is not so much "Here are the 20 things that need sorting right now, and this is how I would manage a team to sort them" as "I feel your pain and by getting me into

# ARMANDO IANNUCCI



## Another Voice

### The rules of the new politics are simple: say nothing of substance, do nothing at all

office you're sort of getting yourself into office too, if you see what I mean, and that's a great thing".

Hence the early stages of the Tory leadership debate resembled not so much a serious exchange of ideas and philosophies as a very bad episode of *The Apprentice*: a bunch of people mad enough to think they can hack it by cobbling together some marketing materials, even though their life skills are suboptimal, because they've groomed their voice, their clothes, their handshakes and their shoes to resemble a serious politician's without actually being one. In this performative exercise, events from the past, the situation today and the crisis ahead are all irrelevant.

That's for the boring bit after the election: for now, it's all about who can stand in the room and most convincingly say, "I won't let you down, Lord Sugar, I'm going to give it 300 per cent!" Or, if you're Rishi Sunak, "Logically, Lord Sugar, you can't commit to more than 100 per cent, but 90 to 100 is certainly what I'll be aiming for."

And of course, the two surviving leadership candidates make more of how they would perform the role of prime minister than what they would do in the post, since the party members to whom they appeal are looking for someone who

reminds them of leaders past: the Thatchers and... er, well, just the Thatchers, actually. Like the *Star Wars* franchise, the Tory party really only has one story it wants to regurgitate again and again, and that's the tale of Margaret Thatcher.

They think it would be great to have her back but, since the motion-capture avatar technology Abba have been using for their concerts hasn't yet been tried out on dead people, that's not going to happen soon. Instead, here the party is with the final two candidates: Rishi Sunak, who wants to be like Thatcher, and Liz Truss, who wants to look like her.

They've both arrived at this position by having practised being prime minister since they were six, and spending the past two years campaigning by Instagram, using fonts, flags and photo ops, saluting to a president here, giggling on top of a tank there. It's all cosplay politics designed to make you think they look like they know what they're doing.

In many ways, it doesn't matter if they don't; it's beside the point. The point is that we won't be freaked out when – as we're engulfed by the flames of hell on Earth, as our infrastructure buckles, our airports melt into the sea, our food queues stretch to the horizon and we fall into the death cycle of global warming alternating with nuclear winters – we have someone in post who tells us that all of this will eventually be solved with tax cuts.

Which candidate will it be? You decide. If you're a Tory member. If you're not, then your voice will be exactly where it was during the previous two changes of prime minister: entirely absent. ●

Our government has gone missing in action, though I use the term "action" loosely

# The Wigan warrior

As the Tories falter,  
Lisa Nandy believes  
Labour can finally  
win again and start  
to define a new  
political era

**By Kate Mossman**

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**Lisa Nandy, photographed for the *New Statesman* in Wigan by Thomas Duffield**

## Interview

On a Thursday afternoon in June, Lisa Nandy headed to Knowsley Safari Park, half an hour's drive from Wigan. She had been advised not to drive through the monkey enclosure in her silver Mini but she thought, you can't go to a safari park and *not* go through the monkey enclosure. They had chewed through the little nozzles that squirt water at the windscreen; when she arrived at the Premier Inn in Wigan the next morning to pick me up, she was fresh from the garage, via a breakfast meeting with striking workers from Royal Mail.

As we drove down Wallgate towards Wigan Athletic Football Club, the shadow secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities admitted that she was writing a book. "I thought it was a great idea," she said. "I had an image of myself in an oak-panelled room on a green leather chair. Turns out it was the worst idea I'd had since running for Labour leader." In June 2016 Nandy was part of the mass walkout of the soft left from Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet before contesting the leadership in 2020, coming third after Keir Starmer and Rebecca Long Bailey.

She started writing the book during her time as shadow foreign secretary, whittling away at chapters on her phone at Crewe Station, while commuting between her constituency in Wigan and London. She began with Britain's role after Brexit – Wigan voted Leave – but changed tack when she realised "that all depends on what kind of country we want to be".

Nandy is now addressing issues she has been talking about for years as a co-founder of the think tank Centre For Towns, set up following the EU referendum to analyse levels of prosperity in towns across the UK. Yet she remains a mystery to many within her own party: a former rebel, immaculately on-message when the cameras roll; an intellectual so rooted in her community that she spends as little time in Westminster as possible.

"I had time on the back benches to think," Nandy said. She has an above-average ability to negotiate ring roads and sustain detailed conversation at the same time. "Founding Centre for Towns had a lot to do with being fed up with hearing that people in towns were thick and racist. I knew there was a reason that my constituents in Wigan came to a different conclusion about the EU from those in David Lammy's in Tottenham.

Towns haven't been winners for the last 20 years and we have to sort it out – this is what became 'levelling up.'" She wrote to focus her thoughts. "I wanted to get out of reacting constantly to Westminster gossip and who's up, who's down. I wanted to think bigger, deeper and harder about the solutions."

Is the book about Wigan? "No, it's about the world!" she laughed. "It's about how to fix the world!" There is a Refreshers chew bar in the car's coin compartment.

"About the world" it may be, but Nandy's book starts with the story of Wigan Athletic FC, which two years ago was sold to a Hong Kong-based consortium for £41m, but then – to everyone's great confusion – was put into administration a month later. For a while, said Nandy, it looked as if she and Jonathan Jackson, the club's former chief executive, were going to have to run it themselves. Might she have been Wigan's Delia Smith? "I have never pretended to have the first clue what is happening on the pitch," she said. "People forgive a lot in politics, but not complete inauthenticity."

Meanwhile, buyers for the club were circling. "Some absolute wrong 'uns, and a lot of Tory donors on the phone, telling me they would do right by it." At the last moment it was bought by Abdulrahman Al-Jasmi, a Bahrain-based businessman "who has no interest in football, but whose son-in-law fancied running a club". Talal Al Hammad is often seen at games with a Wigan hat on, though he, too, lives in Bahrain. "Al-Jasmi is treating it as a long-term investment that belongs to the people of Wigan," Nandy said as she pulled into a car park. "A lot of people

say global is bad, foreign is bad. But it was the opposite for us."

We walked through the smell of fresh paint to the offices of Wigan Athletic Community Trust, an outreach programme run under the direction of Tom Flower.

"Find us OK?" asked Tom, middle-aged, homely.

"I've been here before, Tom. I live in Wigan! You're supposed to be helping with my PR – you've f\*\*\*ed up with that one!"

In the presence of Flower, Nandy morphed into someone comically merciless, a precocious teenage daughter ribbing her dad. She pulled him up on a new sign.

"It needs to be lower," she said. "It's not in the eyeline. It looks like a bin exit."

The trust is financially independent, Flower told me, employing 60 staff across 13 programmes that range from four-year-olds with school-readiness issues to a football team for the children of Afghan refugees.

"You haven't mentioned girls yet," Nandy cut in. "And," said Flower, taking a deep breath, "50 per cent of our workforce is female; 46 per cent of participants are female, 50 per cent of our management team are female."

"Not on the board, though," said Nandy.

"A third of our trustees are female..."

"You know half the population is female?"

"Why don't you just call my mother and tell her how much I'm failing?" said Flower, beaten down.

Nandy's involvement with the club has deepened her appreciation of what football is, she told me: a direct line to a town's industrial past and a multiplicity of social issues.



Leading Labour: Lisa Nandy with Keir Starmer and Rebecca Long Bailey in 2020

ROBERT PERRY/GETTY IMAGES

In the club's toilets there were posters advertising a support group for survivors of sexual assault, and another for women affected by other people's alcoholism. "Men were the breadwinners in Wigan," Nandy said. "Every MP and every councillor was a man. We had one of the highest domestic violence rates in the country – it is a generational problem, and it's changing."

Outside in a vast hangar, amid a heavy fug of AstroTurf and plimsolls, 30 local primary schools were playing a football tournament. Wigan Athletic's mascot is Crusty the Pie; unfortunately they couldn't reject the idea because it was chosen by the children. "They're not going to have me run around kicking a football in heels, are they?" said Nandy on the way to the pitch. "They had me kicking a ball at eight months pregnant." Like the Duchess of Cambridge? "No, like an old MP in a suit," she said. "And the problem is, I'm competitive."

Nandy has dimples; she is generally laughing. In front of a camera, she loses her natural ease. Appearances matter, she said – but by that she seemed to mean looking smart. "You have to be well turned-out as an MP. Corbyn didn't go down well round here – they said he couldn't even cut his hedge. Do you remember that picture of him in front of his hedge?"

"I go quite shy when my picture is taken," she admitted. "When I started out, someone told me, you've got a really fun personality and it's not coming through in your clothes. But I thought people wouldn't listen. There's a whole generation of women I've come up alongside, Stella Creasy and Jess Phillips, who have made it OK for you to express more of your personality through your clothes."

After a nose around the football tournament, I returned to Flower's office to find that Nandy *had* called his mother. They have never met, but she follows Nandy's career. "She remembers Harold Macmillan and Tony Blair and she thinks I'm the one to do it," Nandy said – meaning lead Labour to victory. It is hard to say how much Nandy is teasing when she slips into this mode of mock pride; there is something almost nostalgically laddish about it. She hasn't ruled out another crack at leadership, but won't be drawn into saying so.

A Tannoy sounded. "Would Lisa Nandy please leave the building," Flower told her. "Go and give someone else a hard time."

Six days later Nandy sat at the back of a bus in Berlin with Anneliese Dodds, the chair of the Labour Party, and John Ashworth, the shadow work and pensions secretary, and watched the collapse of the Tory government on someone's iPhone. She and her colleagues were there to learn about successful examples of national reconstruction and how these might

## “Johnson trashed politics. Truss isn't interested in levelling up”

be applied to “levelling up” in the UK. Now, the policy's chief architect Michael Gove had been summarily fired and the Johnson government's flagship plan cut free like a balloon.

“Here I am, with responsibility for everything and no one to shadow,” Nandy told me when we spoke days after Boris Johnson's fall. “Wandering around, Armageddon-style, surveying the wreckage that the Tories have left, rebuilding brick by brick, alone.”

“Levelling up was killed off a long time ago,” she added; it was only ever an attempt to keep Red Wall voters within the Conservatives' electoral coalition. “There was never an enthusiasm for it within the Conservative Party as a whole. It was an agenda that was driven by Johnson and, to some extent, Gove, because they knew it was the key to holding that coalition, and nothing deeper. When the levelling up white paper came out [in February], it looked as if Gove might win the battle with the Treasury. But No 10 came down comprehensively on the Treasury's side and that was the end.” Rishi Sunak did not want to stump up the cash.

In interviews during the pandemic, while Grant Shapps' Zoom background featured a Union flag and a red ministerial box, Nandy appeared in a white attic with, if memory serves, a single light bulb: the room gave nothing away. When we spoke in early July, I spotted an LS Lowry print in the background, but little else. She wore a stripy vest and shorts in the 30°C heat, and held a wind-up fan in the shape of a dog, given to her by her young son.

Was she afraid levelling up would now be entirely abandoned by the Conservatives? “I'm not remotely worried about the agenda disappearing,” she said. “If anything, the problem has become more acute. It's widely accepted now that the only way to solve the problems we have is through creating growth in the economy. You can't do that by writing off most people in most places.”

Nandy pointed out that Theresa May had addressed this before Johnson did – starting with her first speech at the Conservative Party Conference as prime minister, in which she drew a comparison between those rooted in their communities and the globalised elite. “There was that awful line about people who were ‘citizens of nowhere’. May could see that this was the Conservative Party's

new electoral coalition, if they could build it. I found it profoundly depressing that a Conservative prime minister had got there first. But I also found it exciting, because it looked as if there could be a consensus that we couldn't go on like this. The question now is: what replaces levelling up and who does it? And it's clear: it's going to be Labour.”

Johnson, she said, had “trashed politics”. As for his successors, Nandy thought neither Liz Truss nor Sunak constituted bad news for the Labour Party. “Truss will drop the more bonkers tax cuts to the rich and focus relentlessly on trying to win the general election. She will reinvent herself again – which she is very good at – and I don't think she is interested in levelling up. The issue is whether she can convince the public that she's likeable, human and trustworthy.”

Come September the shadow secretary of state for communities and local government of the United Kingdom might need a new title. What should it be? “I'll endorse any Tory leadership candidate who gives me a shadow job title that fits on the ticker.”

The day before we met in Wigan, the *Daily Mail* had published a grim photo story, a sort of exercise in town-shaming, suggesting the place was dying on its feet. There were shots of deserted shopping centres, and an interview with a woman who said you could no longer buy a bra on the high street. The people we met were reeling. Richard Gallimore, a former miner who, in the Eighties, used his redundancy pay to set up a fish and chip shop, now owns one of the last restaurants in town. He elbowed Nandy in pantomime horror. “I threw the paper out!” he rasped. “Yes, it is a ghost town for a second. But we have to be positive!”

No one denied that Wigan was in trouble. “We had a cost-of-living crisis before it was fashionable,” said Nandy. Over fish and chips, Gary Ingram, the union representative from the sorting office, admitted: “The centre wasn't great – there were no supermarkets...” A state-owned Chinese construction firm has moved in to redevelop the Galleries Shopping Centre, one of two malls that were opened in 1991 but now lie empty. This, for Nandy, is the good kind of globalisation, because the money is staying in Wigan. She has campaigned to open Britain's land registry to public view.

Many of Greater Manchester's historic buildings are owned by offshore investors, who, Nandy said, allow them to decay in the knowledge that eventually the council will buy them back at a premium. In July Nandy proposed a “right to buy” policy, giving locals first refusal when assets of community value come up for sale. ▶

## Interview

◀ Outside the fish and chip shop, Nandy was approached by TalkTV, which had come to Wigan to respond to the *Mail's* hatchet job. "I think they stitched you up," a slightly sweaty presenter told her. "I'm from South Shields – you should see the high street there. Or Corby, where my missus is from."

Nandy agreed to film with them, but returned looking disarranged: the crew wanted her to stand in front of the one boarded-up shop they could find. She refused until they re-angled the camera.

Wiganers are now poised between fighting off a national press intent on painting them as in crisis, and acknowledging that the crisis is true. "They call it levelling up – we are levelling ourselves up, thanks," said Nandy's friend from the Royal Mail. "We just don't need a government that pulls the rug out from under us." He predicted that the Red Wall will turn again: James Grundy, who in 2019 became the first Conservative MP to win the seat of nearby Leigh, was a "loan" vote. In June Grundy blocked the Golborne Spur – a 13-mile section of the HS2 network that would link Wigan to the West Coast mainline – because, his critics said, it went through his father's village. "They won't be voting Tory again."

When we spoke a few days after Johnson's fall, Nandy said that levelling up should be an effort on the scale of Labour's rebuilding of Britain after the Second World War. "It's a moment like the post-1945 moment, where there was a recognition that rights and opportunities hadn't kept pace with the expectations of the population. National reconstruction, national renewal, whatever you want to call it. New Labour would probably have called it 'A Fresh Start for Britain'."

Nandy's mission, she said, was not to bring Westminster to the north but "to make the national work like the local". She introduced me to the redoubtable Phyllis Cullen, a councillor who had observed a local pub being developed into flats (literally: she watched with binoculars as the kitchen units were ferried in) and presented Nandy with an obscure piece of Cameroonian legislation to prevent the sale. As for the joyriders on Cullen's estate? "Bootcamp." She looks at Nandy with dark eyes. "Why can't we have bootcamp?"

"I can't give her bootcamp," Nandy said, back in the Mini. "But people like Phyl could run this town if they had the chance."

Lisa Nandy became MP for Wigan, a safe Labour seat, in 2010, winning on an all-female shortlist. She stood against the Conservative MP Michael Winstanley: they got on well, though they "shared no politics". Votes are often counted late into the night. At 4am on 7 May 2010, only Winstanley and Nandy were left, with her partner Andy Collis, a public relations consultant, and her mother in the audience. They gave speeches to an empty hall, congratulating each other. She was given an envelope with "MP" written on it; the letter inside advised her to turn up to Westminster the following week with a gas bill as proof of address.

Nandy talks in comic vignettes. When she began at Westminster, she had training with Chuka Umunna and other new recruits on "how not to embarrass the Labour Party". She and Umunna, then a member of the Treasury Select Committee, shared an office. "Chuka came in and clapped his hands together one day saying, 'I've cracked Nigeria!' I was still looking for the plug socket."

Does she get more done when she's working in Wigan? "No. The combination of spending enough time in Wigan, then taking those issues to Westminster, is the right one. The fact that Westminster doesn't work doesn't mean it doesn't matter.

"But politicians live quite odd lives," she added. "You spend most of the time in a 16th-century palace away from your friends and family, and that's how you get grouphink. There is a lot that is like being a student. The number of MPs who will tell you they're rooting through their washing basket to find something to wear, because they're in at midnight and have to be out again at seven. I had a friend text me saying she's been wearing the same knickers for two days."

Nandy, who was born in Bury and raised in Manchester, stays with a university friend when she's in London. "If I can get away with it, I go down first thing on a Tuesday and come back on a Wednesday. I get incredibly grumpy



"What sort of delays and disruption would you like?"

if I have to do weekends in London." In the era of late-night Brexit votes, she often said yes to the *Peston* show because then she'd get a car all the way home.

A source inside Labour joked that such short stints in Westminster are often viewed as lazy. "What people say about Lisa is they're not sure what she actually wants to do," he added. "She is very brilliant but a bit of a loner. Very talented and driven by ideas, but is she going to play ball with Keir? She needs to demonstrate that she has relationships around the shadow cabinet table. Would I want to do karaoke with her? Absolutely. What would she be like if she was your boss? There is a question mark over her."

He thought she might not win a second run at the leadership. "Could she win in a members' ballot? On day one, she would be favourite. But the will to win among party members is so great they might vote for someone who turned the page on the past."

The former Labour minister Margaret Hodge told me Nandy was "one of the great assets of the shadow front bench. With Yvette Cooper, Wes Streeting and Rachel Reeves, we finally have real depth and capability". She praised Nandy's "sensitive political judgement. When she was doing the foreign office job, she navigated the very difficult issue of Israel-Palestine. She managed, in a fringe meeting at Conference for the Labour Friends of Israel, to get tumultuous applause when she talked about the rights of Palestinians. That's quite a feat."

Nandy never intended to become a politician. She wanted to study English literature at university, but her sister – a superior academic, she said – got a place to study English at Oxford. "And I thought, that is not a comparison I'm going to win." Instead, she studied politics at Newcastle. Her years at university were, bar none, the best of her life, she said.

Unlike many students, she never had a Marxist phase – possibly because her father was one. Dipak Nandy moved from Calcutta to England in 1956, becoming a lecturer at Leicester University and later helping to draft the 1976 Race Relations Act. "I didn't really know anyone who was a Marxist apart from my dad," Nandy said. "It was only when I went to India, aged 17, that I realised that, although there are a lot of different strands of political thought in Britain, only a handful are seen as legitimate. They elect Communists in many parts of India. When you see Communists getting it in the neck about refuse collection, in the same way that Manchester City Council is, it's quite eye-opening."

Nandy's father was, she said, "primarily an academic". "He became an activist only because he had no choice. If he wanted to go and have a drink with his wife in the pub, it took a sit-in to achieve it." Her childhood was

animated by examples of his direct action – such as the time he was chased through the house and garden by police during the 1981 Moss Side riots. He had happened on some officers sitting in the back of a van reading porn and thought it was a photo opportunity “too good to miss”. A perfectionist, he spent too long trying to get the filters right on his lens, and they heard him. Her father liked to photograph the police arresting young people, Nandy said. “It was very clear to most community leaders in Manchester that we had an openly racist police force and a government that was backing them.”

Nandy’s parents divorced when she was seven. In 1989 her father was one of several figures who supported Salman Rushdie against the fatwa issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini. His house was firebombed, and he, too, was issued with a fatwa. “We didn’t see him for several months because it wasn’t safe, and that’s a big deal when you’re nine.”

She was resistant to talking about the influence of her father on her political career. Though she credits him with developing her sense of injustice, she insisted her mother had played a bigger part. The daughter of the Liberal MP Frank Byers, who later became a life peer, Luise Byers was a social worker who retrained and ended up in the current affairs department of Granada Television, working on shows such as *World In Action*.

“Manchester in the 1980s – politics was everywhere,” Nandy said. “It was in the classroom, it was in my home, because they were attacking single mums. It was on the streets, because there were riots and people being put out of work. My mum was very good at explaining why it mattered that you would stand up and be counted. I’ve always been a socialist – in the sense that I do believe that when you put power into the hands of most people, you get better outcomes.”

Does Nandy avoid media-friendly identity politics? With the Conservative leadership race now a two-way contest between a woman and a person of colour, her background could be a political asset for an opposition party that has only ever been led by a white man. She doesn’t see it that way.

“The reason I don’t talk that much about being a woman in politics, or being a mum, or about my dad, is really simple: I didn’t come into politics to talk about myself. My mum’s from Surrey, my dad’s from Calcutta – he still calls it Calcutta – so I don’t know where I fit in terms of the race spectrum, and the privilege debate. I’m Manchester by birth, I’m a Wiganer by choice – so being northern is an important part of my identity.

“But my mum’s from the south, my dad is Indian. I feel English, I feel British: the labels

## “I disliked the cults around Blair and Corbyn. One man can’t change things”

don’t help me. Most people have overlapping forms of identity and see this in a different way than the zero-sum game it’s often presented as. It’s not that I don’t think identity matters. But the debate has become very unhelpful, and a dead end in many ways.”

I asked Nandy how she felt about the rehabilitation of New Labour; Angela Rayner and Keir Starmer are both unembarrassed to praise Tony Blair. “I’ve always hated cults,” she said, “so I disliked the cult around Blair just as much as I disliked the cult around Corbyn. I think it’s unhelpful for us as a party. One man doesn’t change things: movements do. So I feel very uncomfortable with the resurrection of the cults. I also think that those debates are very little to do with Blair the person and Corbyn the person – they’re much more about the Seventies fighting the Nineties, to see which vision of the past will win the day.”

She argued there was no time to waste prosecuting old arguments. “I think these moments only come around every 30, 40 years, where people feel that the old system has crumbled, it’s gone, and they’re looking for something to put in its place. I think it was Harold Wilson who said that the Labour Party is like a bird – it needs its left and its right wing to fly.” In fact it was the Labour MP Ian Mikardo, though Wilson liked to quote him.

Nandy told me there is a solidarity among working people that did not exist in the Eighties and Nineties. “This is the ‘dignity and respect’ agenda that took the SPD to power in Germany. It’s the sentiment that Anthony Albanese was expressing during his successful campaign in Australia, and it’s what the Biden team put at the heart of their pitch to rust-belt America: there is a ceiling on the amount of division that people can tolerate, and we’re not going to pit people against one another in a race to the bottom.”

When we spoke on Zoom I asked her whether she would run for the leadership again. She flipped her iPad round and showed me a crawl space under her desk – which is leather-topped and once belonged to her grandfather, the life peer. “There is definitely a bit of me that, when I’m asked if I want to run again, really wants to climb into this little hole – and I could get into it, if I thought about it seriously,” she said, meaning the hole and not the question. When pressed, she said that she saw her 2020 bid as a valuable corrective

to the pro-Corbyn consensus. “It was a long shot. I’d stood in opposition to the party line on both anti-Semitism – which is why I left the shadow cabinet – and on Brexit. So I could see it was an unlikely prospect.”

Jon Cruddas had urged Nandy to run, saying that if she didn’t, the party would simply “congratulate” itself on Brexit (“Ten out of ten!”) and Corbyn (“Ten out of ten!”). “And we’d lose large swathes of the country forever. So I said to the team, ‘We either show people that we’re still their party and we turn this ship away from the rocks – and we lose. Or we do all of that and we win. I want to do the latter, but if we do the former, I’ll take that as a win.’

“We started off on a stage in Liverpool with lots of people saying, ‘Ten out of ten, haven’t we done well!’ And we ended up with me, Keir and Becky – two people who I came to like a lot – on a stage in the Midlands, everybody acknowledging that things had to change. I think we modelled a different sort of leadership throughout that campaign.”

Nandy and Starmer go back a long way, and she describes theirs as a “collegiate relationship”. When they first met, more than ten years ago, she was working for The Children’s Society and he was the director of public prosecutions. She sought his help in a case involving young people who had been enslaved in a cannabis factory and were being prosecuted along with the owners. Starmer was, she said, “far more responsive to the issue than most people, really easy to work with”.

Their relationship cooled through the Corbyn years – “We were on different sides of the question about the leadership, and Brexit” – before warming during the leadership contest. Nandy revealed a slight superiority about Starmer’s late arrival to politics: “Many of us grew up in the Labour tradition – I was delivering party leaflets when I was seven. He’s not steeped in career politics. He’s come in a lot more recently, and he’s very challenging of why people hold the views they do. I think that has helped us – it’s one thing to feel the public mood, but another to turn that into a strategy. When we are together as a team, you can see how the strength of the people he has put around him makes him much more concrete.”

Being in a room with Rayner and Starmer used to feel, she said, “like two different conversations going on at the same time”. Now there is a better rhythm. “The leader of the party needs to look to the country – the deputy needs to look to the party itself.” She admires Rayner. “Ange has a great relationship with the unions.”

How did Nandy feel about Starmer’s order not to picket alongside rail workers in June? “In fairness, what he was saying is no different from what Ed [Miliband] was saying: that ▶

## Interview

◀ we are the government-in-waiting. I don't think anyone would take kindly to me spending all week on a picket line. They would prefer it if I'm on the Sunday shows telling Grant Shapps he's got some brass neck.

"But I found it a difficult debate because it became symbolic of whether you would stand up for people. It is depressing that we have enabled this to become a question – if you stand on the picket line, are you on people's side? I will always stand up for my rail workers. I will always stand up for the sorting office. It is the right thing to do. I don't think we should ever equivocate about that."

She criticised David Lammy for condemning strikes by British Airways check-in staff. "I just didn't understand that at all – did you see he apologised? We have a lot of BA workers at Manchester Airport. They've been told they can keep their jobs but they have to move to Luton. When they do layovers, they take Pot Noodles because they're not being given enough money to buy food." Later she told

me about the time Lammy was offered a traditional northern barm cake in Wigan and didn't know what to do with the gravy.

**A**t Sunshine House Community Hub in Wigan, locals came to collect parcels for £3 a piece containing washing powder, pens and other household items. The centre doesn't just host food banks. The hub's Cocaine Anonymous meeting is well-attended by businessmen from Greater Manchester, who like to come where they won't be seen.

Barbara, a local matriarch and Sunshine worker, was complaining about a hotel up the road in Standish that in 2021 received 200 refugees overnight. There were Britain First protests outside it, said Nandy. Wigan was 95 per cent white at the last census in 2011; there are now two mosques in the borough. Under the Home Office's dispersal scheme, which subcontracts accommodation arrangements to Serco, more migrants are arriving in Wigan, but the local council is often kept out of the loop. The Standish refugees were rehoused in local flats where, according to Barbara, they made a lot of noise. Whenever the conversation veered towards complaint, Nandy broadened it with a joke or an inclusive gesture; she pointed out that one of the refugees now volunteers at Sunshine House. The case was

another illustration of how the north could run itself better, she said, if only it were allowed to. After the fall of Kabul, the rehousing of Afghan refugees went much more smoothly when the Greater Manchester Combined Authority stepped in – working across its ten councils to sort housing, healthcare, schooling and employment support.

Down the corridor, a group of widows and widowers in their seventies were playing bingo. Nandy couldn't resist, grabbing a chit and one for me, and taking a seat at the table. The eighty-something lady calling the numbers was a joker. "All alone: number ten."

"That's me," Nandy chuckled, scrubbing out the number with a sparkly pen. "Number ten – that's where I'm going!" She peered over my arm: "I've got more than you." Then she reconsidered, probably because it sounded a bit competitive. "Actually, we've got about the same." On the table lay her wallet, featuring a picture of Mr Strong, red and square-shaped, "the one who eats 20 eggs for breakfast".

Board games are banned in Nandy's house, she said regretfully, because she wants to win too much. At her son's recent sports day, she went in for the adult sprint and crossed the line with a dad who works as a professional sports trainer. She got a sticker to mark the shared victory – though she was annoyed to see it was a gendered one, for the mums. ●

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# LOUISE PERRY



## Lines of Dissent In the sleek, luxurious world of athleisure, aspiration hides something much darker

What happens when a company that built its brand on aspirational ideals of “empowerment” rubs up against the dirty reality of 21st-century capitalism? This is a question that often comes to mind when I see women on the Tube in luxurious yoga-wear – and one that I’m now much better placed to answer having read a book with the marvellous title *Little Black Stretchy Pants*.

The author is Chip Wilson, founder of Lululemon, a Canadian sportswear brand that sells high-end products to a primarily female customer base. In 1998 Wilson had already established himself as an entrepreneur with an eye for sportswear trends. He saw a potential market in yoga, which had been gaining in popularity in the West since the 1960s but for which there was not, so far, a prescribed uniform. Wilson designed a new kind of clothing – sweat-wicking, super stretchy leggings that were both comfortable and flattering – that came to be known as “athleisure”. Lululemon now has 574 shops, found on some of the most prestigious streets in the world.

The success of Lululemon was not only a result of its clever products. It was also a result of changing demographics. Wilson identified a new kind of consumer: the childless female graduate with money and time to spare and an intense interest in maintaining her appearance. The new Western fashion for yoga – and thus for Lululemon clothing – was all about her.

The brand’s success depended not just on a product but a lifestyle. The imagined Lululemon customer (“Ocean”, as Wilson called her) was urban, financially

independent, sporty, beautiful, thin and unencumbered by caring responsibilities. Her thinness was particularly important – until 2020, most Lululemon clothes didn’t come larger than a US size 14 (the average American woman is between a size 16 and 18). The Lululemon phenomenon wasn’t just about leggings – it was about a new breed of successful woman.

The brand’s success offers a glimpse into the way that 21st-century corporations often function. They sell a fantasy – in Lululemon’s case, the fantasy of being as gorgeous and glamorous as “Ocean” – but their fundamentals are like those of any other business: there are board members and profit margins and hirings and firings.

There is inequality, too. Chip Wilson’s Vancouver home is estimated to be worth \$66.8m. Meanwhile, as with many fashion brands, those who actually make the clothes earn a pittance. According to a 2019 report by the *Guardian*, one of the Bangladeshi companies that manufactures products for Lululemon was paying some of its labourers only 9,100 taka (£85) a month – less than the price of one pair of Lululemon leggings.

Women in this factory also said they had endured physical violence and humiliation at the hands of their managers, who, the *Guardian* reported, called them

## Brands that sanitise their image with New Age jargon are increasingly the norm

“whores” and “sluts”. (When the claims emerged, Lululemon said it would immediately launch an investigation.)

Compare this with the wording of an ad for a job as an “educator” (retail worker) at one of Lululemon’s London stores: “At Lululemon, we care for and invest in the whole person – body, mind, spirit.”

This kind of waffle, of course, disguises the reality of the business model. And while Lululemon may have been among the first wave of brands to sanitise their image with New Age jargon, this language is now increasingly the norm.

There’s a hysterical skit by the comedian Bo Burnham in which he plays an advertising consultant. Over soaring strings, he asks his client: “The question isn’t, ‘What are you selling?’ or, ‘What service are you providing?’ The question is, ‘What do you stand for? Who are you, Bagel Bites?’” (They’re “a frozen snack pizza bagel”, or so Google informs me.)

During the summer of 2020, in the months following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minnesota, many brands followed a version of Burnham’s advice, issuing sombre statements on their commitment to anti-racism. A yoga studio I had visited a couple of times took the bizarre step of emailing customers an exact breakdown of the ethnicity of its staff (the “in-house team” was “15.4 per cent Colombian”, apparently).

And it was during that summer that Lululemon finally decided to stock larger sizes in its shops. This was not because Wilson himself necessarily cared about body positivity (there was a minor scandal in 2013 when he claimed that some customers’ fat thighs caused Lululemon leggings to malfunction) but because the market was clearly changing. Not only were more customers demanding larger sizes, but it looked terrible for the brand to welcome only skinny women into its embrace.

For all its savviness, Lululemon is now encountering problems. For the first time, staff at one of its larger stores in Washington DC are about to unionise, and their demands include more equitable pay structures for workers across the organisation.

I hope these workers succeed in their organising efforts. And I hope, too, that during their negotiations they remind the bosses at Lululemon that the corporation has committed to “care for and invest in the whole person”. Lululemon and other brands have been getting away with hypocrisy for far too long. It’s about time they paid attention to how things are, not just how they look. ●

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# A fatal attraction

## Why Germany can't escape the perpetual allure of Russia

By Jeremy Cliffe

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February changed everything. It transformed the post-Cold War security landscape of Europe, killed off any hopes of reconciliation between Moscow and the West for at least a generation and gave the rest of the continent a direct stake not just in Vladimir Putin's containment but in his abject defeat. Heart-rending scenes of missiles hitting residential blocks and hospitals, of Ukrainian civilians killed and mutilated, have dramatised those new realities. If there ever was a time for ambiguity, it has passed.

Yet in Germany, many are struggling to process all this change. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's federal government proclaims wholehearted support for Ukraine but has procrastinated on sending weapons. A glimpse into the thinking behind this reluctance came on 21 June, when Scholz's chief foreign affairs adviser, Jens Plötner, chided journalists for concentrating so much on arms exports: "You can fill a lot of newspaper pages with 20 Marders [armoured fighting vehicles for infantry], but larger articles about what will actually be our relationship with Russia in the future are somehow less frequent." The future of Berlin-Moscow relations, he argued, is "at least as exciting and relevant an issue" as weapons deliveries.

In fact, significant parts of the German intelligentsia remain preoccupied by exactly that. In a succession of open letters, writers, philosophers, actors and commentators have warned against "disproportionate" or "escalatory" responses (including weapons deliveries). Alice Schwarzer, a veteran feminist journalist and a convener of one of the letters, has demanded negotiations with Putin and has baselessly accused Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, of being a provocateur. With war fatigue setting in among voters and growing concerns over a gas shutdown this winter, the pressure for Berlin to pursue some sort of settlement with Putin is growing.

Confronted with this German urge to be a bridge to Russia, despairing international observers often turn to history for explanations. Germany's decades-long reliance on Russian energy is one, and is related to a second: the legacy of the former West German chancellor Willy Brandt's "*Ostpolitik*" from the late 1960s, which sought improved relations with Moscow, and is cherished particularly by Scholz's centre-left camp. Russophilia in the eastern German states dates back to their decades under Soviet sway (a 15-year-old Angela Merkel won a trip to Moscow as a prize for her performance in East Germany's national Russian-language competition). And then, colouring everything, there is German guilt over Nazi-era atrocities committed against Russia and its people. ▶





TOBIAS SCHWARZ / REUTERS

**Shrine and punishment: Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin attend the unveiling of Fyodor Dostoevsky's statue in Dresden, October 2006**

## The NS Essay

◀ All of these are persuasive explanations. And yet they are also inadequate. For it is impossible to understand the depth of German Russophilia – and with it the yearning for good relations with Moscow against even the grimmest of backdrops – by reading it off economic statistics or timelines of world-historical events. One has to delve into culture and ideas, and go back much further than 1945, into the darker, older mists of the German psyche and imagination. Fortunately, there is a guide.

Thomas Mann's *Reflections of a Non-political Man* (1918), republished in English last year, grew out of Mann's politicisation by the First World War and its role in the breakdown of his relationship with his brother, Heinrich. Where Thomas had embraced the nationalist fervour of 1914, his sibling rejected the war and called for a democratic German republic. Over the course of the conflict the two issued thinly veiled broadsides at each other. Ostensibly they were debating whether the political (that is, the progressive or radical) and the aesthetic belonged together, but more fundamentally this amounted to a debate about the very nature of Germanness.

*Reflections* was the cumulative work of this feud, by which point the brothers had stopped talking to each other. In it, Thomas drew on the German 19th-century distinction – popularised by Friedrich Nietzsche, among others – between French and English “civilisation” (summarised by the American political scientist Mark Lilla in his introduction to the text as “reason, scepticism, humanitarianism, democracy and progress”) and German “culture” (“more primordial, drawing energy from the dark side of human nature and producing greater depth of feeling and therefore greater art”). Mann argued that the war had been necessary to uphold the conservative order that shielded these musical, philosophical and artistic depths of the German soul from the decadent, materialistic, civilisational West, of which he considered his “*Zivilisationsliterat*” brother (a derogatory term meaning “civilisation’s literary man”) a dismal lackey.

Mann was drawing on the two most fundamental tropes of German identity: a people defined by their culture rather than fixed, territorial nationhood (in contrast to, say, France and England), and a people who are



A weary hour: in his younger years Thomas Mann embraced German nationalism

not entirely of the Roman West. The Germanic tribes, after all, had largely dwelled beyond the “*Limes Germanicus*” (the fortified frontier that marked the north-eastern boundaries of the Roman empire in Europe); the Lutheran rupture from Roman Catholicism in the 16th century was fundamentally a German phenomenon; the kernel of the future German state was forged in opposition to Napoleonic France; and the liberal-nationalist ideals of the revolutions of 1848 flopped among Germans and gave way instead to romantic-conservative nationalism.

This German sense of ambivalence towards the Roman West was often bound up with the lure of Russia, with which Germans had close cultural and political ties. These bonds had been strong since the reigns of Catherine and Peter the Great, and could be traced further back to the medieval period, when German-speaking merchants and artisans settled in parts of eastern Europe. And so post-1848 notions of German “culture” opposed to Western “civilisation” were closely associated with a perceived Russian kinship.

Nietzsche’s contempt for mediocre “modern ideas” (“‘French ideas’... [which] were English in origin”) was matched by his yearning for Russia. The author of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) venerated Fyodor Dostoevsky, describing “that sudden, instinctive feeling of having encountered a blood relative” on reading the Russian’s writing; and he hailed the expanses of Russia as “that huge empire-in-between, where Europe as it were flows back into Asia”.

No two figures are more prominent in Mann’s *Reflections* than the duo of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. Mann opens the book by citing approvingly the former’s 1877 description of Germany as “the protesting kingdom” – “her eternal protest... against the heirs of Rome and against everything that constitutes this heritage”. Mann argued that this “formulation of the German character, of German primeval individuality, of what is eternally German, contains the whole basis and explanation for the lonely German position between east and west”. Over the course of the book, he wove this “eternal protestantism” with political conservatism (calling “anti-radicalism” the “specific, distinguishing, and decisive quality or peculiarity of the German spirit”) and an elevation of wild, musical emotional depth over orderly formalism (the “Dionysian” over the “Apollonian”, to use Nietzsche’s formulation).

This, Mann argued, left him in “no doubt that German and Russian humanity are closer to one another than the Russian and French, and incomparably closer than the German and the Latin”. After all, this shared humanity was rooted in a shared history of suffering: “What a kinship in the relationship of the two national souls to ‘Europe’, to the ‘West’, to ‘civilisation’, to politics, to democracy!... It is no accident that it was a Russian, Dostoevsky again, who, as early as a generation and a half ago, found the expression for the antithesis between Germany, this ‘great and special people’, and western Europe, the

antithesis from which all our reflections began!" Concluding the book, Mann looks ahead to the new post-1918 landscape of Europe and calls for: "Peace with Russia! Peace with her first of all! And the war, if it continues, will continue against the West alone, against the 'trois pays libres' [France, Britain and the US], against 'civilisation', 'literature', politics, the rhetorical bourgeois." Post-1918 Germany should, in other words, at the very least adopt a "Mittellage" (middle position) between Russia and the West.

Reading *Reflections* today, it is striking that the author of a work as humane as *Buddenbrooks* (the 1901 epic about the decline of a bourgeois northern-German trading family) could produce such vitriolic reactionary prose. Yet it is best to view it as the product of a dream from which Mann would soon awaken. In the febrile early postwar years, he came to dislike his new conservative acolytes, who as Lilla notes "placed him on a pedestal next to second-rate minds like Oswald Spengler". He reconciled with his brother and then, shocked by the assassination of the Jewish German foreign minister Walther Rathenau by far-right militants in 1922, he delivered his speech "On the German Republic", in which he distanced himself from many of the arguments of *Reflections*. The new Mann thundered against "sentimental obscurantism" and called on German intellectuals to support the Weimar Republic. He would personify the struggles between Enlightenment humanism and romantic irrationalism in the clash between the characters Ludovico Settembrini and Leo Naphta in his 1924 masterpiece *The Magic Mountain*.

It is a measure of the speed of Mann's shift from the authoritarian right to the democratic liberal-left that he felt compelled to flee to Switzerland in 1933 on the ascent to power of Adolf Hitler, an extremist motivated by some of the irrationalist 19th-century ideas that had so consumed Mann only 15 years before. Mann would acknowledge the irony of this in a 1938 essay entitled "Brother Hitler". A more explicit renunciation of *Reflections* came the following year when Mann, now living in the US, wrote of his "non-political German" that "his elegant disdain of democratic revolution has made him the tool of another revolution; an anarchic one, running amok to threaten the foundations and props of all our Western morality and civilisation".

The completion of the author's political journey towards the Roman and Anglo-Saxon West came, both intellectually and geographically, during his wartime years in Los Angeles. From his Californian exile, Mann gave German-language radio broadcasts denouncing Nazism on the BBC and came

to know Franklin D Roosevelt, idolising him as he had once idolised Dostoevsky. In a speech at the Library of Congress three weeks after the surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945, Mann argued that his homeland's war guilt had deep roots in the country's psyche, and laid particular blame on the "morbid" Wagnerian romanticism he had once championed. "As the rose bears the worm," he said, German romanticism's "innermost character is seduction, seduction to death." These ideas took literary form in his 1947 novel *Doctor Faustus*, which drew on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's magnum opus, *Faust*, to depict Germany's national seduction to death by the diabolical forces of Nazism.

Mann's homeland would soon walk the political and intellectual path that he had taken. While the part of Germany under Soviet control would remain padlocked to Moscow in what became East Germany, roughly three-quarters of Germans ended up in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) when it emerged in 1949. This new entity became everything that the Mann of 1918 loathed: democratic, consumerist and avowedly Western. The new republic's first chancellor was Konrad Adenauer, a Francophile, Catholic, democratic moderate from Cologne who looked instinctively westwards and prioritised the "Westbindung" (the link with the West and the security and rehabilitation this offered) over the old "Mittellage".

This new Germany feted Mann as a pillar of German letters unsullied by the Nazi years. His novels, banned under Hitler, became bestsellers. In 1949 he received the Goethe Prize, one of Germany's highest literary awards. The federal republic's "social market economy" was modelled on Rooseveltian New Deal principles that Mann had so admired in America, and resembled the "middle-class democracy in the Western-Roman sense" that in *Reflections* he had argued would "take away from [Germany] all that is best and complex". His vision for "a European Germany, not a German Europe" and "a free Germany" in "a European federation" would soon take shape with the creation in 1951 of the European Coal and Steel Community, which would grow into today's European Union. Mann lived to see West Germany join

**Thomas Mann lived to see West Germany join Nato in May 1955, dying three months later**

Nato in May 1955, dying three months later – an appealing conjunction, which could be taken as a neat symbol of the final reconciliation of the novelist's journey with that of his country.

Too neat, in fact. For Germany's story is not as binary as this chronology suggests. While Mann – and the country – travelled a long political path between the early and mid-20th century, there were points of consistency throughout. Mann imagined Germanness on a spectrum of traits. Even in *Reflections*, he did not argue that the romantic streak in German nature was its sum total, just as he did not argue that German and Russian cultural affinity was absolute. Rather, the Germanness he described was fundamentally a *Mittellage*, an in-between state "between a burgher and an artist... between a protester and a Westerner, a conservative and a nihilist". His 1918 Russophile conservatism was an argument about which side of this in-between state his fellow Germans should prefer when faced with a choice.

Even the Mann of the postwar years cleaved to this dualism. The protagonist of *Doctor Faustus*, his 1947 personification of Germany, is an Enlightenment man who succumbs to the powerful (and diabolical) undertow of irrational romanticism. In essence he is caught between the two traditions, rather as Goethe himself had been. Nor did the elderly Mann gravitate to absolutes in his political outlook: he abhorred the partition of Germany and Europe, and seems to have considered Adenauer too comfortable with the federal republic's alienation from the east (calling it in private "his Vatican-American West Germany"). The "European federation" of which he dreamed spanned east and west. Mann remained ambivalent about his homeland until the end of his life, choosing to spend his final years on the shores of Lake Zurich.

But all of this really makes Mann an ideal symbol for modern Germany. The complex of his impulses and contrasts – his internal battles and transitions – captures an aspect of the country that endures even as Putin's tanks rumble across Ukrainian soil: a tension between its straightforwardly Western political vocation (a *Westbindung* challenged only by the hard right and hard left) and its sometimes more fraught cultural and emotional sense of itself in a *Mittellage*. The irrationalist pull on the German psyche remains. And for as long as it endures, so too will the deep romantic appeal of Russia: the ineffable tug exerted on German hearts by clichés such as deep birch forests, onion-domed churches, samovars, infinite snowy expanses and Dostoevsky; the country's "Russia complex" as the German historian Gerd Koenen titled his 2005 book. ▶

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◀ Understand that, and you understand the turmoil that Europe's new security reality causes Germans. After all, a major part of the euphoria the country felt over the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification was the sense that this old tension had finally been resolved: Germany would no longer have to choose between west and east, between politics ("civilisation") and spirit ("culture"), between Anglo-French rationalism and Russian depth. Their country's long, awkward *Mittellage* now placed it at the heart of a peaceful, united Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals. Putin, who knows Germany relatively well having lived in Dresden in the 1980s, appealed directly to this in his 2001 speech to the Bundestag, invoking both the Enlightenment "freedom and humanism" of the German poet Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and the romanticism of Dostoevsky.

Understand the intensity of this dream, and you also understand why the German establishment has clung to it for so long; why Russia's turn away from the West under Putin has been so hard to accept; why political figures like the former chancellor Gerhard Schröder (the leading proponent of Germany's gas dependency on Moscow) wax poetic about the "*Seelenverwandtschaft*" (spiritual kinship) between Germans and Russians; why

his fellow former chancellor Helmut Schmidt scandalously called the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 "understandable"; why Merkel, although intellectually committed to the *Westbindung*, kept a portrait of Catherine the Great in her chancellery office and deepened that energy dependency even after 2014. It is also to grasp why Scholz's reformist liberal-left German government is wringing its hands about "our future relationship with Russia" and struggles to take seriously the pleas of the countries (Poland, the Baltics and of course Ukraine itself) wedged between Germany's eastern border and Russia.

Russia's war in Ukraine has challenged many of the German establishment's policy assumptions, but, more than that, it has exposed conflicts in the country's basic identity – east or west, *Mittellage* or *Westbindung*, rational or romantic – that are still not settled. There is some evidence that younger Germans, those who have grown up since the wall fell, are more firmly Western in outlook than older generations. Polling shows they are more likely to back a more "responsible" Germany (a fairly reliable proxy for the *Westbindung*) over "restraint" (the language of the *Mittellage*). There is also a notable generational divide between the

older intellectuals who dominate the signatories of the open letters promoting negotiation with Russia – such as Schwarzer, born in 1942 – and the younger signatories of opposing letters that urge Germany to stand with Ukraine. Time will tell whether these are indications of a bigger shift.

It is tempting to wonder what Mann would have made of today's Germany, and where he would have come down in the battle of the open letters, were he still around. Would his romantic, Dostoevsky-loving spirit have found the prospect of permanently frozen relations with Russia too much to bear and the vision of a *Mittellage* too emotionally resonant to give up? Or would his FDR-loving democratic rationalism have put him on the side of sparing no effort to arm Ukraine? He certainly would have been intrigued by Volodymyr Zelensky, the comedian turned war leader. But quite what the old novelist would have made of his country's plight now, with its moral constitution under greater strain perhaps than at any point since 1945, is unclear. And in that very ambivalence, he stands as a fine symbol of a federal republic whose long journey – emotional, cultural and political – is far from over. ●

See Bruno Maçães, page 51

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# The battle for the soul of English cricket

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When the former Yorkshire bowler Azeem Rafiq blew the whistle on racism within the sport, high-profile resignations and inquiries followed. Can the summer game change?

By Emma John

One day in early May, Crouch End Cricket Club were on a roll. The north London team's all-rounder, Dhaval Narotam, had removed both of the opposition's opening batsmen, and now – faced with the left-arm orthodox spinner, Aparajit Khurana – the middle order was collapsing too. As the last wicket fell, Martians CC, a visiting side from Essex, had scored only 88 off 24 overs. Crouch End raced past their total to win the game.

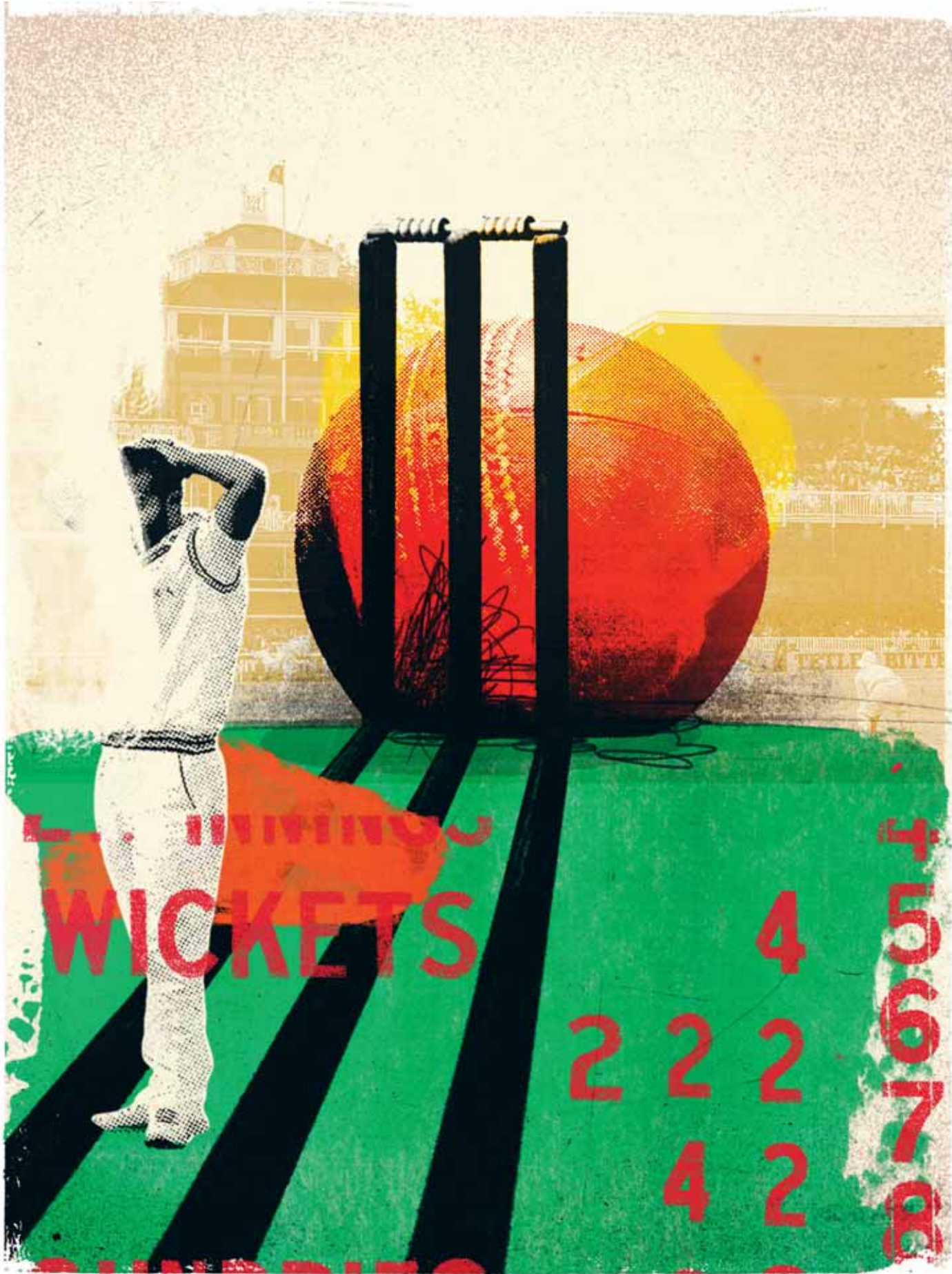
If it was a mismatch, it was because the home team are the current Middlesex Premier League champions – the best amateur side in the county. This in itself is an astonishing feat: four years ago, Crouch End weren't even the best team within a five-minute walk.

The club's home ground nestles in an urban oasis known as Shepherds Cot – a collection of playing fields overlooked by Alexandra Palace, whose glass cupolas glimmer above the tree line. The Cot is home to five cricket clubs, most of them wealthier and more established. Here, North Middlesex Cricket Club has a two-storey clubhouse and a second pitch, as well as a long history of feeding players into the county side. Highgate has floodlit tennis courts and a kitchen that serves Thai food, the scent wafting across the fields on match days.

For decades, Crouch End were the Cot's poor, scrappy underdogs. The first team struggled at the bottom of the Middlesex Championship, the lowest level of regional competition, and regularly faced demotion. Then, in 2014, a player with a radical idea joined the club. Hiren Desai, 29 at the time, had inherited a passion for cricket from his father, a Ugandan-Indian among those expelled by Idi Amin. Together they spent their Sundays playing in London's Asian leagues, and Desai knew they contained huge amounts of untapped talent: first-, second- and third-generation immigrants from every part of the Indian subcontinent. Largely overlooked by the traditional set-ups, these players seldom had the opportunity or resources to progress beyond the parks and council pitches where they competed. Desai told Crouch End they could transform the club.

In 2015 he took over the captaincy from James Jenkins, who works in a family timber company with his father and brothers, all of them Crouch End members for decades. Jenkins, who is 40 and now captains the seconds, remembers being sceptical. "Hiren said, 'I think we can get promoted from this league' when we'd been struggling to stay up. So I said, 'I'm not sure about that, but OK, let's give it a go.' And a fun conversation turned into reality."

In his first year, Desai recruited two players: Pratik Patel, born in the UK to Indian parents, and Nilesh Patel, who was Indian-born but holds a UK passport. Under his ▶



ALEX WILLIAMSON

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## Reporter at Large

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◀ captaincy, the first XI was promoted four divisions in four years until, in 2021, they became league champions. That success has brought secondary rewards: the demand for membership has meant increased funding, and a club that struggled to raise two teams now puts out eight adult sides a week, including a women's XI. The club's new nets are busy almost every night, and the pavilion has had an overhaul.

But what they haven't seen is any interest from county cricket administrators – the people who decide who plays at the next level. Desai had been inviting Middlesex scouts to watch Crouch End in action for more than a year. “Not one has come,” he told me in May, “and I find that really strange. Do you need to fit a certain bill: go to private school, be well-spoken? I think absolutely that comes into it.”

**O**n 16 November last year, Azeem Rafiq testified to parliament's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee about his experiences of racism while playing for Yorkshire. The off-spinner and former England youth captain said that between 2008 and 2018 he had been subject to racial slurs, called an “elephant washer”, and portrayed as a troublemaker; that his employers' lack of empathy after his son was stillborn in 2018 had led him to consider suicide.

He had raised these complaints a year earlier at an employment tribunal, after which Yorkshire conducted its own investigation. It found that the racist language had been “friendly banter”. No further action was taken.

But the fallout from the select committee hearing was catastrophic. Yorkshire's chairman, Roger Hutton, and chief executive, Mark Arthur, resigned, and major sponsors including Nike and the brewer Tetley's withdrew their support. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) suspended Yorkshire's right to host Test matches, reinstating it in February after senior staff, including the director of cricket and head coach, had been sacked. The repercussions continue: the club has been ordered to appear before the Cricket Discipline Commission this autumn; and Michael Vaughan, the former England captain and a Yorkshire teammate named in Rafiq's testimony, has stepped aside from his BBC commentator role after the ECB charged him and others with “bringing the game into disrepute”.

Vaughan denies having used racist language.

It was clear that the issue went far wider than Yorkshire. The ECB made a weak showing in front of the same parliamentary committee; its chief executive, Tom Harrison – who stepped down in May this year – failed to explain why the board had not intervened. The Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket, set up by the ECB in March 2021, had only just begun to gather evidence. It also sounded similar to an inquiry conducted in 1999, whose dozens of recommendations the ECB had promised to implement. In the two decades since, the number of professional black British cricketers has fallen dramatically.

On 24 July, the entire Cricket Scotland board resigned before publication of a report on institutional racism in the Scottish game. When I spoke to Azeem Rafiq earlier the same day, he said nothing had changed in the two years since he made his complaint. “The system always looks for excuses not to take action. I used to think that people just didn't get it, but I've come to a different conclusion now – I think the leadership don't want to get it.”

The research bears him out. Last year Birmingham City University PhD student, Tom Brown, found that while one-third of all recreational cricketers in the UK have Asian heritage, only 4 per cent make it to the professional level. Research published by Leeds Beckett University in 2019 highlighted the lack of black British players in the county game and in coaching roles. The number of black British cricketers in the professional game fell by 75 per cent from 1994 to 2019, and in the recreational game, black players account for less than 1 per cent. Asked about this startling disparity when the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's hearings resumed in January 2022, the chairman of Middlesex, Mike O'Farrell, suggested that Asian families prioritise schoolwork, while Afro-Caribbean children prefer football – reductive cultural stereotypes for which he later apologised.

Middlesex – and the UK as a whole – is home to thriving leagues and park teams that exist with little support from official bodies. This has led to a farcical situation in which some traditional, predominantly white clubs complain about a lack of new players, while

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“We've got more prime ministers than you,” the Etonians sang to the Harrovians

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oversubscribed Asian teams struggle to find grounds. It might seem obvious for the former to hire out their pitches, or follow the example of Crouch End (and other clubs such as East Lancashire) by involving Asian players in their organisation and outreach. However, Ankit Shah, co-chair of Middlesex's equality, diversity and inclusion committee, told me he does not see this happening. “This conservatism, protectionism, whatever you want to call it, is out there,” he said. “It's not just the clubs – it's the private schools, too. They often have three or four pitches that aren't used from July to September. And you're talking about some of the best facilities in the country.”

**E**nglish cricket has long been a refuge for a certain kind of conservative, a panic room padded with a fantasy of a vanished country. In his 1994 history of cricket, *Anyone But England*, the American writer and Marxist activist Mike Marqusee wrote that the sport had introduced him to “a world where the norms of an imagined 19th century still obtained... a world of deference and hierarchy, ruled by benevolent white men, proud of its traditions and resentful of any challenge to them”. Cricket, to him, portrayed “an England that did not exist, except, powerfully, in people's heads”.

Marqusee noted the “parallel malaise” between the English game and the socio-economic doldrums of John Major's Britain. Comparisons of Graham Gooch, who resigned the England captaincy in 1993 after Australia retained the Ashes, with the prime minister, then facing a confidence vote, were frequent at the time, not least because of Major's enthusiasm for the game. During Boris Johnson's premiership, the England Test team suffered a similar run of humiliations – winning only one-third of their matches and losing four series in a row, including a 4-0 drubbing in the 2021-22 Ashes. But no one has thought to draw parallels between the Prime Minister and the then captain Joe Root, whose integrity and talent remain widely admired.

Now, nearly 30 years since Marqusee's book, the country finds itself in another period of intense political and social churn. Right-wing newspapers are full of the cries of a white establishment that feels culturally threatened, its fears cloaked in a righteous crusade on “wokery”. And cricket has, once again, become a favoured battleground.

**O**n 28 June, Eton and Harrow met for their annual match at Lord's cricket ground. Most of the stands were empty, but in the Mound, two banks of smartly suited teenagers, carefully separated, supported their respective sides. Every so often, one group rose to its feet and





**Aftermath of victory: Azeem Rafiq leads the Yorkshire team off the field having taken five wickets against Essex, September 2012**

hurled an insult, in perfect unison, at the other. “We’ve got more prime ministers than you,” sang the Etonians. The Harrovians pointed to themselves and proudly cried, “Winston Churchill”, then gestured to their antagonists with a sneer: “Boris Johnson”.

Harrow scored 265 from their 55 overs; Eton were 28-2 in reply, then 59-4. The Eton parents grumbled that Harrow offers sports scholarships: Eton never has. Eton lost by 86 runs; a couple of the young spectators were ejected for setting off blue flares.

The rivalry dates to 1805, making it the longest-running fixture at Lord’s. But this year may well be Eton-Harrow’s last at Lord’s: from 2023, Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) plans to replace the game with the final of a new schools’ tournament. The theory behind this change – offering the opportunity to play on hallowed Lord’s turf to the best young cricketers in the country, rather than those with the wealthiest parents – is admirable. The reality is that it could take years, possibly decades, of investment in state school cricket before a non-private school reaches the final two.

On the benches in front of the pavilion, relatives of the players – some of them also MCC members – were angry about the club’s decision. “It’s pathetic,” said one grandfather, “absolutely pathetic.” His daughter-in-law was less vehement, but agreed it was a shame. “We’re losing all our traditions – there won’t be anything left,” she said. “Ascot, Henley – we have to hold on to these things.” If she were extremely rich, she added, she would open a

riding school in every comprehensive. “You are extremely rich,” her father-in-law replied.

Another mother told me the boys themselves were “very sad. But it’s the way the world is going – people don’t want elitism any more.” Her husband called it “Boris syndrome”, a reaction against Johnson’s premiership and the privilege that lay behind it. “I question the timing,” he said. “It’s change for change’s sake: we can’t get rid of all our history. And now my son will never get his chance to play here – it’s been taken away from him.”

The former *Test Match Special* presenter Henry Blofeld, an Old Etonian, has threatened to resign as an MCC member if the game is not reinstated. But while he has some support within the club, even the most traditional cricket lover would not claim that the English game is in a healthy or sustainable condition, or a fair reflection of the society in which it exists. The MCC has recognised this, recently creating a network of cricket hubs for promising state-school-educated children; last year, an inaugural national competition culminated in boys’ and girls’ finals on the main square.

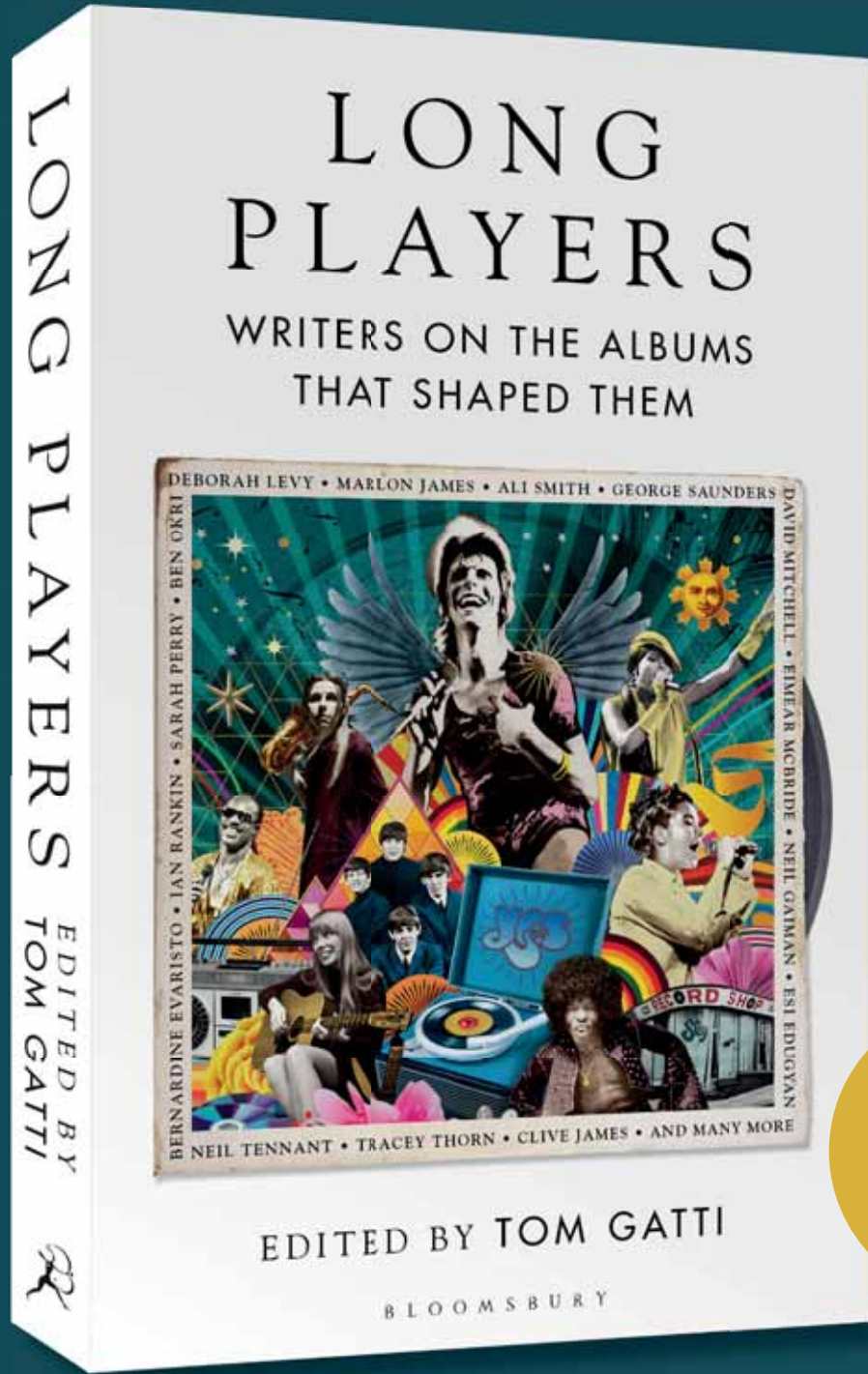
Cricket, once cherished as our summer game, is no longer a national sport, neither watched nor understood by the mainstream. In the recent BBC series *Freddie Flintoff’s Field of Dreams*, the former England all-rounder returned to his home town of Preston to get local teenagers into the game. “You’ve got to be lucky, or privileged, to play it,” Flintoff said

in his introduction, and his raw recruits – many of whom couldn’t name a single cricketer – demonstrated how far the sport has ebbed from the national consciousness. The majority of state schools lack the equipment and the expertise to teach it; in the 1980s and 1990s, the Conservative government is estimated to have sold off 10,000 school playing fields. Nine of the 11 England Test players that took on Pakistan at Southampton in 2020 were privately educated – a record high. Several England players developed their talents at private schools, albeit several on scholarships.

Many of the problems English cricket has in tackling racism are magnified by an ingrained classism. Its club structure is focused on Saturday league games and “after work” training sessions, despite a fundamental shift in working patterns for those in low-income jobs, be it the 24-7 demands of the retail and service industries, or the unsociable hours of shift work. “Different leagues need to cater for that,” Middlesex’s Ankit Shah told me. “Clubs have a huge role to play in championing change. But it’s not happening because it’s reflective of how they’ve been run in the past, and they want it run in the same manner now.”

He pointed without hesitation to several cultural barriers to entry – from a disinclination to join post-match drinks to the need to attend religious or family occasions. The simplest solution, he said, was greater diversity among coaching staff and at the organisational level. “It’s about seeing a face that parents or kids feel comfortable speaking to. When it comes to selection for the talent pathways [into county and national squads], if you’ve got a 99 per cent white coaching set-up, there are going to be some biases whether you like it or not.” The BBC presenter and former England player Ebony Rainford-Brent, whose *Ace* programme encourages young people of African and Caribbean heritage into cricket, echoed this. “We haven’t created a system that works for diverse, lower socio-economic groups,” she told me last summer. “If you’re black, and living in the inner city, and going to state school, there’s no cricket. There’s a void. As soon as we offered people the chance to play, they grabbed it.”

Middlesex’s own research has identified a major decline in diversity once players reach the professional game. Until then, 65 per cent of the talent is of Asian ethnicity. “In the pathways, you play with people you’ve grown up with, who look and sound like you,” said Shah. “In the professional squads, you get a lot of players from public schools – because that’s when they enter the system, having developed their game through the university set-ups. The dynamic in the changing room is different, and it’s not what some of the working-class kids are used to.” ▶



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For many, Azeem Rafiq's testimony came as a shock – that such overt racism could exist within the 21st-century game. For others, it was not a surprise. "It was nothing new to most ethnic people playing cricket," Ronak Shah told me. He started playing for Crouch End with his twin brother, Niren, last year, when they were 25. Some of their friends had given up the game, even those with the talent to represent their county. "You ask them why they stopped, and they say, 'I got dropped for a guy with a double-barrelled surname,'" said Niren. He and his brother were unusual among their friends and family for supporting England; since hearing Rafiq's testimony, they have switched allegiance to India.

Crouch End recently had its own encounter with cricket's "zero tolerance" approach to racism. Last summer, one of their players was verbally abused during a cup match in Surrey. A racial slur from the boundary was captured on the video feed of the game, and there was further abuse online. When the organisers investigated and found there was no case to answer, Crouch End escalated their complaint to the ECB. A confidential mediation process was arranged, with a resolution that the club still finds unsatisfactory.

"Hiren said that there was no point reporting it, and he's been correct, because as far as I'm aware, they've faced no sanction," said Crouch End's secretary, Simon Tanner. "And it was a trope that started the whole thing off – the idea that Asian players cheat, that they claim bumped catches." The ECB told the *New Statesman*: "We condemn any form of discrimination, and are working hard to make our game a more welcoming and inclusive one. It was agreed that this complaint should be referred to Sport Resolutions, an independent dispute service, who appointed an arbitrator. They issued a judgment and imposed a sanction they deemed appropriate."

Crouch End's rapid rise through the Middlesex league had caused resentment long before the club lifted the trophy last year. Its white wicketkeeper, Jac Cleaver, was asked: "Surely you can't enjoy playing with these guys?" Rivals began rumours that its success was not legitimate, calling it a "brown envelope club" (one that pays its players – a practice strictly forbidden in the amateur leagues). "People say, 'Yeah, I might leave my club and join yours, how much are you offering?'" said Desai. "We get it all the time."

Omar Khan, who became Crouch End's director of cricket in 2010, told me he was tired of the suspicion and resentment. He is proud of the club's integrated community: about two-fifths white, two-fifths Asian and the remainder other ethnicities, including a strong Afro-Caribbean contingent. "My response is: have you asked yourself the real

reason why we've done what we've done? We've got 20 to 30 lads, predominantly from ethnic minorities, who have not felt welcome in other clubs. Look at Aparajit – he's probably the best spinner in the league, and he's nearly 40 years old. I find it unbelievable that a guy who's played all his league cricket in this country, in London, has never been picked up by his county."

One Saturday in mid-June, I watched three Crouch End teams in simultaneous league action at the Cot. The second XI was racking up the runs against Highgate, while the thirds had a late-innings wobble against North London. The firsts put on a commanding performance against Ealing, one of the largest and most established London clubs. Wandering between the matches, the difference between the Crouch End teams and their opposition was notable. Ealing's home ground is 15 minutes from Southall, the London suburb home to more Indians than anywhere else in the UK, but that day's team was entirely white.

Out in the middle, Pratik Patel – a former Ealing member – was smashing fours and sixes. He reached 101 not out, taking Crouch End to a win by 39 runs. Meanwhile, there was news: Middlesex scouts had begun attending their games, and even offered a trial to one young player (ironically, it was their Australian player-coach, who has a British passport).

The county's former director of cricket, Angus Fraser, who now oversees Middlesex's academy and youth squads, had been in touch. "We're aware that we need to do more," Fraser told me. "And we're trying to. We've brought more non-white coaches into the system. We're educating coaches so they're more culturally aware of the behaviours of players and parents."

Khan welcomed this: he is convinced that a cultural reserve is held against his Asian players, who can appear less sociable in a dressing room setting. "We constantly hear: 'Yeah, he can play, not sure about the personality, though.' A lot of our lads are fairly quiet. They're not going drinking, they're not boisterous, and we're told, 'I'm not sure they're going to fit in.'"

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It is a question of expectation versus accommodation, of what we consider "Englishness" to be

It is a question of expectation versus accommodation, of what we consider "Englishness" to be. Three decades after the notorious Tebbit test, when the Conservative minister Norman Tebbit suggested nationhood could be determined by whether someone of Asian heritage supports England, cricket is still circling the same questions. Must players conform to a 1950s vision of what English cricket should be?

Last year, on the eve of Euro 2020, which was delayed for a year by the pandemic, the England football manager Gareth Southgate showed another way forward. In an open letter ("Dear England"), he condemned the racism his players had faced and articulated a more inclusive patriotism: "We have a desire to protect our values and traditions – as we should – but that shouldn't come at the expense of introspection and progress."

Stephen Fry, the incoming president of the MCC, has expressed similar sentiments, praising the Lord's Eton-Harrow fixture as "a terrific tradition" while arguing that cricket must create new ones: "[The game] developed as a pastime for the working man. It needs to recover some of that"; "It's not a 'woke' question: it's about making cricket better."

The ECB says meaningful change is happening. Since Rafiq's testimony, progress on its 12-point action plan has included a new whistle-blowing procedure and increased board diversification, as well as a review of dressing-room culture. An anti-discrimination unit has been formed, and there is fresh funding for the Ace programme and coaching bursaries. This increased scrutiny is having an effect. In May Essex County Cricket Club was fined £50,000 for racist language used by its then chair at a 2017 meeting.

But in late July, Rafiq said he felt nothing had changed: "The ECB is not fit for purpose, simple as that. We need a total clear-out. Cricket is too much of a boys' network: we need government to get involved, and an independent regulator, because the game can't be trusted to regulate itself."

Later this year the ECB's Independent Commission for Equity will report its findings, and cricket – a game Khan described as "institutionally racist", and Shah called "institutionally classist" – will once again attempt to remake itself. It won't be easy. At Lord's, the MCC will host a special general meeting, called by a small cadre of irate members, to demand a vote on the decision to replace the Eton-Harrow fixture. The private club has committed to making cricket a sport for everyone – but there are some who don't plan on ceding their privilege any time soon. ●

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*Emma John is a writer, broadcaster and the author of "Following On: A Memoir of Teenage Obsession and Terrible Cricket" (Bloomsbury)*

# From hillbilly to Capitol Hill

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JD Vance's memoir of his impoverished childhood was a bestseller. Once a Trump critic, he is now an ultra-conservative with Senate ambitions. Is he really the future of the Republican Party?

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By Sarah Baxter

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Step one: attend an Ivy League university and edit a prestigious law journal. Step two: write a lyrical memoir about growing up in challenging family circumstances. Step three: become a senator for a Midwestern state. Step four: become president of the United States. This was Barack Obama's trajectory. Could it also be that of JD Vance?

Vance went to Yale Law School (not Harvard, Obama's alma mater) and is running for senator in November's midterm elections in his home state of Ohio (not Illinois) on the Republican ticket, but the pattern is startlingly familiar. The rookie politician lacks Obama's smooth oratorical gifts, but he is still young – he'll be 38 on 2 August – and has cosmic ambitions.

In 2016, Vance's memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy*, found immediate success. It describes in

affecting detail growing up in Middletown, Ohio, with his heroin-addicted mother, who brought a stream of new "stepdads" home, and his fierce grandmother, Mamaw, the rock of the family with her Kentucky roots. She taught the young JD to stand up for himself and succeed at school. More broadly, *Hillbilly Elegy* took a compassionate, but clear-eyed, look at the economically depressed white community he grew up with. Published in June, it also caught the political mood, coinciding with Donald Trump winning the Republican nomination for the 2016 presidential election. The book was far more successful than the initial edition of Obama's *Dreams from My Father*, and it was turned into a Netflix film in 2020, directed by Ron Howard and starring Glenn Close and Amy Adams.

Even before he was a bestselling author,

Vance had forged a lucrative career. Four years in the marines led to university in Ohio followed by law school at Yale. After leaving education in 2013, Vance worked for a venture capital firm in California owned by the Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel (named Mithril Capital, after the elvish metal in *The Lord of the Rings*). Shortly after the publication of his memoir, Vance left to found a non-profit organisation in 2017, dedicated to combating opioid abuse in Ohio, as well as his own private equity firm, Narya Capital (another JRR Tolkien reference). Two years later he moved with his wife, Usha – whom he met at Yale and is the daughter of Indian immigrants – and their young children to Cincinnati, living on a street named after William Taft, the 27th president of the US.

Was it a sign of greater ambitions? At the time, Vance told the press he was moving closer to his family roots and his mother, Bev, but in July last year he finally announced he was running for the Senate. He held his campaign launch event at a factory in Middletown, an explicit appeal to the working-class vote. In his launch speech he declared: "Every issue I believe traces back to this fact: on the one hand, the elites in the ruling class in this country are robbing us blind, and on the other, if you dare to complain about it, you are a bad person."

"He's the real deal," his friend Rod Dreher, a conservative writer and senior editor at the *American Conservative* magazine, told me. "I look for him to get to the Senate and become a national voice in short order. The GOP is desperately in need of visionary leadership." An orthodox Christian, Dreher attended Vance's baptism into the Catholic Church in 2019. "I think JD's conversion to Catholicism was primarily intellectual," he told me. "He has always believed in God, but didn't have much formation as a young man."

"Will he run for president?" asked Dreher. "God, I hope so."

Vance has not even won Ohio yet. The polls show he faces a tough Senate race, and he did not distinguish himself during the primary campaign. It's still unclear whether swing voters, or even Republicans, fully trust him. In 2016, the shape-shifting Vance was damning about Trump, telling National Public Radio he couldn't "stomach" the guy. "I think he's noxious and he's leading the white working class to a very dark place." By April this year, he was describing Trump on the campaign stump in Marion, Ohio, as "a great president", adding, "When the facts change, you gotta change your mind."

Loaded with "Thielbucks" from Thiel's \$10m super-Pac (political action committee), Vance still only managed to scrape through



From publisher's advance to "Vote Vance": the would-be senator at a hotel in Columbus, Ohio, March 2017

the Republican primary on 4 May with a slender 32 per cent of the vote. But a win is a win. "They wanted to write a story that this campaign would be the death of Donald Trump's America First agenda," Vance crowed in his primary victory speech. "Ladies and gentlemen, it ain't the death of the America First agenda."

Reed Galen, a founder of the anti-Trump Pac the Lincoln Project, composed of both former and current Republicans, said: "It's very simple. Vance is a very smart guy who decided to take the easy path and go for the full Trump base. He did it without compunction or a second thought because he understands that the people he grew up with and raised him don't want empathy. They want anger."

Those close to him have commented on the shift as well. "He looks different," an unnamed law-school friend told the *Washington*

*Post* in January, noting Vance's new beard. "He's going for a severe masculinism thing. He looks like Donald Trump Jr."

Channelling Trump has perhaps helped Vance in his political ascent; it at least earned him the former president's endorsement. But it is not the summit of his ambition. "He isn't Maga any more, he's Ultra-Maga," Galen warned, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "Ultra-Maga

**"He's going for a severe masculinism thing – he looks like Donald Trump Jr"**

has gone past Trump. It's more extreme. That's where Vance is. He is a might-makes-right, America First, isolationist, Charles Lindbergh kind of guy." Galen thinks Vance has his sights on the White House: "Absolutely, 100 per cent I think he wants to run for president."

Vance has become part of a rising New Right circle of politicians and thinkers who have embraced a neo-reactionary (or "NRx") form of politics. This alt-right group regards the governing US establishment as a "regime" run by elites that is ripe for dismantlement. The growing movement is also boosted by a collection of journals which promote its ideas, including Dreher's *American Conservative*, the quarterly *American Affairs* and the religious publication *First Things*. ▶

## The NS Profile

◀ One of Vance's leading allies includes Blake Masters, the 35-year-old president of the Thiel Foundation, who is running for senator in Arizona, peddles electoral-fraud lies and has cited the Unabomber as one of his intellectual influences. Masters also vociferously opposes same-sex marriage. (Though he's backing Masters, Thiel himself is gay and married to a man.)

The group is also associated with Curtis Yarvin, a 49-year-old reactionary blogger known for his concept of "the Cathedral", which describes the matrix of liberal institutions and media supposedly forcing a liberal ideology on America. Yarvin has also argued for a Caesar-like "national CEO, what's called a dictator" or, more recently, a monarch to take over the republic.

Vance has already proposed a version of Yarvin's much-touted policy known as *Age – Retire All Government Employees*. Interviewed at the annual National Conservatism conference (NatCon) in Orlando last November, Vance told a *Vanity Fair* writer he would advise Trump, if he became president again in 2024, to "fire every single mid-level bureaucrat, every civil servant in the administrative state, replace them with our people" – and defy the courts to enforce it. "This is a description, essentially, of a coup," the writer concluded.

Dreher was at the same NatCon conference. The "new thought movement", as he calls the New Right, thinks of itself as a broad church. "The nature of the fight in front of us now is such that we can't afford to be over-prissy about our allies," he said. "I think Curtis Yarvin's monarchy ideas are bonkers, but you know what? He's absolutely on to something real with his concept of the Cathedral."

Dreher said that Vance and Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor tipped as a presidential contender, are the future. "It's arguable that their ideological trajectory would not be possible without Trump – and I give Trump credit for that – but Trumpism has no future unless it trades in Trump for acolytes who are actually good at politics, and who prefer governing to tweeting," he said.

"Watching the rise of people like JD Vance, Blake Masters and Ron DeSantis – well, they give me hope." We are a long way from Obama's rhetoric of hope; it is more a case of Silicon Valley's "move fast and break things" maxim moving into politics.

Yet does Vance really have the political gifts, stamina and broad reach to succeed as a front-line politician? He is siding with some divisive allies. At the Claremont Institute in California, an abrasive hothouse of the New Right where the country's deepening divisions are regularly debated, Vance delivered an alarmingly martial, almost Bolshevik lecture on "woke capital" in May 2021.

Evoking the threat of civil war between red and blue states, Vance told his audience: "It may not be as bad as it was in the 1860s, but we are going through a fiery trial. The people in this room are the people who are going to be in the vanguard of a conservative movement that fights back against its enemies instead of just taking it.

"If our enemies are using guns and bazookas, then we had better fight back with more than wet noodles. We need to use the same means if we are actually going to win this fight. And I'm not in this to lose; I'm in this to win."

All this sound and fury is profoundly alienating to the admirers Vance won with *Hillbilly Elegy*. In 2016 I gave his memoir a five-star review in the *Sunday Times*, describing it as the "political book of the year". Liberals in particular hailed Vance as the astute prophet of Trump's runaway success with the left-behind, white working class in rural and declining industrial America. The timing of its 2016 publication was fortuitous. The Ohio police had just released a shocking picture of a four-year-old boy sitting in the

back of a car, his parents slumped unconscious in the front, after overdosing on heroin and painkillers. The country's opioid crisis was escalating, and Vance summed up Trump succinctly as "cultural heroin" for his tribe.

In his memoir, Vance recounts how his grandmother left the Appalachian mountains of Kentucky in the 1950s with her teenage husband for the steel mills of Middletown. It was possible then to bring up a family on a single working-class income, which Vance still touts as the masculine ideal. But it is not a path he follows at home, gaining him a reputation for hypocrisy. His wife, Usha, works for Munger, Tolles & Olson – one of the most successful and prestigious "white-shoe" law firms in the country. She was also a Gates scholar at Clare College, Cambridge, earning an MPhil in early-modern British history, and has clerked for two conservative Supreme Court justices.

Usha was born in California to parents who moved from India to the US. The film version of *Hillbilly Elegy* makes much of the way the couple bonded as outsiders while students at elitist Yale. It has become part of Vance's political shtick to hark back to the past. "I just want normal Americans to know they still have a voice in this country," he told Tucker Carlson, the Fox News host, last year when he announced his Senate run on air. "I have two boys. I love those kids. I want them to live in the same great country as I did." (The Vances had a third child, Mirabel, in December.)

Carlson, who frequently promotes Vance



Heir style: JD Vance (left) at a town hall with Donald Trump Jr in Ohio, April 2022

MARK PETERSON/REDUX/EYEVINE

on his top-rated show, spoke admiringly about his combination of high- and low-brow political savvy: “This is not flattery. I don’t think I know anybody who understands both worlds as well as you do.” Dreher also credits Vance’s ability to balance his past and present. “What I admire about JD is that he managed to overcome his traumatic young life and make a success of himself, but stayed true and loyal to his people without sentimentalising them.”

Vance’s political rhetoric is deeply nostalgic, about the return of the traditional values he grew up with. Yet his grandmother, Mamaw first got pregnant at 13 and doused her drunken husband, Papaw, with fuel and set fire to him when she could no longer put up with his violence and alcoholism (he survived). On his campaign website, Vance boasts that Mamaw’s “tough love and discipline kept him on the straight and narrow. That, or maybe the fact that she owned 19 handguns.”

Is this the lost Eden he wants America to return to? Perhaps it is. Vance has heaped scorn on the “childless left” and cheered when the Supreme Court threw out *Roe vs Wade* in June. To his satisfaction, Ohio now bans abortion after six weeks of pregnancy with no exemptions for rape and incest. “It’s not whether a woman should be forced to bring a child to term,” Vance told a reporter when asked about the experimental ban on abortion in Texas last year. “It’s whether a child should be allowed to live, even though the circumstances of that child’s birth are somehow inconvenient or a problem for society.”

Shortly after the Supreme Court’s verdict in June, a ten-year-old rape victim from Ohio, barely past her sixth week of pregnancy, was forced to travel to Indiana for an abortion. Her very existence was falsely mocked as fake news by the right. At the time of writing, Vance has not commented on her case.

Yet Vance’s tone has become notably meaner and harsher. The empathy in *Hillbilly Elegy* has given way to the trolling mockery adopted by the alt-right, which he regularly indulges on Twitter. “If your world-view tells you that it’s bad for women to become mothers but liberating for them to work 90 hours a week in a cubicle at the *New York Times* or Goldman Sachs, you’ve been had,” Vance tweeted after *Roe vs Wade* was overturned. This was rich, critics fumed, coming from a millionaire venture capitalist.

Many old-school Republicans also winced at his tone-deaf tweet on the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, when a video of him saying, “I don’t really care what happens to Ukraine one way or the other,” was posted on Twitter. His position on the war

## “If your world-view says it’s liberating for women to work 90 hours a week, you’ve been had”

has not changed. The following month, he stuck up for Marjorie Taylor Greene, the far-right Republican congresswoman, who had been criticised for attending a white-nationalist conference, where the baby-faced fascist commentator Nick Fuentes cheered on Vladimir Putin. She is “my friend and did nothing wrong”, Vance said at an Ohio Senate debate.

On a recent trip to Ohio, it was apparent how ugly the political campaigning had become. A large sign emblazoned with “F\*\*\* Biden” could be spotted in a residential neighbourhood, where children pass by every day. The race is tight between Vance and Tim Ryan, a moderate Democrat from the industrial Youngstown region. Two July polls commissioned by the Democrats showed Ryan leading Vance in Ohio by two and nine percentage points respectively, but the outcome is uncertain given rising inflation and Joe Biden’s poor approval ratings. Trump won the former swing state for the Republicans by eight points in 2020.

Dreher is bullish about Vance’s prospects, noting that the Senate hopeful’s working-class background has enabled him to understand something important about low-income, non-college-educated America. “JD has pointed out that the culture war is really a class war – a truth that needed saying clearly. Americans aren’t used to the language of class conflict, but JD Vance, the hillbilly who went to Yale, understands how these dynamics work better than just about anybody in national politics.”

Could JD Vance go all the way to the White House? He sounds increasingly as though he wants to. “It’s time to fight back,” he told Carlson on Fox News at the launch of his political campaign. “If you’re not willing to wade through a bit of crap to save this country, then you’re not willing to stand up on the big stage – and I am.” His embrace of the New Right makes him dangerous, but leaves questions unanswered: who is the real JD Vance? Is he a uniter or divider? A cynic or true conservative believer? Until he knows himself, he may not get to the Senate. ●

THE NS

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MARI FOUZ



# My abortion showed me that women in Britain are far from free

By Johanna Thomas-Corr

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On 24 June, when *Roe vs Wade* was overturned, taking away half the American population's bodily autonomy and destroying any hope of women's economic parity, I found myself in a spiral of futile rage familiar to many women and girls. I kept thinking about what it would have been like if someone had walked into the abortion clinic where I had sat 16 years ago and announced that all terminations were permanently cancelled. That I would now have to go through with an unwanted pregnancy unless I was prepared – and had the means – to fly hundreds of miles. In which case, here was a phone number, a web link, a vague rumour of someone somewhere who might be able to help. I've lived in the US. I know that this journey would have left me feeling desperate and alone.

Like many women, I shared my fury on social media and then read the calm-down-

dear takes from British men, wondering why we were being so emotional, since abortion is effectively a political non-issue in the UK. As if such takes aren't themselves rooted in emotion; as if the decision by five Supreme Court justices wasn't entirely based on emotion!

The difference, for women, is that it's more than our feelings on the line – it is our bodies, too. But according to the Tory MP Danny Kruger – whose own mother, the TV chef Prue Leith, has spoken of her backstreet abortion – women shouldn't have “the absolute right to bodily autonomy”. If you have any idea of what carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term and then giving birth involves, I'm not sure how you can remain impassive while reading about any country in which religious fundamentalists have reduced women to second-class citizens overnight – let alone a country as familiar to us as the US.

And while we British like to congratulate ourselves on our liberal enlightenment on the issue, my experience of abortion taught me that our attitudes aren't so advanced. Although terminations are freely available on the NHS (in theory, at least), having one is still deeply taboo, bound up in shame and judgement that owe far more to entrenched religious beliefs than medical realities. Americans may scream loudly about abortion, in ways that make us recoil, but in Britain, the impulse to control, coerce and judge women manifests itself more subtly.

It's not so well remembered now, but in the late years of Margaret Thatcher's government, abortion was a live debate in the UK. I remember my mother – then a local councillor – addressing hundreds of campaigners at political rallies when the Liberal MP David Alton put forward a motion to cut the legal limit for terminations from 28 to 18 weeks, first in 1987 and then again in 1990.

Back then, my mum was described in the local press as a “pro-abortionist”. She was certainly pro-choice. That's what was written on the T-shirts she wore and the banners she and her friends carried on demonstrations where they chanted: “NOT THE CHURCH, NOT THE STATE, WOMEN MUST DECIDE THEIR FATE.”

I was only nine years old in 1990 but I vividly recall the looks of disgust we received from some passers-by. I felt embarrassed but I also admired my mum's forcefulness. She explained to me that she had come to feel passionately about the issue after accompanying a college friend to an illegal abortion before the law was changed in 1967. A few years later, I wrote about the subject at school. A girl in my class wouldn't stop going on about the “evil” of “killing unborn babies”, and it had left me feeling helpless and incensed.

Reading back through my old school project recently, I was surprised at how diligently the 13-year-old me had tried to weigh up arguments. I had Pritt-Sticked into my folder newspaper clippings: a profile of a woman who had an abortion, regretted it, and was subsequently calling for an outright ban; and articles about anti-abortion campaigners posting ghoulish models of 20-week old foetuses to MPs. At the end, there is my own anguished argument for a woman's right to choose. “No woman wants an abortion,” I wrote. “I would certainly not want to go through it myself but that is not to say that I wouldn't in a given situation. If I had a good reason to abort a child, then I probably would, but it would be very hard.”

When that moment did come, at the age of 25, my physical and emotional distress were not eased by my certainty on the issue – nor by my mum's commitment to women's ▶

## Personal Story

◀ rights. Did I have a “good reason” to do it? Not according to some people. I lost several close friendships within weeks of the termination, which went wrong and landed me in hospital. “Well, at least you look thinner now,” one had said, when she saw me a few days after the first procedure. I learned then that the same people who will sob with you through Mike Leigh’s abortion drama *Vera Drake* might also stop answering your calls when you find yourself dealing with an unsuccessful termination.

It didn’t help that, two weeks after my abortion, I opened the *Guardian* to see a comment piece by the journalist Mary Kenny that began: “I once knew a girl who had an abortion at a cushy clinic in Regent’s Park, where they provide flowers and champagne along with ‘the procedure’. She was treated so royally she came out saying, ‘When can I have another?’”

As I read the column – which went on to

insist that some women were becoming addicted to having abortions, much like heroin users – I felt like I was on fire. I couldn’t imagine how I would ever put out the flames. That “cushy Regent’s Park clinic” was where – after several failed attempts to get an NHS abortion – I had my procedure. When I explained that I couldn’t produce the right utilities bills in time to get an early-stage abortion, and nor did I have access to a fax machine (that wasn’t my employer’s), my future mother-in-law offered the use of her credit card. Her loan was one of the most surprising acts of female solidarity I have ever experienced. But at the clinic, there were no flowers or champagne. All I remember is a windowless waiting room, and women of all ages and races, some looking focused, some relieved, some dejected.

**M**y abortion happened in June 2006, 16 years ago. This is the first time I have openly discussed it, partly because for many years, I feared the judgement, the professional fallout, the broken relationships. Devastated at being abandoned by friends over the issue, I kept it hidden from one my best friends, a Jehovah’s Witness, because I couldn’t face losing her too. Once, when I had confessed a secret to her, she had said: “Phew! I thought you were going to tell me you had had an abortion. Because then we couldn’t go on being friends.” A therapist I saw for a short while suggested I just tell her I’d suffered a miscarriage, but this felt false. Of the friends with whom I had been – perhaps foolishly – completely honest, one or two worried I might “regret” my decision or feel “guilt” over it.

It all contributed to a feeling that I was not “deserving” of an abortion. I was in a long-term, stable relationship with my university boyfriend (now my husband and father of my two children). We had been living together for three years and were the same age as his parents when they had their first child. When my boyfriend told his mum I was pregnant, she could hardly contain her delight – only to have to hide her disappointment when he said we weren’t planning to go through with it. The truth was, neither of us felt ready for a baby.

Now, as thousands of women come forward with their own abortion stories, I have different misgivings about telling mine. Does my experience serve any purpose? Will it change anybody’s mind? Is it extreme enough? Or, conversely, is it positive enough? What if it puts women and girls off having an abortion?

I now realise that for the past 16 years I have been subconsciously crafting my own sympathetic abortion story – so that when I

eventually came to tell it, I would come across as responsible and relatable. A good girl – like the one who carefully weighed up both sides in her school project. I would explain how the contraception failed, the morning-after pill failed and so – it turned out – did the medical procedure (though this may seem to strain credulity). I might tell you how several weeks later, I was found bleeding, quite dramatically, in the loos of a department store and taken in a taxi to hospital. Though I would of course spare you the nasty details.

Many of the personal stories that get told about abortion are stories of women’s pain and suffering. As with accounts of sexual abuse, we know that we must portray ourselves as good citizens, victims of circumstance. While these stories can be valuable in highlighting how difficult it is to access reproductive care, they feed into a narrative that says abortion is justified for certain patients and not others. Less often do we hear from women who had abortions freely and easily, without ambivalence or apology, because it was their right to do so. Plenty of women aren’t traumatised by their experience of abortion because they see it as a healthy choice. We should hear from them.

**S**o, no, I don’t take abortion for granted. But even if I did, even if I swaggered into the clinic – as Mary Kenny suggested – thinking this was some kind of “cushy” option, that would have been fine, too. In fact, flippancy about pregnancy is surely one compelling reason to end it. A person’s control over whether and when they have a child leads to healthy children, healthy parents and healthy families. I am happy that things turned out for us the way they did.

I promised my mother, who died at the end of last year, that I would one day write about my abortion, though neither of us realised how politically pressing the issue would become. She knew she was leaving this world with a lot for women to still achieve but she thought her generation had at least taken care of this issue.

We are lucky that religious extremists are not as empowered in the UK as they are in the US. But we are kidding ourselves if we think that the matter is settled. The overturning of *Roe vs Wade* has already emboldened those people who stand outside British clinics harassing and shaming the women who go inside. These are women of all kinds. Your neighbour, your boss, the woman who sells you a flat white in the mornings, your sister, your daughter, your mother, perhaps even your wife.

Women seek abortion every hour of every day. Nice girls, too. In the end, the only question that matters is: can they do it safely and without intimidation? ●



# BRUNO MAÇÃES



## Power Politics Why intellectuals like Jordan Peterson are failing to tell the truth about Russia's war

In October 1943, as the fate of the Second World War started to turn, the great German writer and intellectual Thomas Mann addressed an illustrious group of lawmakers, journalists and tycoons at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. Perhaps his audience expected him to be subtle and ironic, like every genius is supposed to be. Mann quickly disabused them of the notion. Speaking to them that day was not the novelist of many voices and hidden meanings but someone certain of a few truths and willing to go into battle for them.

In certain conditions, Mann said, it is the duty of intellectuals to renounce their freedom for the sake of freedom. He would not be questioning the values of freedom and justice. He was going to affirm them. It was his "duty to find the courage to affirm ideas over which the intellectual snob thinks that he can shrug his shoulders".

The speech seems to have been written yesterday and to speak of the war in Ukraine. We, too, are surrounded by intellectual snobs who think that values such as freedom or justice are boring and banal. And perhaps they were, before young Ukrainians started to die for them, and to die for the freedom of the intellectual snob to continue mocking them.

During the past few months there have been those, such as the American political scientist John Mearsheimer, who have felt comfortable telling Ukrainians that the way to defend themselves against Russia is to lay down their weapons. The Canadian intellectual Jordan Peterson has argued that Russia invaded Ukraine to stop American "wokeism". The equally anti-woke US commentator Michael Tracey is

still suggesting Russia did not bomb Odesa, even after the Kremlin claimed credit for it.

There have been dozens of German intellectuals writing letters on how peace is better than war. Jürgen Habermas, the ultimate intellectual snob, has reflected with amusement on the childishness of the Ukrainians, who still believe that wars can be won. Silicon Valley luminaries have mocked the war as the new "current thing", a form of virtue signalling used for social control. I have even heard from a prominent American conservative that he would be secretly cheering for Russia because he is against trans rights.

Intellectuals are not always required to take a side in the great battles of our time. In many cases they are required *not* to take a side. When political tribes fight about matters that can only be described as trifles, intellectuals should stay aloof and, if possible, bring their irony to bear on the dispute. But, as Mann pointed out, the moment arrives when a battle becomes personal for the intellectual as well.

In the Ukraine war intellectuals are face to face with their oldest enemy. This is a battle one can join with no ambivalence. It is a battle between those who create culture and those who aim only to destroy. In this case, the role of the intellectual is to inspire his or her society with the will to

**This is a moment  
of violence against  
culture, darkness  
against light**

fight for sacred values. There is a moment when even intellectuals have to realise everything they stand for is at stake: when violence is pitted against culture, darkness against light, destruction against history, imbecility against mind.

This is also the moment when the difference between the intellectual and the academic is most acutely felt. The academic is, in a way, lost to the world. We have seen many examples during the war, among which Mearsheimer is only the most spectacular. The academic lives among theories and concepts. To quote from an imaginary dialogue between a Western academic and the Russian president tweeted by the writer John Ganz:

you: noooo its essentialismoooo to say  
russia is calling on its imperialistttt  
pastttt  
putin: I'm like peter the great in this bitch

Ganz's tweet is satire, but Vladimir Putin expressed something close to this in a meeting with young Russian entrepreneurs on 9 June.

Intellectuals lose interest in simple truths because everyone has access to those. Conquest and war? Too primitive. Better to develop abstract theories, removed from the hustle and bustle of politics, which reflect real intellectual power and can remain the preserve of the expert class.

The problem, of course, is that the world is often a lot less subtle than theories, and in order to understand it one has to make a deliberate effort not to be subtle. Very few manage to do this. For many intellectuals in the past it took years or even decades before they learned how to be as naive as the events around them. Like George Orwell, they ended up feeling much closer to the world but irremediably disconnected from their peers.

What did Orwell conclude? He was not particularly original in thinking that the role of the intellectual is to stand up for truth, but he added two further considerations which have urgent relevance given the war in Ukraine. First, there is no point in defending the truth in public if one does not use the whole arsenal of weapons without which it cannot survive: passion, skill, courage and, if need be, aggression. Second, there is no such thing as standing up for truth unless one has made the difficult effort of looking for it, sometimes on the front lines. The right to speak for truth is not granted but won.

More than ever, we need those who can tell us the truth about the war. The wisdom of the decisions we make in the next few weeks depends on this rare knowledge. ●

# Afghanistan after the fall

## A year since the Taliban took Kabul, they have learned that they cannot shut out the West

**By John Simpson**

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It was the most shameful capitulation of its kind in my lifetime. Worse than Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. Worse than Phnom Penh in April 1975; worse than Saigon, only 13 days later. Unlike those other military defeats, where governments and armies were out-thought and out-fought, the fall of Kabul was an entirely unforced error.

President Joe Biden actively chose to abandon a thriving city that was wholly dependent on American support. If it hadn't been for that, Kabul would still be in the hands of President Ashraf Ghani. Biden had months to think about it, and plenty of people tried to dissuade him, but he took no notice. It is scarcely surprising that, as a result, Vladimir Putin decided it would be safe for Russia to invade Ukraine only six months later, and China increased the level of its threat to Taiwan.

And so those dreadful scenes at Hamid

Karzai International airport continued for days on end, as panicking crowds, desperate to escape, blocked the airport road, while mobs tens of thousands strong besieged the terminal building. People fainted in the heat and were trodden underfoot. Babies and young children were passed over the heads of the crowd to the protection of Westerners, never to be seen by their families again. Many British and American soldiers who tried to keep order at the airport are said to be still receiving counselling. "I'll never get those screams out of my head," says a cameraman who was there.

The horrors worsened. An Islamic State volunteer worked his way into the depth of the crowd and detonated his suicide vest, killing at least 140 people, including 13 Americans. Three days later, Afghan and US intelligence learned of another intended attack, and an American commander

ordered a drone strike against a white Toyota sedan whose driver had stopped off at what was thought to be an Isis safe house. A Hellfire missile hit the car as it headed for the airport. The seven children and three adults inside it died instantly. Three weeks later, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff admitted, "After deeper post-strike analysis, our conclusion is that innocent civilians were killed." No one was disciplined.

As the Taliban forces approached the outskirts of Kabul on 16 August, panic broke out in the city. The boss of one Western organisation yelled over and over that everyone had to get out. "Her eyes kind of glazed over. She was paralysed with fear," said one of her colleagues. But fear of what? It's true that the Taliban are deeply unreconstructed, and capable of ferocious violence; they executed government officials and soldiers on their



**Bread line: a young girl waits outside a bakery in Kabul, 31 January 2022. Afghanistan has relied on international aid to avert famine**

way to Kabul. But they weren't fanatics like, say, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, who crucified their captives, or the Shining Path in Peru, who skinned them alive, or Islamic State, who sawed off their prisoners' heads and filmed it in close-up. In fact, during those early days after the Taliban takeover, it was Islamic State members who were most at risk; the Taliban identified them as worse enemies than the Americans or British.

Directly after Kabul fell, a Taliban detachment headed for Pol-e-Charki gaol on the edge of town and massacred 150 Islamic State-Khorassan Province prisoners there, including the group's former leader, Abu Omar Khorassani. For the time being, officials of the former regime, women's rights campaigners, Westerners, former soldiers and everyone else who felt themselves to be targets were reasonably safe. The Taliban victory was so total – the Taliban com-

mander Mohammed Nasir Haqqani said that when his group reached the entrance to the city, there wasn't a single soldier or even policeman on guard there – that they had Kabul to themselves. Their difficulties were sorting out street patrols and trying to decide which government buildings to base themselves in. A senior Western aid worker who had the fortitude to stay now says there was a period of three months in which people could organise their escape.

**Biden believed the Afghan army was strong enough to stand on its own**

Ultimately, the responsibility for this humiliating episode lies with Donald Trump, who signed an irreflexive, principle-free agreement just to have something – anything – that looked like a foreign policy success before the 2020 election: every other possibility, from the Middle East to North Korea, had been a failure. Biden, when he came into office, could have dumped it. But he decided that his own standing would benefit more from sticking with the supposed peace deal than from continuing the war; though it wasn't much of a war, and if it was unwinnable, it was pretty much unloseable, at least as far as protecting Kabul was concerned.

Biden believed what his intelligence people told him: that the Afghan army was strong enough to stand on its own. It was the ultimate mistake. In a situation such as that in Afghanistan, where a foreign power has ▶

## World View

◀ overwhelming influence on the host government, the intelligence agencies usually depend on their local counterparts; and they have a vested interest in talking up the chances of the existing regime. In Iran in 1978-79, the CIA and MI6 kept assuring their governments that the Shah was safe, because Savak, Iran's intelligence service, told them so. In Afghanistan, only five days before the Taliban swept in, the CIA reported that Kabul would be safe until at least November. Why? Because the Afghan National Directorate of Security told them.

The city's sudden fall shouldn't have been such a surprise. Kabul had changed hands three times in the 19 years before 2021, and each time it happened with stunning speed and a minimum of fighting. True, after 2001 the Afghan armed forces had 20 years of training and state-of-the-art equipment from the West, but every time I went out with them on operations they were totally dependent on their Western advisers. Many officers were claiming pay for soldiers who, in Falstaffian style, didn't exist. It was an act of willing self-deception to believe they would fight alone if the Western powers pulled out, especially given the panicky way they left.

The US military left Bagram air-force base outside Kabul without informing General Asadullah Kohistani, the Afghan commander. He said he only found out hours afterwards, though looters moved in within minutes of the last American plane taking off at 3am. And if the Americans were flying out, abandoning three and a half million items of kit, what was there to keep the Afghan forces at their post? Only six weeks after the Americans made their moonlight flit from Bagram, Kabul fell.

It was an odd coalition that took power. Some senior Taliban figures spoke excellent English and seemed eminently reasonable. One still follows me on Twitter and rebukes me when I say something he doesn't like. There were top figures who had been on the negotiating team in Doha in 2020, and had convinced Trump's officials that they would scale down their campaign and do a deal with President Ghani's government. And then, of course, there were the mountain men, the kind of Taliban that journalists such as me were familiar with, who weren't accustomed to sleeping in houses and regarded women as being

only marginally more useful than donkeys.

Now, after a year, the regime has settled into shape. Some people in the government are reasonably approachable: a recent finance minister studied at the University of Illinois, for instance. But the Taliban in the streets can be pretty rough and unreconstructed, and they are the ones that the great majority of people have to face. Arrests, torture and murder, ordered by local commanders, are frequent. A former top government legal official who taught at Khost University was recently reported to have been killed by the Taliban.

No single description fits them all. My friend, the combat cameraman Peter Jovenal, is now a businessman trying to operate in Afghanistan; it's not easy. Last December, soon after we had a convivial dinner in Kabul, he and his associate went to look at the British ambassador's abandoned house; Peter thought he might rent it as an office. They took photos. Someone rang the police and they were arrested for spying – despite their letter of permission from the Ministry of Commerce. The police and security officials then tried to justify the arrests by inventing evidence. So far, so Taliban.

The British Foreign Office, with no real foothold in Kabul, had to start negotiating from scratch. Yet they found the Taliban easier to deal with than they'd expected. The commander of Peter's gaol had been a prisoner of the Americans in Guantánamo, and had been tortured for 15 years. Far from making him vindictive, his experiences determined him to treat his prisoners

properly. Peter had to beg his gaolers to feed him less, and the worst privation he suffered was that there were only *Harry Potter* books to read. His contacts in the Taliban government told him they were worried that China would try to take over Afghanistan, and were anxious to keep good relations with Britain. Peter and his colleague, plus several other Brits, were flown to London at the end of June.

The Taliban, though obsessively inward-looking, have learned the hard way that they need outside help. The threat of famine that hung over Afghanistan last winter was averted by the UN World Food Programme and organisations such as the International Rescue Committee. The earthquake near Khost in June, which killed at least a thousand, brought help from many countries. It is difficult to persuade the Taliban that women are not second-class citizens, that every country needs to educate its girls, that ethnic groups such as the mostly Shia Muslim Hazaras need the state's protection rather than persecution. But it's clear the Taliban are in Kabul to stay, at least for the next few years, and that they are open to negotiation. What happened in August 2021 was appalling. But having failed the people of Afghanistan so utterly last year, we mustn't simply turn our backs on them now. ●

*John Simpson is the BBC's world affairs editor. His TV show, "Unspun World", resumes on 7 September on BBC Two*



Back in charge: the Taliban flag-raising ceremony in Kabul, 31 March 2022

ALI KHARA / REUTERS

# JONATHAN LIEW



## Left Field

### The new Saudi-funded LIV tour lays bare what golf is: an elite club where all get rich

The year was 1968 and revolution was in the air. Golf had become rich on the television boom and money was flowing through the game like spring water. The Professional Golfers' Association of America (PGA) ran the sport and wanted to distribute the wealth among the small-time clubs and jobbing local professionals who formed the bulk of its membership. The top players argued that they were the ones generating the money, so they should decide where it went. All summer the game sizzled with revolt and fissure, breakaways and boycotts, accusations of greed and bad faith, lawyers suiting up on both sides.

But golf's first civil war was only tangentially about money. Really it was about control and power, about who owns sport and what its basic purpose should be. Ultimately, the players prevailed: when more than 100 of them decided to set up their own breakaway tour, the PGA had no option but to give in and hand them the keys to the sport. It was an admission that what the public craved was not lineage and tradition, but stars and spectacle. Or as Sam Gates, a lawyer representing the breakaway group, put it: "This is where the dancing girls are, isn't it?"

The PGA Tour, the entity that grew out of that player rebellion, conceived and built pretty much everything we think of as modern golf. The borderless global pageant. The multimillion-dollar jackpots. The unabashed affluence and avarice. Whooping crowds in tailored shorts, mini-metropolises of hospitality marquees and fleets of sponsored cars. The money now flows not like water but champagne. Mediocre players can become millionaires

without ever hoisting a trophy in their lives. Elite golf is an exclusive club where everyone gets rich. Everything was fine. And then LIV Golf came along.

The year is 2022 and revolution is in the air: talk of breakaways and bans, accusations of greed and blood money. LIV Golf is a new invitational golf tour funded by the bottomless pockets of Saudi Arabia's public investment vehicle, trying to poach pretty much every decent golfer on the planet. Phil Mickelson is on around \$200m just for turning up. Dustin Johnson, Brooks Koepka, Bryson DeChambeau and Sergio Garcia, household names and major champions, are all in. Henrik Stenson was warned that he would be stripped of the European Ryder Cup captaincy if he signed up. He signed up anyway.

What do the Saudis want from this? The usual answer is that it's all some grand geopolitical game, a means of deflecting scrutiny from their execrable human rights record. And yet to date perhaps the most enduring motif of LIV Golf has been the sight of squirming golfers being forced to answer pointed questions on public hangings and state violence. "Nobody here condones human rights violations," Mickelson insisted. Asked about how he felt acting as the public face of a regime accused of murdering the journalist

## Of Jamal Khashoggi's murder, Greg Norman told reporters, "We've all made mistakes"

Jamal Khashoggi, the former world No 1 Greg Norman replied: "We've all made mistakes." Naturally, LIV Golf is currently a men-only event.

But the brazenness is in many ways the point. As with the players' rebellion of the 1960s, LIV Golf is as much about power and prestige as it is about profit or PR. On some level you sense that Saudi Arabia relishes all this attention and takes a grotesque pride in facing down its critics then continuing regardless. Behind the mammoth pay cheques and the glib statements is an implied impregnability. You can write your screeds, it says. You can wave your white flag of moral outrage. But you can't prevent us from doing whatever we want.

Golf has proved the perfect vehicle for this show of strength. Again, the financial reward is only part of the story: most top golfers are already set up for life. The sport has long been realigned along the principle of money as a proxy for success, status, even virtue. Other sports have league tables and medal counts. Golf, by contrast, has a "money list", whereby the winner is simply the richest player at the end of the season. It will not surprise you to learn that one of the most vocal supporters of LIV Golf is Donald Trump, whose Miami course will host the \$80m series finale in October.

LIV Golf is by no means guaranteed to succeed on its own terms: it still has no conventional broadcast deal in the US or UK, and the threat of bans from major tournaments and the Ryder Cup has kept most of the leading PGA players onside. Some of the biggest names have been openly critical of it: Rory McIlroy, world No 1 Scottie Scheffler, Tiger Woods (who reportedly turned down an offer of almost \$1bn). And it is notable that the majority of the LIV rebels are either older players in gentle decline or young challengers yet to make their fortune. For now, most of the dancing girls are staying put.

But in another sense, it hardly matters. In theory, this would be the ideal juncture for golf to consider its role in the world: who it takes its money from, how to mitigate its impact on a planet where land and water are increasingly scarce, the way it celebrates and entrenches wealth and privilege. Instead, spooked by the threat of further defections, the PGA Tour is plotting major changes for 2023, with more prize money and eight lucrative new tournaments open only to the world's top 50 players. As it turns out, the new landscape will largely resemble the old: an exclusive club, where everyone gets rich. ●

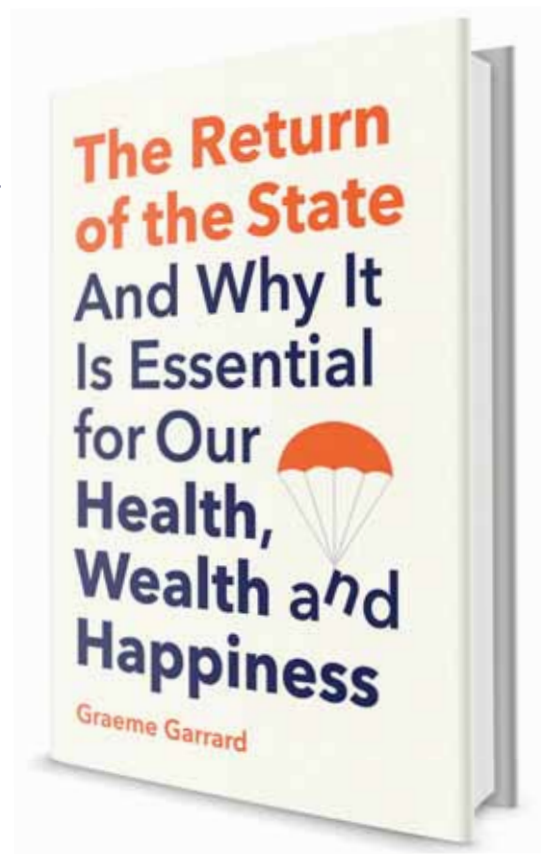
*Jonathan Liew is a sports writer at the Guardian*

‘A masterpiece of analysis...  
convincing and compelling’

**Danny Dorling**

‘A timely case for the  
necessity of restraining  
private power’

**Luke Savage**



**Out  
now**

Yale

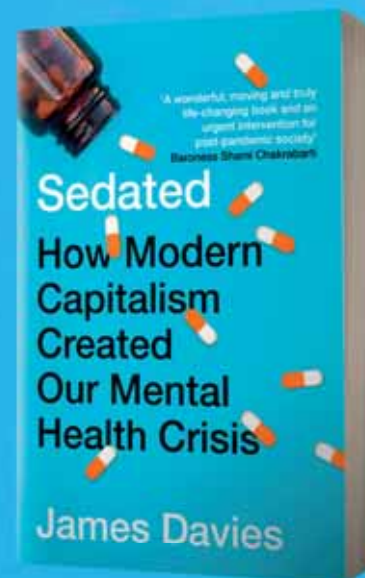
## We're in a mental health crisis. But can we fix it?

‘A polemic of great clarity that will make  
you feel at once angry and reassured’

*New Statesman*

‘An urgent intervention for  
post-pandemic society’

*Baroness Shami Chakrabarti*



**OUT NOW**





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## What will survive of Philip Larkin

Reflections on the poet's life, work and legacy, 100 years after his birth

Ann Thwaite

Wordplay, friendship and sweet sadness: having Philip to stay

I have been thinking about Philip Larkin a lot this year, 100 years after he was born and the year after Anthony Thwaite's death. The names of the poet and his poet-editor, my husband, are inextricably linked, whether I like it or not.

As a young producer at the BBC, Anthony had selected Philip Larkin for a European Service programme called *Younger British Poets of Today*. It included two of Philip's most loved poems, "Church Going" and "An Arundel Tomb", both written not long before. Their close friendship began on 2 July 1958 as they took a taxi after the recording to meet Kingsley Amis for a drink. As James Booth points out in his biography of Larkin, the pair's very different political views "never hindered their relationship".

Anthony's interest in Larkin had begun in 1954, when he ordered a copy of the pamphlet *XX Poems* from Blackwell's in Oxford while he was still an undergraduate. Our interest increased when, in 1956, *The Less Deceived* arrived in Tokyo, where we were both teaching.

As a literary editor, later, Anthony published many

He was not a miserable Scrooge but kind, thoughtful and excellent company

of Philip's poems, but he was also in the position to commission regular reviews of books he thought Philip might want to read. In the *New Statesman* of 14 March 1969, for instance, Larkin reviewed Christopher Ricks's splendid edition of Tennyson's poems: Paul Johnson, the editor at the time, thought it one of the best reviews they had ever printed. It can be read now in *Required Writing*, dedicated by Philip to Anthony.

Forty years ago Anthony edited a book for Faber to mark Larkin's 60th birthday. He ended his introduction: "The work remains unassailable except by those who look for something in poetry other than the virtue of startling truth, memorability, skill and poignancy embodied in Philip Larkin's poems." Anthony denied his intention was to tell readers that "Larkin is really much nicer, much more normal, much more like us, than both his admirers and his detractors have established".

Anthony was (long before Philip's death and the subsequent publication of his letters and Andrew Motion's biography) facing the suspicion that many readers, who didn't know the man, had in their heads the image of a misogynist, a miserable Scrooge reminiscent of the joyless bachelor in Larkin's own "Mr Bleaney". Later, worse words would be added which I will not repeat. I will instead remember with pleasure Philip's warm friendship with RK Biswas, the Indian scholar, and his long, good relationships with women other than his lovers. We always found Philip Larkin kind, thoughtful and far more than just excellent company.

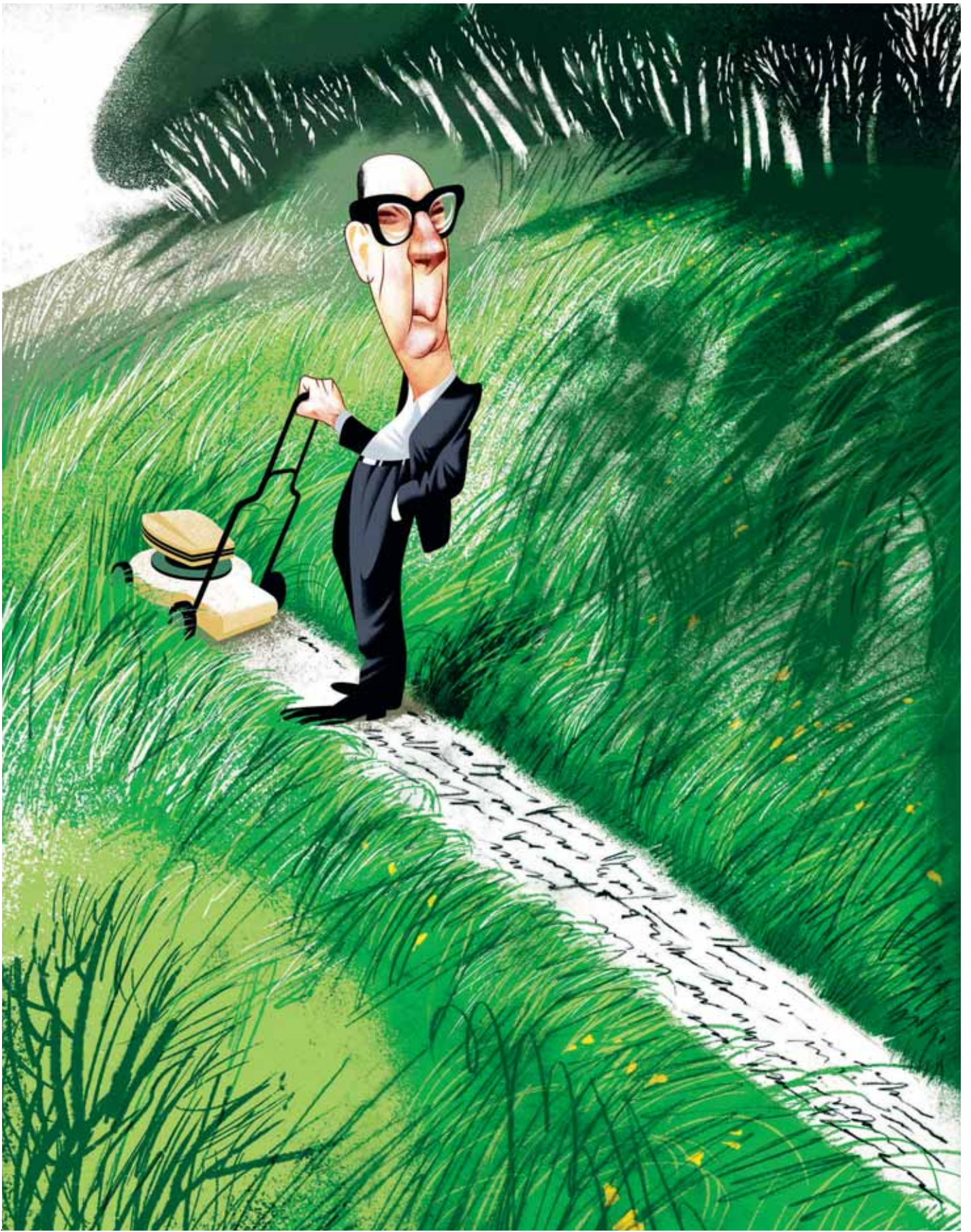
I have an almost relevant example of how letters can betray their writers. How differently men (perhaps only men) can write on the same day, what different sides of themselves they can show to different correspondents.

When I was planning a book for Anthony's own 50th birthday in 1980 Larkin and Amis were among the poets I had invited to contribute. Philip took particular trouble, writing out his gloomy "The View" (then unpublished), and adding at the bottom: "– but it wd have been a lot worse without you, dear Anthony." He wrote to me: "As you can see, that goes nearly into the binding at the left. I'm afraid I've spoilt it... If so, send me another sheet of the splendid paper & I'll redo it."

He wrote this on 9 February 1980, two months before Kingsley Amis wrote to him complaining about my request: "SODDING CHEEK I thought it was." This was published by Zachary Leader in his edition of Amis's letters in 2000, on the page after his letter to me written on the same day. I had no idea, of course, that Amis had any such feelings when he wrote to me:

I hope Anthony is pleased with his present. He certainly should be. What a wifely wife you are. Needless to say, nobody did anything like that for MY 50th. I expect your visits to London are pretty crammed, but it would be fun to see you both for lunch or something. Jolly good luck.  
Yours, Kingsley.

I never knew Philip as well as I would have wished, and certainly not as well as Anthony did. But it ▶



ANDRÉ CARRILHO

◀ pleased me that he seemed to like me and liked coming to stay with us, first in Richmond, then in Norfolk. He called the Norfolk house Mole End and took photographs of it (he was a keen photographer). Because of my enormous admiration for his poetry – my awareness that he was not just the best poet of our time but a great poet for all time – I was slightly nervous of his coming, feeling it was a bit like having Wordsworth to stay. Wordsworth had himself stayed on several occasions in the late 18th century a couple of miles up the river, at Fornsett St Peter, where his uncle was rector. We took Philip there once on a wild day with rooks flying over the round flint tower and thought a poem might come of it, but it didn't.

In 1982 I was working on my biography *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape*. Gosse was himself a biographer. In 1919, when reviewing Festing Jones's memoir of Samuel Butler, he was happy to discover that Butler, when travelling abroad, kept diarrhoea pills in the handle of his Gladstone bag. "These little things are my delight," he wrote. In the same way, my delight is in the trivial things Philip Larkin told me on that evening in Norfolk. At the time of this visit, two of our four daughters (Alice, 16, and Lucy, 20) were at home. I wrote the following in my journal at the time.

**30 March, 1982**

We have Philip Larkin staying with us for a couple of nights – he asked if he could come before going on to a Librarians' Conference at UEA. I'm rather worried about him – he seems very unfit. He is bulkier than ever – apparently it's all drink not food. He talked a lot last night to me when Anthony and the girls were clearing up after supper. I find his life sad, his substance (or rather physical presence) sad – but he is himself so funny and sweet – such a sweet smile. His deafness is worse than ever. He now has hearing aids on each ear yet still obviously misses a great deal in general conversation, as on Sunday night when Malcolm and Elizabeth [Bradbury] came to supper – and also Joanna Motion (Andrew is in New York).

He talked to me of his domestic routines. He makes his bed too early each day, while his bath is running, probably before it's aired, but he can't bear to have it to do later. He does everything really except actual cleaning. He's never had a washing machine. He sends everything very extravagantly (as he admits: 48p a shirt) to the laundry, the last individual in Hull to do so, along with the orphanages and the restaurants, he says.

In the evening (having often had only a sandwich for lunch) he makes himself something hot – maybe macaroni cheese or risotto. He can make a macaroni cheese in twenty minutes and then drink two gins and tonic while it cooks. Sometimes he makes too much and then has it the next night as well. Another couple of nights a week he'll have tinned or frozen "rubbish" – probably a stew, not fish; he doesn't care much for



**A summer lunch in the Mill House orchard: Anthony and Lucy Thwaite at home in Norfolk with Philip Larkin, 1979**

**He can make a macaroni cheese in 20 minutes and drink two gins and tonic while it cooks**

fish. If only satumas went on all the year. That's what he likes afterwards. So easy to peel.

Anthony took him off for the day yesterday in the Golf. He couldn't fit in the Spitfire. His head touched the roof. In our dining room he has to go more or less on all fours. At one point he got down on the living-room floor full length looking for a metal ball Alice had lost (from the maze game). Unfortunately he didn't have the pleasure of finding it, as she did herself... Edwin and Liz [Brock] came in and we played the Dictionary Game, which he seemed to enjoy. Philip particularly liked the true definition of falsism: "a platitude that is not even true". Edwin and he found they shared a common love of Cyril Connolly, and he read out that marvellous passage from "Ninety years of novel reviewing" or whatever, about all the things one should not put in novels. Lucy talked to him about [his novel] *Jill* at the meal. He was only a little older than she is when he wrote it: 21. "In the marvellous freedom after going down from Oxford" – presumably meaning with no essays to write or prescribed books to read. I wonder if he might write another novel when he retires.

Apparently, though early retirement is so much in the air, they don't want Philip to leave. He has moments of thinking he'd like to – but I think he needs the toad, the yearly frame. What would he do anyway? He said it would be unlikely he'd write another novel. The pressure wouldn't be there – that's what makes one write, it's not the time available. "Of course it helps to be gloomy."

COURTESY OF ANNTHTWAITE

Philip is thinking of making Anthony his literary executor, which makes sense. The awful thing is that we may not be talking of some far-off time as Philip really doesn't seem likely to live to a good old age.

Philip died, aged 63, less than four years later. Of course I wished I had written after each of his earlier visits – and asked better questions. When Philip died, he left Anthony and Andrew Motion “not only to deal with my publishers as I would myself”, but also “in general to look after my interest and my good name”. The latter has proved more difficult than Philip had imagined. But the poems remain “unassailable”, as Anthony said – the work of a great poet and of someone we knew as a lovable man.

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## Julian Barnes

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### Larkin had a calm, clear voice – and in 1971, I felt he was speaking directly to me

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I an Hamilton, at the start of his contentious biography *In Search of JD Salinger*, recalled being transfixed by *The Catcher in the Rye* at the age of 17:

I carried his book everywhere with me as a kind of talisman. It seemed to me funnier, more touching, and more right about the way things were than anything else I'd read...*The Catcher* was the book that taught me what I ought to have already known: that literature can speak for you, not just to you. It seemed to me “my book”.

At which point Hamilton adds ruefully:

It was something of a shock when I eventually found out that I was perhaps the billionth adolescent to have felt this way... “My book” had turned into everybody's book: Everybody had seen in it a message aimed at him.

Of course, we are constantly discovering new writers – many of whom are also old writers – and the zeal of discovery never goes away. But the only time in my reading life I have felt something close to what Hamilton is describing – that sense of immediate passionate ownership, coupled with a naive belief in its uniqueness – was when I “discovered” Larkin.

This happened in 1971 when I bought both *The Less Deceived* and *The Whitsun Weddings* in quick succession. No one had previously suggested his work to me; I hadn't read English at university, and was finding my own way through the canon. But this wasn't “the

canon”; this was some near-contemporary speaking directly to me in a calm, clear voice that felt familiar even though I hadn't read him before, and was “more right about the way things were”. Not a “poetic” voice either; a daily voice, wry, careful, melodic, witty, and cautious about the oceanic.

Larkin's friend Kingsley Amis had asked “Should poets bicycle-pump the human heart/Or squash it flat?” Larkin's implicit reply was: “No, they should show it as it is, in all its pock-marked hopefulness and begrudged disappointment.”

Larkin was already well-known to others, as Salinger had been: by 1971 *The Whitsun Weddings* was seven years old, and *The Less Deceived* a full 16. But this didn't diminish my proprietorial feelings. I cut out Larkin's rare poems as they appeared in magazines; I waited for the next book, and along came *High Windows* a mere three years later.

Little did I know that these three volumes would add up to the collected works, pretty much all he would grace us with. Well, there has been *The North Ship* (1945), but I never got on with it. It read like the young poet putting on someone else's overcoat (made of Yeats tweed).

I held on to my naive possessiveness for a good many years, until the selfishness wore off and I realised that it was a good thing if as many people as possible also read and admired Larkin too: good for him and good for us. Also, good for the world to be measured by such precise instrumentation: as in the way “our almost-instinct almost true” precedes and modifies what would otherwise seem a greetings-card declaration (and one often taken as such): “What will survive of us is love.”

I never met Larkin, though I once spoke to him on the phone when I worked at the *New Statesman*, having been instructed to chivy him about a late review of Thomas Hardy's notebooks. He made the mistake of remarking that he read what I wrote (which was only reviews up to then); so over a period of five years I sent him my first three novels.

His letters in reply were precise, funny and encouraging (it was only on about the third reading that I noticed his courtly caveats). Such kindness irritated Kingsley Amis. “I don't know what you think you're playing at, all this reading Julian Barnes,” he grouched in a letter of November 1984 after Larkin had praised *Flaubert's Parrot*. “I stopped reading F's P as soon as it was clear that the fellow wasn't going to find in F's works concealed instructions for finding a hidden treasure in a sleepy little village in the Vosges.” (Well, whose praise would you prefer?)

In a way, I was happy to have met Larkin only and purely through the poetry. But about ten years ago I visited him at his grave in Hull. It was a flat, bleak, damp boneyard, hardly a ground “proper to grow wise in”. I was shocked to see that the letters of his name, far from being cut stylishly into marble, were pasted on to the slab in what looked like strips of black velcro. Later, I thought how Larkinish this detail was, and imagined him smiling wanly at it; so I did too. ▶

I cut out his rare poems as they appeared in magazines and waited for the next book

## Blake Morrison

### His most memorable lines came from a search for wisdom and authenticity

Larkin is the most quotable writer of the 20th century – not even Samuel Beckett and TS Eliot run him close. A few examples: “What will survive of us is love”, “Sexual intercourse began in 1963”, “They fuck you up, your mum and dad” (a line he thought would “be my Lake Isle of Innisfree. I fully expect to hear it recited by a thousand Girl Guides before I die”), “Home is so sad”, “Nothing, like something, happens anywhere”, “Why should I let the toad work/Squat on my life?” and (one of his many evocations of death) “The solving emptiness/That lies just under all we do”. His quotability covers religion (“That vast moth-eaten musical brocade/Created to pretend we never die”), First World War recruits (“Never such innocence again”) and fate (“The unbeatable slow machine/That brings you what you’ll get”). Sometimes the lines emerge from an unlikely context: it was after accidentally trapping and killing a hedgehog in his mower that he came up with: “We should be careful/Of each other, we should be kind/While there is still time”.

As those last lines suggest Larkin could be gentle, tender, even soppy, and despite his reputation for being a curmudgeon there are several poems that celebrate the joy of being alive. Hence his terror of death, which supplies his most memorable moments, not only in “Aubade” but in the culmination of “Dockery and Son”, which builds to a beautifully bleak climax four lines before the end, then extends it for three more:

Life is first boredom, then fear.  
Whether or not we use it, it goes,  
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,  
And age, and then the only end of age.

Larkin could be casually wisecracking in letters and interviews (“Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth”, “I wouldn’t mind seeing China if I could come back the same day”), but in the poems he earns the right to his aphorisms by struggling towards them.

This isn’t a man belting out what he already knows but one who begins from a position of ignorance (“Strange to know nothing, never to be sure/Of what is true or right or real”) and dramatises his search for knowledge and authenticity.

It’s a key point, given his reputation for being a man of extreme prejudice – racist, misogynist, right-wing.

Few of the poems carry traces of that. They’re where he goes to leave himself behind and he exults in the escape (“Such attics cleared of me! Such absences!”). It’s the stuff he didn’t publish (included in letters to friends, for instance) that have damaged his name, not the poems.

Larkin’s humour is there even when he’s tackling the darkest of subjects. He took on the great essentials – love, sex, marriage, work, illness, death, religion, fate and free will – and had something insightful to say about them all.

## Rachel Cooke

### I know I sound slightly mad when I say it, but Philip Larkin saved my life

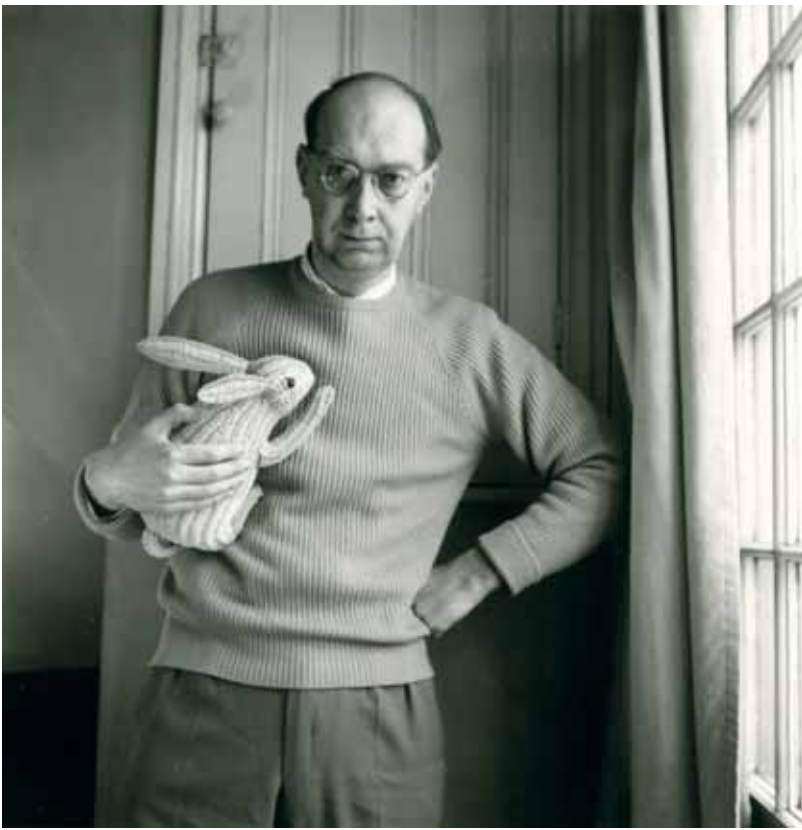
On our kitchen wall, we have a funny poster that purports to be the cover of an album by a jazz ensemble called the Philip Larkin Quintet. The record in question is called *Moanin’ About Everyone*, and below an old black and white photograph of the band’s leader looking, as he once put it himself, just like “an egg, sculpted in lard, with goggles on”, are a list of its tracks, “swinging classics” from the “maestro of mournful”. One is called “Staff Meeting Rag”. Another is “Dewey Decimal Lady”. A third has the title: “Hornin’ Again (Morning at Ten Past Three)”. You get the picture.

I like this poster, which we found in Beverley, in East Yorkshire, a place not far from Hull, where Larkin famously lived and worked (“Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows/And traffic all night north”). I like watching people respond to it: getting the joke, or not.

But the joke, of course, isn’t straightforward. These smart-alecky riffs on Larkin’s life, in all its quotidian melancholy, conceal an irony, which is that those who really know his work find it far too lovely ever to be dispiriting. If Larkin’s first appeal lies, as Seamus Heaney once put it, in the fact that his verse is an encounter between a compassionate, un-foolable mind and its own predicaments – which we recognise as our own predicaments – its second, greater appeal lies far beyond all this. Larkin’s yearning for “a more crystalline reality to which he might give allegiance” makes his poetry, at moments, visionary: a repository of hopefulness that could not be less dour or cynical if it tried.

When I talk about how I found Larkin as a teenager, I know I sound slightly mad; when I tell people that I regard him as having saved my life, I wonder if they think I’m being self-conscious after the fact. But there it is: he turned things around for

Sometimes the lines emerge from an unlikely context, like accidentally killing a hedgehog in his mower



me, a girl who'd given up school for drinking and nightclubs, her family life, always somewhat byzantine, having then reached a particularly crazed pitch (my stepmother, my father's third wife and the mother of my two sisters, had very publicly run off with a man 30 years her senior).

My dad was a fan of Larkin's – a yellowing copy of his late, great poem "Aubade", snipped (memory tells me) from the pages of the *TLS*, was permanently pinned to the noticeboard in our all-pine kitchen – and it was him who first told me to read him, pressing an old hardback of *The Whitsun Weddings* into my reluctant hands.

The shock was considerable. This was stuff I could read! And it was so good, too; so profound. My older self agrees strongly with my teenage self, who saw straight off that Larkin's verse had not only to do with work and death and bad sex; that he wrote exquisite love poems, too. "Broadcast", in which a man listens to a concert on the radio knowing that the woman he quietly adores is there in the hall in person – "Your hands, tiny in all that air, applauding" – struck me then as infinitely beautiful: its aching fondness; its foreshadowing of loss; the way it balances both these things, and yet still finds, in all its sublime concision, words to convey the orchestra, the music, the audience.

Love, though... I was panicky about it, and not only because of the mayhem at home. Several girls at school had left early, having taken no exams: sometimes, I'd see them on the bus, folding their baby buggies, and experience something close to terror. What was amazing was that Larkin had written a

**The old softie: Larkin could be "tender, even sappy", despite his reputation as a curmudgeon**

**His poem "Afternoons" shoved me, not to the edge of my life, but towards its centre again**

poem about this, too: "Afternoons", in which women at a playground look on as their children search for unripe acorns.

I read "Afternoons" – "Something is pushing them/ To the side of their own lives" – and something shoved me, not to the edge of my life, but towards its centre again. I could see a possible route ahead, and as peculiar and as daft as this may sound, one of the people that held my hand as I picked my way along that path was that old sculpted egg.

Say anything you like about Larkin – alas, I know that you will – but don't ever tell me that he doesn't, at points, know more about your life than you do yourself. From his own predicaments, clarity: a crystalline reality to be learned, by the rest of us, by heart.

## Andrew Motion

### As a child, he stammered so badly he couldn't even ask for a railway ticket

A good deal has been written about how Philip Larkin "found his voice", most memorably by the man himself; in his introduction to the 1966 reissue of his first collection *The North Ship* he describes how he applied a cooling Hardy-esque poultice to the Yeatsian "Celtic fever" that raged through his earliest published poems. Although this account oversimplifies things a good deal, and ignores the persistent influence of early models on the mature work, most people still accept the basic proposition: the trajectory of Larkin's work is from highfalutin to demotic, from grand symbols to granular realities.

Much less has been said about how he found his voice in a different sense, and what the effect of this parallel development might have been. As a child Larkin stammered so badly that (again, he tells us this himself), he couldn't even ask for a railway ticket when he went to the ticket office, but had to pass over a slip of paper with his destination written on it. Not surprisingly, his parents arranged for him to see a speech therapist, someone who eventually improved things by encouraging him to "swallow" his stammer. The effect was to make Larkin punctuate his conversation with occasional tense pauses which ended with a quick click of the tongue (he called it his "bushman's click"); the sound is faintly and intermittently audible on the recordings he made of his own poems.

Stammers have complex origins, most likely of a neurodevelopmental kind, and it would be foolish to ascribe a definite cause – or set of causes – in ▶

◀ Larkin's case. But to the extent that his stammer at least sounds like hesitation, it exists in striking contrast to the very forthright and clear articulations of the poems themselves. Are those qualities in the latter a form of compensation for the former? Although proof would be hard to come by, it seems likely – in which respect his childhood affliction and its consequences might be described as an under-appreciated motive for the development of his “voice” in the other sense of the word.

And there's something else. When I was gathering material for my biography, I visited Larkin's older sister Kitty, hoping that she would help me establish certain facts about the early part of his life, and understand better the mood in their childhood home. She turned out to be a person of such complicated reticence, I didn't get very far – but I was struck by her voice. Kitty had an unmistakable Midlands/Coventry accent: she said “chicking”, rather than “chicken”. Her brother's accent, as the recordings of his poems once again demonstrate, was so much less obvious it was almost imperceptible.

Did the person who helped Larkin swallow his stammer also weaken his accent? Did his slightly posher new voice provoke and/or accompany a different set of ambitions in life – including perhaps different ideas about poetic tone and form? Once again, it's impossible to know for sure. But the possibility is intriguing.

## Daljit Nagra

### What would he have made of my books being published alongside his?

“Larkin's poems taught me so much about my new home.” So tweeted the then secretary of state for education, Nadhim Zahawi, in June 2022. I found this amusing because migrants who fight tooth and nail to risk their lives to get to another country don't usually expect the host country to say, as in “This be the Verse”, “Get out as early as you can/And don't have any kids yourself”. In “Self's the Man”, from the *The Whitsun Weddings*, Arnold “married a woman to stop her getting away/Now she's there all day”; Arnold is mocked for getting married, for having children, for being a good father and for his DIY skills. Could these be the British values that Zahawi found so edifying?

I first came across Larkin when my middle-class peers quoted him in the Royal Holloway quadrant when I was an undergraduate, and when I started reading contemporary poetry, I saw his fingerprints on



**Made in England: Larkin has become “a substantial part of the myth of the nation”**

**Earlier today I took Larkin's Collected Poems in my hands and felt my skin tone darken**

every British poet. I learned that to be accepted as a person of culture, the correct opinion was that I liked Larkin, perhaps even that I loved Larkin.

More recently, I went to a Larkin exhibition at Hull University, and though I didn't see Zahawi there, I saw a busload of elderly women disembark from a coach. At the exhibition, Larkin's brogues were the size of boats and his suspended pyjamas under spotlight were the size of a wicker man; he seemed to be the Green Man, John Barleycorn, most likely John Bull, a substantial part of the myth of the nation.

Larkin died in 1985, and by the early 1990s we were learning more about his private views. In 1992 the *Selected Letters* exposed a racist and a sexist who exchanged his opinions with Kingsley Amis over several decades. The following year Andrew Motion's biography revealed his infidelities, and in 2012 the American edition of his *Complete Poems*, thankfully never published in the UK, exposed further disturbing views. Sadly not juvenilia, but written in his mid-forties, he writes “How to Win the Next Election”, presumably in support of the Conservatives, and lists his many views. As a whole it reads less as satire and more as an earnest appeal. Here is the opening quatrain: “Prison for strikers,/Bring back the cat,/Kick out the n\*\*\*\*\*s,/How about that?”

Earlier today I took Larkin's *Collected Poems*, its cover park-green, in my hands, and I felt my skin tone darken, as though I had become a shade more visible. Ever since his infamous letters were published, I've sensed the shadow of his enormous hands fall across



the recto and verso. I can almost hear him, lowering his glasses, saying sombrely, “Do you dare to assume this book was written for you?”

Would he have wanted me to read these poems that ignored England’s postwar dynamism, the England where folk such as my family were here to rebuild Britain from the 1950s? What would he have made of all my books being published by Faber & Faber alongside his? What if after I’d told him how much I loved the formal vigour of his verse, the tragic comedy of his stylistic versatility, that I’d like him to apologise for some of the language in his letters? Would he have surprised me? I don’t know.

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## Emily Berry

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### Few poets today would care, or dare, to put their mean sides so boldly on display

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Philip Larkin may have written that “What will survive of us is love”, perhaps his most famous (and uncharacteristic) line, but that’s not what survives of Larkin. What survives of him – for me, anyway – is something closer to love’s opposite: not hate, quite, but a decided meanness.

In “Vers de Société”, a bitter audit of the relative demerits of socialising versus solitude (with both options found to be dreadful), the speaker ponders which would be worse: staying home alone or spending his evenings at parties “canted/Over to catch the drivel of some bitch/Who’s read nothing but Which”. The poem continues: “The big wish/Is to have people nice to you, which means/Doing it back somehow./Virtue is social. Are, then, these routines/Playing at goodness, like going to church?” He could be responding to contemporary debates around virtue signalling.

Few poets these days would care, or dare, to put their more unpleasant sides so boldly on display – though the American poet Frederick Seidel, who wrote “a naked woman my age is a total nightmare” (Seidel was born in 1936), must receive an honourable mention. I can almost imagine a less uptight, less sexually awkward – less British – Larkin writing something similar. Instead, in “Letter to a Friend about Girls”, he has a speaker complaining, rather pathetically, about his comparative lack of success with women, how he always ends up with the “sort” that “put off men/By being unattractive” (and don’t put out).

“We should be kind/While there is still time,” he wrote after the death of a hedgehog: people rarely moved Larkin to such sentiments but one (kindly, lovingly) senses that he desperately wished they

would. In “Talking in Bed” he captures the acute loneliness of unhappy coupledness: “At this unique distance from isolation/It becomes still more difficult to find/Words at once true and kind,/Or not untrue and not unkind.”

This difficulty, clearly, was beyond him when he wrote “Wild Oats”, a definitely not-kind summary of a relationship that began when “Two girls came in where I worked –/A bosomy English rose/And her friend in specs I could talk to”. In some ghastly inversion of a meet-cute, the speaker admits it was “bosomy rose” he really fancied, “But it was the friend I took out” (one of the “sort” that “put off men”, no doubt). Cut to seven years later and after numerous failed attempts the relationship with the “friend in specs” has been broken off, and the speaker admits that all along he’s been carrying “two snaps/Of bosomy rose” in his wallet. (Now I think about it, something like this is the premise of the mid-Nineties romcom *The Truth about Cats and Dogs*, but it all works out beautifully because the leading man is apparently not as shallow as Philip Larkin, and ends up happily partnered with Janeane Garofalo – “the friend”, albeit not bespectacled – despite the undeniable allure of Uma Thurman.)

I quite like Philip Larkin, despite all this. What a funny, mean little man! He wrote some great things about death. And he wasn’t always mean, of course. After all, he came up with the phrase “My loaf-haired secretary”, the tenderest line in all of literature...

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## Rowan Williams

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### Perhaps we should think of him as a very unusual kind of love poet. Love doesn’t work for Larkin

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I have never found Larkin an easy poet to like; never mind for the moment the unhappy record of his personal views and attitudes. I suspect this is partly because the first collection of his that I read properly was *High Windows*, which struck me (and still does) as indulging the least appealing of his poetic mannerisms – the mumble and shrug and occasional snigger that warn the reader not to take any of this stuff too seriously, the tugging undercurrent of resentment, fear, self-pity.

And yet, having got that confession out of the way – is there not something to be said for such an uncensored picture of a damaged and unhappy sensibility? You can’t make poetry just out of fear and self-pity, but what sort of poetry happens when these are so starkly acknowledged? Larkin is still widely admired, even loved, by a lot of non-habitual poetry readers. And this surely has

**There is something to be said for such an uncensored picture of a damaged and unhappy sensibility**

◀ something to do not only with the sheer lucidity of his language – the unobtrusive brilliance of how he can in so many poems sustain a scheme of rhythm and rhyme without breaking his conversational stride – but with that commitment to an undeceiving voice.

The title of his early collection, *The Less Deceived*, is a significant marker. “Poetry of Departures” repudiates the “reprehensibly perfect” moral life, and warns against mistaking our lives for some kind of aesthetic exercise, a conscious project designed (in the absence of a divine judge) for a sympathetic public. The central image of the title poem in *High Windows* evokes a heady sense of emptiness, the lack of any pressure that could come from being seen (and judged). It connects with the “wish to be alone” spelt out harshly in an earlier poem, “Wants”.

A bit of a paradox: the poet writes precisely so as to show what human life feels like when released from the pressure that arises from being displayed, being judged, which leaves the reader in a rather odd and complicated position. To write at all is some sort of appeal to be, if not judged, at least heard or seen, and if not loved, at least attended to.

Larkin may say, in “Love Again”, that what people talk about in relation to love “never worked for me”. But – like a medieval mystic attempting to define God by spelling out what God is not – he anatomises repeatedly where the void is and what its emptiness entails.

The featureless sky beyond the “high windows” may be liberating for the suffocated mid-20th-century English ego. But such liberation is not straightforward. In what is probably Larkin’s most famous poem, “An Arundel Tomb”, the apparent persistence of love, symbolised in the joined hands of the tomb figures, remains a fiction: “Time has transfigured them into/ Untruth” (the line-break stresses the jarring character of the sentiment here).

Time makes the importance of love “almost” true; yet it also disproves it. “Faith Healing”, from *The Whitsun Weddings*, is not one of Larkin’s better-known poems, but it contains a very poignant portrayal of ageing, lonely women finding a moment of some sort of truth as they receive the laying on of hands by an American evangelist who calls each of them “dear child”. They feel “an immense slackening ache” (a wonderfully characteristic Larkin phrase), a sense of “all they might have done had they been loved” – yet this is also a sense of “all time has disproved”, everything that they know has never happened and never will.

Perhaps we should rethink Larkin as a very unusual kind of love poet. Love doesn’t work for him; and even if the experience of others has been less bleak, none of us, in his eyes, has ever been loved enough. But the “almost-instinct” of the “Arundel Tomb” remains: so is “almost true” a statement of failure or of hope?

Larkin survives as a serious poet, I think, because – sometimes despite his own intentions – he leaves this question on the table.

## Michael Henderson

### His denunciations of jazz villains still leave readers honking with laughter

When, a few years back, the Orange Tree in Richmond presented *Larkin With Women* by Ben Brown, the theatre rocked with laughter. One Sunday afternoon during the run, Patrick Garland, the play’s director, and Oliver Ford Davies, who played Larkin, read from the poet’s *Required Writing*. The laughter was even louder.

Larkin the fabled curmudgeon was a very funny man, as his jazz criticism reveals. Those Capstan-strength denunciations of favourite villains still leave readers honking like John Coltrane, and though the po-faced arbiters of taste turn crimson at his revisionist tone, Larkin was usually spot on. Coltrane did become a master of “gigantic absurdity”, and Thelonious Monk (“what key is this?”) did attack the piano like an elephant.

He continued to listen to Archie Shepp, “in the hope that it will one day all cease to sound like the ‘Flight of the Bumblebee’ scored for bagpipes and concrete mixer”. Another bullseye! Then there was Miles Davis, and the “passionless creep” of his muted trumpet. Davis served as midwife to some fine music-making in the Fifties and early Sixties, but to somebody such as Larkin, who had grown up with the king, Louis Armstrong, he spoke a language that defied translation.

*The Selected Letters*, edited by Anthony Thwaite, give immense pleasure. The prejudices, as most readers pick up fairly quickly, are usually performative. Larkin was a man of his time, and although times have changed, in many ways for the better, that must be borne in mind. There isn’t a dull sentence, and the barbs he exchanged with Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest can lift the flattest day. It’s a male humour, very English in its irony, wordplay and occasional filth, but there’s nothing wrong with that. Unless you don’t like laughing.

There is a grim humour in the poetry, expressed in a minor key. In “The Whitsun Weddings”, for instance, Larkin notes the proud mothers and fathers at each station they pass, and also the uncle “shouting smut”. In “Next, Please”, that early poem of dread, he draws our attention to “the figurehead with golden tits” on the ship of death. No other poet would have turned that phrase.

Would Eliot or Yeats have noticed Mr Bleaney in his lonely room, “plugging at the four aways”? It’s a lovely image of a solitary man: not laugh-out-loud funny, but amusing – and sympathetic. Larkin understood that world of dashed hopes better than any poet, and his

It’s a male humour, very English in its irony, wordplay and occasional filth

admirers understand that he understood, which is one of the reasons his poetry will survive official neglect and fluctuations of taste. Whether or not his poetry is studied in schools, curious readers will always beat a path to his door.

The best joke is on the mardy pouters who would commit him to the doghouse for the appalling sin of being Philip Larkin. When they are confronted by the poems, however, the mockers become very shy indeed. His finest work stands, to lift a phrase from his last notable poem, "Aubade", "plain as a wardrobe". It will endure because it is great, and greatness stays the course.

"I feel like a tinker may do when surveying the Forth Bridge", Elgar said of Beethoven. So it is when we consider Larkin. The supreme poet of English life in the second half of the 20th century is untouchable. He will always have the last laugh.

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## Margaret Drabble

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### Why spend one's life in fear of death? Larkin asked the question but had no answer

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Larkin was much afraid of death, and he did his best to communicate this fear to others. I well remember reading "The Old Fools" in the *Listener*, in 1973, as I sat innocently unaware on top of the 24 bus on my way to the British Library Reading Room. I was horrified. My hair stood on end. And recently, during the pandemic, I heard William Sieghart reading "Aubade" on Radio 3, a poem that has a similar and appalling message. But I am so near death myself now that it had lost its impact. Why spend one's life in fear? Larkin addressed that question, but he had no answer to it.

I read Larkin's poetry as it was published, with admiration and at times (for he can be very witty) amusement (see "Sunny Prestatyn" and "Annus Mirabilis"). But increasingly, as I aged and death approached, his corpse lantern flickered with less immediate menace, and I began to rally my spirits. Larkin argues that those who don't fear death are deluding themselves, but he really misses the point. He writes in "Aubade":

Courage is no good:  
It means not scaring others. Being brave  
Lets no one off the grave.  
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

With respect to the rest of the poem, that's just not true. Of course it's better not to scare others. Whining in itself is not a good approach to anything. Although



**The rest is noise: Larkin loved trad jazz, and scorned the "passionless creep" of innovators such as Miles Davis**

he worried about other people (principally his mother) Larkin never had to look after anybody but himself. He sent his laundry home to his mother when he was a grown man. If he had had to care more for others, he might have felt differently.

It's true that courage doesn't let you off the grave, but why should it? And what would you want instead of death? More of life as an old fool? What on earth was he so frightened of? As Shakespeare has Caesar say: "Cowards die many times before their deaths,/The valiant never taste of death but once..."

Some of Larkin's poetry is more optimistic, more conventionally consoling: "Church Going" and "An Arundel Tomb" speak more confidently of the eternal, although they have their inbuilt ironies. His evocations of the natural world are, almost despite himself, magnificent (and he did mock himself for these Wordsworthian moments). I particularly love "The Trees", which I say to myself every springtime:

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

This does demonstrate how much Larkin loved the world he feared to lose. But so did Seamus Heaney, whose last message, a text from hospital to his wife, makes for me a better mantra: "*noli timere*". Do not fear. We need that message too. ●

**As I aged, his corpse lantern flickered with less immediate menace**

# Books

## Nietzsche the messiah

In his final years, the ailing philosopher prophesied the West's violent decline – but not even he could prevent it

By John Gray

“Wait for tea to cool before drinking it, avoid all alcohol, crowds, reading, writing letters, wear warm clothes in the evening, eat rhubarb from time to time, have a napkin at breakfast, remember notebook.” These memoranda, as recorded in Lesley Chamberlain's *Nietzsche in Turin*, capture the regime Friedrich Nietzsche followed in that city, in the last of his many lodgings during his wanderings across Europe. He loved long walks, but any interruption of routine was as toxic for him as bad food, so he avoided fashionable cafés and promenades. Even a bookshop was off-limits for fear of bumping into an acquaintance who might want to talk about Hegel. He needed, above all, a quiet life.

Nietzsche had cultivated the habits of an invalid for many years. Migraines, myopia, insomnia and nervous exhaustion pursued him from his twenties. Born in 1844 into a third-generation family of Lutheran pastors, he was appointed to a professorship in classical philology at the University of Basel in 1869, aged just 24. After ten years of worsening health he resigned to become a peripatetic writer. He sought out ambiances where the light was mellow, the breeze gentle and the people cheerful. He tried Sorrento, Genoa, Venice, Switzerland and Nice. Turin suited him perfectly.

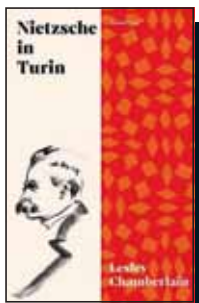
Formerly the capital of the Duchy of Savoy and then of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the elegant, geometrically designed city embodied what Nietzsche, in his seminal first book, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), defined as the Apollonian virtues of reason and order, which emerged in opposition to the Dionysian forces of ecstatic vitality. In Greek mythology, Apollo was the god of music and the sun, Dionysus of wine and dance. In Nietzsche's view, both Apollonian

harmony and Dionysian energy were necessary in a balanced culture. With its picture of the Presocratic Greeks struggling against a deep-seated sense of the tragic irrationality of the world, the book scandalised the classicists of his time, who – like many people, even today – clung to a simplistic image of Greece as the birthplace of reason. Nietzsche's essay remains a powerful criticism of “Socratism” – the belief that logic, science and morality can curb conflict and destruction in human life. But in exploring this polarity Nietzsche was (like all philosophers, he believed) engaged in an autobiographical exercise. The warring gods reflected conflicts in his personality, from which he was released chiefly by absorption in music. In Turin, his room was yards away from an opera theatre.

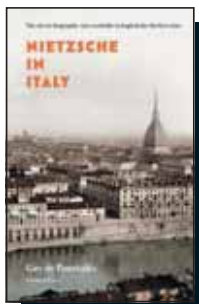
There have been several accounts of Nietzsche's travels. *The Good European* (1997) by the philosopher David Farrell Krell and the photographer Donald L Bates is a definitive guide to what Nietzsche found in the cities and landscapes in which he chose to work and live. Sue Prideaux's *I Am Dynamite! A Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* (2018) tells the compelling story of how Nietzsche became “the empty occupant of furnished rooms”. In 2020, the admirable Pushkin Press published Stefan Zweig's *Nietzsche* – which first appeared in 1925 as part of a larger book on European thinkers – in an English translation by Will Stone.

Now Pushkin has reissued two outstanding studies of his later years. Published in 1929, *Nietzsche in Italy* by the German-born Swiss essayist and biographer Guy de Pourtalès (1881-1941), freshly translated by Stone, remains remarkably penetrating in its interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. *Nietzsche in Turin* (1996) by Chamberlain – who later wrote *The Philosophy Steamer* (2006), an evocative history of Lenin's deportation of Russian intellectuals in two German ships in 1922 – is the most detailed account of how the philosopher's travels ended, as well as the best-written and most intelligent.

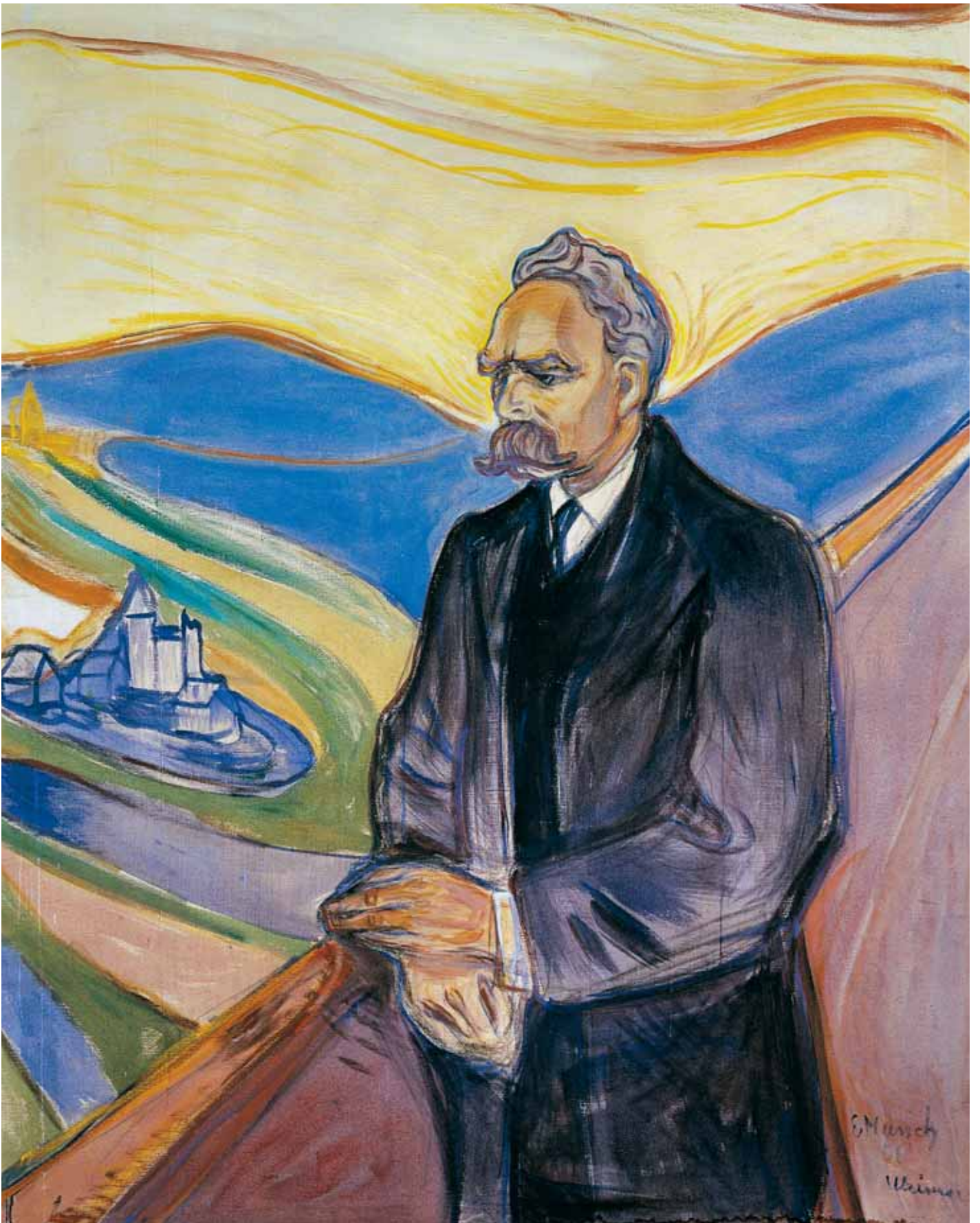
When he arrived in Turin in the spring of 1888, Nietzsche had reached a complicated juncture in his life. His friendship with the composer Richard Wagner, whom he had seen as an ally in an ambitious attempt to renew German culture, had ended a decade before. Nietzsche's relations with his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche – at the time living in a racist colony, Nueva Germania, which she had founded in Paraguay with her anti-Semitic husband – were acrimonious, partly because of her role in sabotaging his relationship with Lou Andreas-Salomé. Captivated by the spirited, Russian-born young woman, he made her a proposal of marriage via another admirer, his friend the philosopher Paul Rée, which she declined. Nietzsche responded by reviving a plan they had previously discussed for a platonic *ménage à trois*, but instead she went off with Rée. Salomé's rejection of him left Nietzsche shaken and embittered. Yet there was never any prospect she would spend her life with him. Salomé, who would later, with the support of Freud, become one of the first practising female psychoanalysts, must have quickly recognised that Nietzsche was incurably unwell. ▶



**Nietzsche in Turin**  
Lesley Chamberlain  
Pushkin Press,  
256pp, £12.99



**Nietzsche in Italy**  
Guy de Pourtalès  
trs Will Stone  
Pushkin Press,  
112pp, £9.99



EDVARD MUNCH / NPL-DEA PICTURE LIBRARY / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

All too human: a portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche by Edvard Munch (1906)

◀ Nietzsche was suffering from syphilis, most likely contracted during a visit to a brothel in his student days. (His ill health was compounded by the effects of the dysentery and diphtheria from which he suffered while serving as a medical auxiliary in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War.) Nietzsche seems to have had no sustained sexual relationships of any kind. In this he differed from his first intellectual lodestar, the celebrated pessimist Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who had many affairs with women, some long-lasting. A chapter of *The World as Will and Idea*, where Schopenhauer argues that human life is ruled by unconscious impulses rather than rational choices, presents a forensic analysis of sexual desire.

Though the two never met, Schopenhauer was a pivotal figure in Nietzsche's life. Discovering his treatise in a second-hand bookshop while a student in Leipzig in 1865, Nietzsche was overwhelmed. He came to reject its philosophy as life-negating, but both thinkers looked for a way of living that did not depend on theistic myths. While Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God from the rooftops, Schopenhauer noted the deity's demise and calmly moved on. The pessimist believed fulfilment could be found only in renouncing the ego, but took care not to practise his philosophy, fashioning a satisfyingly selfish life for himself. A colder and merrier soul than his sometime disciple, Schopenhauer felt no need to save humankind.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, could not rid himself of the belief – he was the son of a pastor, after all – that the world needed redeeming. In his last months in Turin he gave full vent to his messianic passion. In January 1889, after tearfully embracing a carhorse that was being flogged in the street, he fired off letters to friends announcing he had imprisoned the pope and calling for a concert of European powers against Germany. Others he drafted were to be sent to Bismarck and the Kaiser. Many were signed "Dionysus", or "the Crucified One".

Nietzsche's thought was then unknown except to a few devotees. By the time he died in August 1900, he was on the way to becoming a global intellectual celebrity. His reputation as a precursor of fascism was formed by the editions of his works that his sister – a Nazi sympathiser, whose funeral Hitler attended – edited and at times redacted; she may also have forged some letters from him. Nietzsche was a lifelong opponent of German nationalism – so much so that on several occasions he denied his Germany ethnicity and claimed Polish origins. Preferring the Old to the New Testament, he loathed anti-Semitism. In many ways he was the opposite of a proto-Nazi. At the same time he planted a bomb under the foundations of liberal rationalism, whose thunderous detonation can be heard today.

In the autumn of 1880, Pourtalès records, Nietzsche was living in an attic room above a grass-covered street in Genoa. He spent his days walking through the city, composing attacks on Christian values. The fruit of his meditations was one of his best books, *The Gay Science* (1882), where he proclaimed the death of God as an opportunity to find joy in earthly things. Watching him

always alone, book in hand, his neighbours called him "*il piccolo santo*", the little saint, and gave him candles for his devotions, which he accepted gladly. With "no alcohol, no renown, no women, no newspapers, no honours", as he put it, he turned a modest existence on a professor's pension into a life of holy poverty. "How at root he is a Christian," Pourtalès writes, "this future anti-Christ!" Near the end in Turin, watching the passing cortège of a famous admiral, Nietzsche had the impression that he was attending his own state funeral. Accosting passers-by, he told them, "Be joyful. I am God. I am just in disguise."

If Pourtalès presents Nietzsche as an anti-Christian messiah, Chamberlain shows him as a casualty of modernity. *Ecce Homo* – his last complete book, written in 1888 but published in 1908 – is in her view "an auto-obituary". The death of God meant the erasure of any transcendental realm through which humankind could find meaning and value. Nietzsche's response was to make himself into a sacrificial offering – half Christ, half Dionysus – whose posthumous gospel would deliver the world from nihilism, its hidden sickness.

As Chamberlain writes, "He associated nihilism with illness, his own illness and the cultural decay of all Europe." The ailing *Übermensch* may have realised he cut a droll figure. Chamberlain reports that as he was leaving Turin for a psychiatric clinic in Basel he asked his landlord for his *papalina*, a triangular nightcap with a tassel: "So dressed he left Turin, the tragic philosopher who not only willed himself to be a clown but willed himself to bequeath that visual image to posterity."

Contrary to his comic-book reputation, Nietzsche did not welcome Dionysian frenzy. It was Apollonian harmony he craved – both in his own life and in society. *The Birth of Tragedy* identified the besetting weakness of the modern West as the belief that reason can bring order into human life. Nietzsche envisioned a new kind of human being who, without denying the reality of Dionysian forces, could contain the chaos they brought with them. The most prophetic of 19th-century thinkers, he discerned that the seemingly triumphal march of European progress was heading for a cataclysmic fall. He feared an era of great wars, which as he drifted into madness he imagined he could prevent. His breakdown may have come with the realisation that, like his illness, the malady he diagnosed was fated to run its course.

Nietzsche believed that without a spiritual realm in which goodness and truth are one and the same – as Plato affirmed in his timeless forms, and Christianity in a divine Logos – values are ultimately expressions of human will. Rationality, in that case, is simply a tool which can be used for the sake of chaos and barbarism as much as order and civilisation. At present, as Vladimir Putin prosecutes a war of terror with calculated savagery, reason is serving Dionysian forces of the darkest kind. If you want solutions to the disorder of our time, you will gain little from reading Nietzsche. Yet there is much to be learned about the sources of the West's decline from the struggles of this unbelieving Christian, who found in ancient Greece a tragic vision that he spent his life struggling vainly to escape. ●

Often accused of being a proto-Nazi, Nietzsche was so opposed to German nationalism he sometimes claimed to be Polish

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# The NS Poem

## Kindertransport

### Craig Raine

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A single cornflake in Vienna.  
Brittle dark-gold henna.

Returned from England, her teacher  
gave the class one each.

She remembered how it tasted  
when, ten years later, she fled

a raft of racial laws  
against the Jews,

and came to England.  
One suitcase heavy in both hands.

Her father had been President  
of the Österreichischer Fußball-Bund.

In Oxford, she was a nursery maid,  
grateful to work for food and board.

After the war, she married Humphries,  
older, a dentist, with open eyes.

It wasn't a love match.  
All *that* was *Quatsch*.

Two sons later,  
no longer slender,

she metamorphosed into a matron,  
a widow with a bungee-jump bosom.

I remember her, fearless,  
in a bouncing sleeveless dress

and burly sandals,  
facing down a vandal,

a skinhead in the University Parks,  
tearing the bark

off a sapling. A mountain ash.  
She ran to him across the grass.

"You mustn't. Don't be silly.  
If you do that, you'll kill it."

As if he didn't know. Litter likewise:  
"Excuse me, I think you forgot this."

A year of cancer operations,  
of pointless surgical interventions,

left her thin  
as a prepubescent girl again.

"This is my proper weight.  
Years of over-eating, I'm afraid."

Thin and humbled.  
Humbled, not humble,

as we are at our end. Our flood  
a riverbed's mosaic of mud.

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*Craig Raine is a poet, novelist and critic, and was the editor of "Areté" magazine*

## You couldn't make it up

Nora Ephron poured her life into her journalism and romcoms. So what can a new biography tell us that she can't?

By Anna Leszkiewicz



Everything is copy: Ephron understood that the essence of a story is its details

In 1976, when she was a columnist at *Esquire* magazine, Nora Ephron was in Vermont, working on a story about a professor who had been fired from Bennington College as a result of her “brave stand against tenure”. Ephron was not convinced.

I go to Bennington and discover that she has in fact been fired because she's been having an affair with a professor at Bennington, that they taught a class on Hawthorne together, and that they both wore matching T-shirts in class with scarlet As on them. What's more, I learn that the faculty hated her from the very beginning because she had a party for them and served lukewarm lasagne and unthawed Sara Lee banana cake. I can't get over this aspect of journalism. I can't believe how real life never lets you down. I can't understand why anyone would write fiction when what actually happens is so amazing.

Here is Nora Ephron's trademark wit, her instinct for life's absurdities, her unsparing journalistic scepticism, her refusal to venerate women simply because feminism demands it, her belief that the truth makes more entertaining, impressionable material than anything you could invent. Hers is not so much a keen eye for detail, as a fundamental understanding that the detail is the story – that without these telling and often ridiculous specificities, there is no story at all.

Ephron was always willing to put her life into her work. In her first widely read *Esquire* column, “A Few Words About Breasts”, published in 1972, Ephron laments her small bust and concludes (with a refreshing lack of the guilty, performative soul-searching that blights the modern personal essay): “My girlfriends, the ones with nice big breasts, would go on endlessly about how their lives had been far more miserable than mine... I think they are full of shit.”

In her autobiographical novel *Heartburn*, she took the most upsetting event in her life and turned it into a great work of comedy. Her husband, the *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein, had an affair while she was seven months pregnant; Ephron could see that the true indignity (and farce) of the story was not simply the affair, but that her husband and his mistress were – “are you ready for this?” – seeing the same therapist: “At the family rate!!” Her character traits show up in her enduring romantic comedies: Sally's hyper-specific food orders in *When Harry Met Sally...* Annie's straight-from-the-movies idea of love in *Sleepless in Seattle* and Kathleen's devotion to *Pride & Prejudice* in *You've Got Mail*. The Sara Lee banana cake comes from her 2006 essay “The Story of My Life in 3,500 Words or Less”, written with insight, bathos – and, crucially, economy, being in fact a few hundred words shy of 3,500. In it, she expands on her mother's and subsequently her own mantra, “Everything is copy”: “When you slip on a banana peel, people laugh at you; but when you tell people you slipped on a banana peel, it's your laugh.”

All this is to say that the person who decides to put themselves forward as the chronicler of the life of Nora Ephron, and does not have the previous candidate's qualifications of actually being Nora Ephron, has a hard task before them. Kristin Marguerite Doidge,

LINDA NYLIND / GUARDIAN / EYEVINE



a culture journalist, has taken up this challenge, with “the first comprehensive portrait” of Ephron. Doidge is, in her own words, an “aca-fan” – a fan as much as an academic. As such, her tone tends to flatten the complexity of Ephron’s career, which encompassed sentimentality in her films but also wry cynicism in her journalism. Doidge describes Ephron as “a woman who taught us how to live” and “that it’s never too late to go after your dreams”, a figure who “gives us hope”. Her book is an explicit “celebration” of Ephron’s life.

**E**phron was born in New York City in 1941, the eldest of four daughters. Her parents were Jewish native New Yorkers and noted playwrights and screenwriters, who moved the family to Los Angeles when Ephron was five years old. (Ephron later wrote: “Happy laughing blond children surround me. All I can think is: what am I doing here?”) They were not warm parents, but they encouraged their children to write. At her high school’s “vocation day”, a female sports writer spoke and mentioned how few women were in journalism. Ephron realised “that I desperately wanted to be a journalist and that being a journalist was probably a good way to meet men”.

Ephron’s mother and father slid into alcoholism, and she moved back to the East Coast. At 17 she took up a place studying political science at Wellesley College outside Boston, where she worked on the student paper the *Wellesley News*, and in 1961 was accepted into a summer internship at the White House – it later became “horribly clear to me that I am probably the only young woman who ever worked in the Kennedy White House whom the president did not make a pass at”. After university, she moved back to her beloved New York City and found a job as a “mail girl” at *Newsweek*.

During the newspaper strike of 1963, Ephron’s friend Victor Navasky told her he was publishing parody editions of the papers – she took on Leonard Lyons’s famous *New York Post* gossip column. While *Post* staff were rattled, its publisher, Dorothy Schiff, was impressed. “If they can parody the *Post*, they can write for it. Hire her.” So began Ephron’s career as a reporter – covering everything from the Beatles’ arrival in the US in 1964 to the wedding of Lyndon B Johnson’s daughter Lynda in 1967. In the 1970s she took the job at *Esquire*, after the editor, Harold Hayes, offered her a film column, which she declined. Shocked, he asked: “Well, what is it you want to write about?!” “Women,” Ephron replied. It would remain her great subject. A committed feminist, she often wrote on women’s liberation, but was never reluctant to critique or find humour in the movement.

Navasky introduced Ephron to the humour writer Dan Greenberg – he and Ephron married in 1967. They threw endless dinner parties, where Ephron’s love of food and conversation shone. Later, Ephron summed up their six-year marriage in just two sentences: “My first husband is a perfectly nice person, although he’s pathologically attached to his cats. It’s 1972, the height of the women’s movement, and everyone is getting a divorce, even people whose husbands don’t have

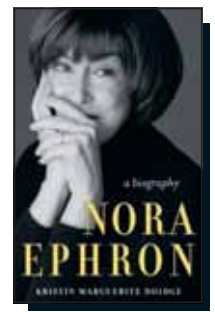
pathological attachments to their cats.” She was 32 when she met Bernstein, who had broken the Watergate story the previous year. They married in 1976. When Bernstein fell in love with another woman, it was 1979: their first child, Jacob, was a toddler, and Ephron was pregnant with their second, Max. *Heartburn* was published in 1983, and made into a film by Mike Nichols starring Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson in 1986.

By this time, Ephron already had some experience in the movies – her screenplay for another Streep film, *Silkwood*, won her an Oscar nomination. She would repeat that achievement with the script for *When Harry Met Sally...* in 1989. She began directing in the 1990s, finding another outlet for her detail-oriented approach with *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You’ve Got Mail*. Her final film was 2009’s *Julie & Julia*, in which Streep played one of Ephron’s culinary heroes, Julia Child. In 2006 Ephron was diagnosed with blood cancer, something she kept a secret even from close friends, and never wrote about. She died aged 71 in 2012. In her final years, she returned to prose – her collections *I Feel Bad About My Neck* and *I Remember Nothing* were both bestsellers.

**D**oidge’s biography relays all this in chatty, enthusiastic prose, and is full of admiration for its subject. But it can never surmount the fundamental obstacle that Ephron has already written it better. Take Ephron’s complaint about her White House internship: “THERE WAS NO DESK FOR AN INTERN TO SIT AT AND THEREFORE NO TYPEWRITER TO TYPE ON. Yes, I am still bitter about it!... I could type 100 words a minute. Every eight-hour day there were theoretically 48,000 words that weren’t being typed because I didn’t have a desk.” In Doidge’s paraphrase, this becomes: “Perhaps even more frustrating, interns didn’t have desks or typewriters, and that meant that by her estimate, some 48,000 words were going unwritten every single day she was there. It was painful.”

Nor does it fully fill in the gaps that Ephron (who often skipped to the funny parts) left in her life-writing – at 225 pages, this is not a “comprehensive” work. Doidge glosses over many aspects of Ephron’s story, such as her early years or domestic life, as well as some of the key contextual factors that influenced her (psychoanalysis is summed up as: “AKA therapy”). Doidge has conducted many interviews, but has understandably not secured the level of access of Ephron’s son Jacob Bernstein, whose film *Everything is Copy* is repeatedly quoted from here. Later chapters read more like behind-the-scenes “oral histories” of her films than a chronicle of her experience.

A quote on the jacket of *Nora Ephron: A Biography* claims that it will “inspire the next generation of Ephron fans to pick up her writing, turn on her films, and dream another dream of what is possible in their lives”. Perhaps this reveals a chronic lack of imagination on my part, but I find it hard to envision someone reaching for this biography before streaming *You’ve Got Mail* or reading *Heartburn*. To borrow her words: I can’t understand why anyone would first read *about* Nora Ephron, when what she wrote about herself is so good. ●



**Nora Ephron:  
A Biography**  
Kristin Marguerite  
Doidge  
Chicago Review  
Press, 304pp,  
£28.99

**Ephron often wrote on women’s liberation but was never reluctant to critique or find humour in the movement**



## The rise and fall of Lex Greensill

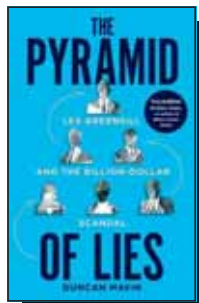
How David Cameron's favourite banker became the focus of a billion-dollar scandal

By Will Dunn

It's a trick that goes back at least as far as the Middle Ages. Say a wool merchant has a stack of unpaid invoices from tailors who buy his cloth, but no cash on hand to buy more wool. Rather than stop trading while he waits for his customers to pay up, he sells the invoices, at a small discount, to a "factor" – a banker who gives him the cash today. The merchant gets to keep trading, and the factor collects the money from the tailors and pockets the difference.

In the centuries since, factoring became part of the supply chains that grew around the world, oiled by liquidity. As these operations became faster and more complex they needed not just factoring but reverse factoring, in which people sell their debt, rather than their credit, and each agent in the chain is paid straight away. The process became computerised, and modern global trade now runs on a silent river of digitised debt.

The problem for Lex Greensill, a farmer's son from Bundaberg, Australia, was that this business, known as supply chain finance, isn't a huge money-spinner. So he pretended it was, selling its magic everywhere from boardrooms to trading floors to the highest echelons of British politics before his real business – extending risky, short-term loans to people other banks wouldn't touch – was uncovered by



**The Pyramid of Lies:**  
**Lex Greensill and the Billion-Dollar Scandal**

Duncan Mavin  
Macmillan,  
352pp, £20

Duncan Mavin and other journalists, and his company collapsed in March 2021, leaving billions in unpaid bills.

The picture that emerges from Mavin's forensic and riveting book is of a man driven by grasping insecurity. This is a personality cut from the pages of *GQ*, somebody obsessed by the need to have the very best in suits, air travel and business cards.

The business cards were one-and-a-half times standard size to make them stick out of a Rolodex. They were designed by Smythson of Bond Street and, like many things in Greensill's life, they served a double purpose. Until May 2010, Smythson's creative director was Samantha Cameron, and eventually Lex would have two sets: one for his company, Greensill Capital, and one for 10 Downing Street, where David Cameron took him on as a crown representative in 2014.

Cameron had his uses for Greensill, too. He and George Osborne knew that huge cuts to public spending would hobble Britain's economy, but like all good ex-Buller boys they blithely assumed that their vandalism could be easily paid for. When banks remained cautious, Cameron's government looked for new ways for businesses to borrow, and supply chain finance was made to fit the bill. Greensill went to almost every arm of government touting his financial wizardry, and with Cameron's help he introduced it to the NHS.

On 24 June 2016 Cameron walked humming from the podium at which he had just resigned towards a new role at Greensill Capital, where he would work as a lobbyist for £29,000 a day. The two men visited Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman in his desert retreat, and Son Masayoshi, CEO of the company with the world's biggest technology investment funds, in Tokyo. During the pandemic, Cameron lobbied officials in government and the Bank of England to allow Greensill to offer taxpayer-backed loans to businesses.

And yet Greensill seems drawn to disaster. He helped persuade Carillion to move its debts into its supply chain (it collapsed in 2018, owing £7bn); he extended loans to the Spanish energy giant Abengoa (it collapsed in 2021, owing €9bn); he financed an airline's deal for Boeing 737 Max planes (the model was grounded for 20 months following two crashes). His most dangerous relationship, however, was with the metals tycoon Sanjeev Gupta, to whom he loaned \$5bn.

For years, Gupta supplied much of the revenue that allowed Greensill to claim its worth to investors; prior to its collapse, Greensill sought a valuation of \$7bn. But the arrangement was also Greensill's undoing, as a series of risky bets on Gupta's companies led the financial institutions that insured Greensill's debt and provided its credit to withdraw their support, leaving it exposed as Gupta's troubled business defaulted.

The question is: who will pay? Greensill keeps a low profile at his eight-bedroom Georgian vicarage in Cheshire. Cameron was cleared of unregistered lobbying. And Nadhim Zahawi, whom Gupta thanked for being "personally instrumental" in securing £400m in state-backed loans for his business, is Chancellor of the Exchequer. The cost to the taxpayer of the Greensill debacle has been estimated at up to £5bn – so the answer, as always, is you. ●

## Reviewed in short

### **The Escape Artist: The Man Who Broke Out of Auschwitz to Warn the World** by Jonathan Freedland

John Murray, 376pp, £20

The journalist Jonathan Freedland's book starts in 1944 with Rudolf Vrba and Fred Wetzler hiding for three days under a pile of timber in Auschwitz concentration camp. They had spread tobacco soaked in petrol around the logs to put off the guard dogs and after their nerve-shredding wait the two young men broke out of the compound – the first Jews ever to escape. The tension, however, barely drops. The pair, after further ordeals, finally made it back to their native Slovakia, where Vrba put his extraordinary facility with numbers to great use. He had been forced to work in various sectors in Auschwitz and had memorised what Freedland calls “the data of industrialised murder”. He used it to compile a 32-page report that he presented to the Allies: it provided a comprehensive account of the Nazi's genocidal programme, which had previously been the stuff of rumour. Freedland estimates that Vrba's report immediately saved the lives of Budapest's 200,000 Jews who were waiting to be deported.

Vrba's postwar life was one of neither contentment nor acclaim but this account finally brings both his extraordinary actions and his heroism into the light.

*By Michael Prodger*

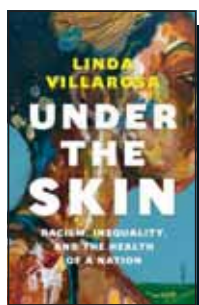
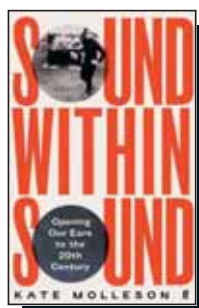
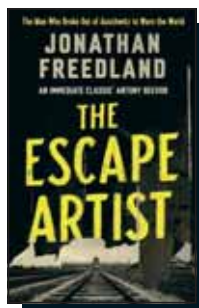
### **Under the Skin: Racism, Inequality and the Health of a Nation** by Linda Villarosa

Scribe, 288pp, £16.99

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the deep racial inequalities that define the capitalist democracies of the West, nowhere more than in the US, where black people died at a significantly higher rate than white people. George Floyd had coronavirus when a Minneapolis police officer murdered him in 2020 – a moment that brutally exposed how black Americans experience life at the cruel intersection of health and state violence.

Introducing her new book, the journalist-activist Linda Villarosa reminds us that the US “has the most advanced medical technology in the world – and spends more on healthcare than anywhere else” – yet black and other minority Americans are largely denied this technology. While Villarosa once thought poverty was the root cause of black Americans' health problems, she now believes that the US healthcare system is built atop a structural racism in which myths about the black body – that black people have higher pain thresholds, for example – remain deeply embedded in the (white) medical establishment. This is a searing indictment of a broken health system in the age of American decline.

*By Gavin Jacobson*



### **Sound Within Sound: Opening Our Ears to the 20th Century** by Kate Molleson

Faber & Faber, 368pp, £18.99

The music critic and broadcaster Kate Molleson introduces us to ten 20th-century composers whose works are rarely included in the “canon” of classical music – because they are not white, male and Western. She travels to upstate New York to visit Annea Lockwood, the 82-year-old New Zealander who is fascinated by how sound is formed both by nature and by our bodies. In Oxford she meets Peggy Seeger, whose mother Ruth Crawford, known as a collector of folk songs, wrote formidable string quartets in her youth.

Molleson is tremendous at describing music. An album by Walter Smetak, who spent his career in Brazil, is “an astral smirr, a pointillistic smudge, a crowded and inky night sky like a microtonal Milky Way”. And among these vivid musical details is an important political point: Molleson will not allow her book to be used as a weapon in the culture wars. “It is an odd and spurious fear that The Great Works are somehow threatened if classical music becomes more inclusive,” she asserts. Bach and Brahms are in no way slighted because we now also know the joys of the Danish electro pioneer Else Marie Pade, or the Ethiopian pianist and nun Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou.

*By Ellen Peirson-Hagger*

### **The Young Accomplice** by Benjamin Wood

Viking, 368pp, £16.99

“He'd had her spinning like a pony on a carousel from the beginning, and she hadn't even heard the music playing.” Joyce Savigear has been at the mercy of Mal – flabby, hairy and older, though we're not sure by how much – since he lured her away from her job at a department store at 16 with promises of trips to the zoo and a life different from that of “ordinary folk”. It's 1952 and she and her younger brother are beginning afresh, having each been selected from borstals by the Mayhoods, a pair of architects who own a farm, for the quality of their drawings. The improbability of their both being chosen, unknowingly, from different institutions adds an air of foreboding.

The Mayhoods, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's creative communal living project Taliesin, replant the Savigears into a new life, working the land and apprenticing in architecture. But soon Mal's malign influence creeps into even this upright, bucolic setting. Benjamin Wood's tender fourth novel is about nature and idealism, but it also examines responsibility and the fragility of aspiration.

*By Pippa Bailey*



Wasteland: the Germans' destruction of Stalingrad made it easier for the Russians to defend the city

## A myth made from rubble

There are echoes of Ukraine's struggle in the epic battle for Stalingrad, but this time Russia is on the wrong side of history

By William Boyd

Ukrainian ironies and parallels accrue on almost every page throughout Iain MacGregor's splendid new account of the Battle of Stalingrad – ironies that, of course, he could never have foreseen while the book was being written, although he notes the beginnings of the Ukraine war in his introduction and epilogue. Vladimir Putin's crazed and bungled invasion has put the Russian armed forces back in the international spotlight and the verdict is both shaming and shocking.

The Red Army heroes of yesteryear who fought in the titanic conflict that raged in and around Stalingrad between September 1942 and the end of January 1943 would not recognise their successors. The drunken, terrified, mutinous conscripts who are being asked to fight in Putin's self-glorifying war would seem utterly alien to them. The contrast between the martial myth of Stalingrad and the present tawdry – though still lethal – reality is astounding.

MacGregor writes with great fluency and narrative

LASKI DIFFUSION/GETTY IMAGES

drive, and his account of the context to the battle and the complexity of its fraught swings of fortune and misfortune is compellingly terse. Stalingrad was attacked in the autumn of 1942 as a result of the relative failure of “Operation Barbarossa”, Hitler’s 1941 invasion of Russia. The new campaign against Russia was renamed *Fall Blau* (“Case Blue”) and it was once more an assault of many armies across an enormous front. The offensive had serious ambitions, not least of which was the push into the south towards the Caucasus and the rich oilfields between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Stalingrad was just over 400 kilometres due east from today’s border between Russia and Ukraine. The Germans had occupied Ukraine in 1941 and the geography of their push south rings with names familiar from the current headlines: Kyiv, Kharkov, Poltava, Izyum, Luhansk.

In 1942 Stalingrad (Volgograd today) was a large industrial city some 60 kilometres by five kilometres with a population of close to half a million – but swollen to almost twice that size by refugees from the war. The city was on the west bank of the Volga. The huge river, about two kilometres wide, was at the Russian defenders’ backs – hence the desperate nature of their resistance.

The German Army Group South quickly arrived at Stalingrad and stopped. The city was soon reduced to rubble by German air superiority and artillery bombardments. Paradoxically, this destruction aided the Russians. Every ruined house or apartment block, or demolished school or railway station, became a bunker – think of the recent scenes in Mariupol or Severodonetsk. Overwhelming force made little impact on the pockets of stalwart, improvised defence, and inevitably the battle became a costly slugfest. A few metres gained, a few metres lost. The casualty count on both sides was in the tens of thousands. The scale of the battle is almost unimaginable.

The Russian army, however, adapted to the survival tactics better than the Germans. The concept of “active defence” was born. General Vasily Chuikov, the commandant of Stalingrad, said in an interview that: “The peculiarities of the fighting in Stalingrad... can be applied to all combat situations. Any populated area can be turned into a fortress and can grind down the enemy ten times better than a garrison.” Sound familiar?

Chuikov then developed the idea of *shturmovye otriady* (“storm groups”) – aggressive patrols by a handful of well-armed soldiers, who used the demolished buildings as cover and harassed the German forces at night. It was remarkably effective counter-warfare. Slowly but surely, as 1942 drew to its end, the Battle of Stalingrad became a stalemate. The front line barely moved: German and Russian soldiers faced each other across a few yards of shattered masonry. Attacking ruined buildings became futile – they were unassailable death-traps.

The title of MacGregor’s book refers to one of these staunchly defended outposts, today something of a shrine to the heroism represented by battle itself. Known as “Pavlov’s House” (codename “Lighthouse”), it was under the command of Junior Sergeant Yakov

Fedotovich Pavlov. The ethnic mix of the soldiers under him encompassed the peoples of all Russia and, thanks to their endurance and cunning, they held out against overwhelming German opposition for two months. However, MacGregor has established that Pavlov himself was wounded fairly swiftly and evacuated. The legend of the “Lighthouse” was a deliberate act of propaganda that lasted long after the end of the war. Pavlov was heavily decorated and lauded for his uncommon bravery, paraded everywhere as a hero of the Soviet Union and cynosure of everything that Stalingrad came to symbolise.

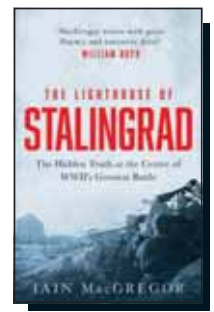
The myth persists. Putin has visited Volgograd many times. The grim paradox for Putin is that the myth and values of Stalingrad that inspired his invasion have been turned on their head. This time it is the Ukrainians who are repelling the barbaric invaders and who are fighting for the honour and safety of the motherland.

**I**n November 1942 the siege was broken by an audacious breakout overseen by General Georgy Zhukov. “Operation Uranus”, a large-scale attack on a 320-kilometre front, drove back the German and Romanian armies in the Caucasus and resulted in General Paulus’s 6th Army being surrounded in the very city they had been attacking for five months. The besiegers were now themselves besieged. It was only a matter of time before the hopelessness of their position was brutally manifest and Paulus and the wretched remains of his army surrendered. This was the Red Army’s greatest victory and, it can be argued, the turning point of the war. All Hitler’s hopes were dashed at Stalingrad – and the long endgame of the Second World War began to play out.

However, MacGregor’s real coup is not so much the exposure of the propaganda-myth of “Pavlov’s House” but the access he was given to the unpublished letters and memoirs of a German officer who was present at the battle from its inception to its end. Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Roske is almost a Wehrmacht Officer from central casting. Cultured, intelligent, an able and dedicated soldier, his observations on Stalingrad add first-person authenticity to the familiar history of the battle. Furthermore, he officiated at the surrender of General Paulus, and his meticulous observations of the process are superbly and uniquely detailed.

While he was fighting during the battle, news reached Roske that, back in Germany, his wife had given birth to a son. Roske became a prisoner after the surrender in 1943 and wasn’t released from the Russian Gulag until 1955 – at which stage his son would have been almost a teenager. It is a poignant coda to the whole story of Stalingrad that, despite surviving the horrors of the fighting and more than a decade in Russian prison camps, Roske found civilian life too much to bear. He died by suicide in 1956. Stalingrad was still taking its toll long after the battle was over. ●

*William Boyd’s new novel, “The Romantic”, will be published in October by Viking*



**The Lighthouse of Stalingrad: The Hidden Truth at the Centre of WWII’s Greatest Battle**  
Iain MacGregor  
Constable, 368pp,  
£25

**Every ruined house or apartment block, or demolished school or railway station, became a bunker**

# independent thinking from polity

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Serhii Rudenko

Translated by Michael M. Naydan, Alla Perminova

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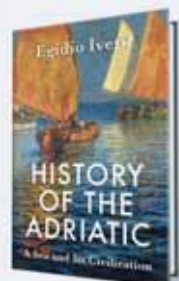
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## Close encounters of the wild kind

Magic and nature help children confront their fears in the best new books for young readers

By Amanda Craig

In these grim times, we like to think of children's books as a walled garden of innocence, safety and peace. Yet the greatest children's writers have always known that the young need arming against the worst, whether war, climate change, displacement or mortality.

In David Farr's fantasy, *The Book of Stolen Dreams* (Usborne, £12.99) – one of the best new books for 9-12s – Rachel and Robert live in a totalitarian state that has killed their mother and is ruled by a president who hates children. The siblings flee, and what follows is a heart-stopping adventure of the kind that will appeal to fans of Eva Ibbotson and Philip Pullman. There is an assassination plot, betrayals and resistance, as well as pancakes, airships and a touch of magic. It's not an escape into a better world, but a challenge to this one.

Not since E Nesbit or Joan Aiken has a writer conjured up so much excitement and enchantment for the young and resentful as Lissa Evans does in *Wished* (David Fickling, £12.99), for 8-11s. Ed, who uses a wheelchair, his sister Roo and the "class clown" Willard are stuck with their boring neighbour during a holiday. They find a box of birthday candles that grant wishes until they burn out. What can be done in five minutes? Fizzing with charm and wit, *Wished* will take children out of a state of worry and return them to a better place.

**Open ocean:** Hannah Gold's *The Lost Whale* is about a child's quest to find a gentle giant

Being small and powerless is often what makes children vulnerable. Two delightful, big-hearted books for 7-9s address this, indirectly. Hannah Moffatt's *Small!* (Everything With Words, £7.99) is about an ordinary boy packed off to Madame Bogbrush's School for Gifted Giants. There, he learns how to stomp, smash and sing horribly, all to give his single mum the chance to keep working. It's a joy. Caryl Lewis's *Seed* (Macmillan, £7.99) is quieter but also very funny. Marty's dad has gone, his mother has mental health problems, he's pushed around at school and the council is threatening eviction. But when his eccentric grandad gives him a seed from his allotment, it changes Marty's life.

Skye McKenna's *Hedgewitch* (Welbeck Flame, £12.99) is about a bullied child who discovers she has powers and must learn to control them at a special boarding school. Its account of how the ostracised Cassie gets to the land of Faerie, where a battle against kidnapping goblins is raging, will be thoroughly magical for those aged 8+. Gwen, Noor, Dodo and Vera are at boarding school for a different reason in Jamila Gavin's terrific *Never Forget You* (Farshore, £8.99, aged 12+). It's 1937 and their parents are abroad. Each girl gets flung into a different arena of the Second World War, from joining the Resistance in France to surviving the Blitz. As in her masterly *Coram Boy*, Gavin weaves together historical events and heart-rending characters, some of which are based on real-life heroines who, like Noor, defied torture by the Nazis.

Yet while human beings do terrible things to each other, the approaching environmental catastrophe is what preoccupies many children. Hannah Gold follows her prize-winning *The Last Bear* with *The Lost Whale* (HarperCollins, £12.99), about a boy sent from London to California to stay with his American grandmother. Once again, Levi Pinfold's dramatic illustrations underscore a story about a child's encounter with the wild during a time of extreme stress. It is a perfect match with Nizrana Farook's *The Girl Who Lost a Leopard* (Nosy Crow, £7.99, both 9+). Set, like her previous novels, in Sri Lanka, this is a tale for those who crave animal adventures. The spirited Selvi must find a way to protect her beloved leopard, the "true king of the mountains", from poachers.

Phil Earle's *While the Storm Rages* (Andersen, £6.99) follows his Carnegie-shortlisted *When the Sky Falls* with another story about saving animals during the Second World War. The government has decreed that pets be put down. Noah sets off to find a safe place for his dog, and is joined by a host of other creatures. Moving and brilliantly written, it is a classic for 8-11s.

For those who wish to read aloud to their children or grandchildren, or for young readers of 5-7, the reissue of Paul Biegel's *The King of the Copper Mountains* (Pushkin, £7.99) is a must-have. After a 1,000-year reign, King Mansolain is dying. A succession of animals, from a wolf to a three-headed dragon, arrive to tell the king their stories – some thrilling, some funny, some sad. Each must make the king's heart beat faster, to keep him alive. It's a reminder that, whether in war or peace, the prospect of losing those we love is always the ultimate trauma. ●

## An English holy grail

The Lindisfarne Gospels are returning north. Their spectacular pages still illuminate questions of nationhood today

By Michael Prodger

Even for a saint, Cuthbert was a prolific miracle worker. Added to the standard celestial gifts of healing, asceticism and clairvoyance, Cuthbert, a 7th century holy man and hermit from the north-east of the British Isles, had special communion with animals and the sea. When a group of monks were stranded on a raft on the River Tyne and in danger of being washed away, it was Cuthbert who prayed until the wind changed and brought them to shore. After he spent the night waist deep in the sea in prayer, a witness saw otters emerge to dry him with their fur and warm him with their breath. When he was building a church and in need of a hefty roof beam, one was dispatched on a heavenly tide to wash up on the nearby shore. When stranded on an uninhabited island for three days by a storm, the saint was sent cooked dolphin meat by God, just as on a previous journey Cuthbert's horse had found warm bread among the roof straw when they stopped, tired and hungry, at a derelict hut. When ravens pecked away at the thatch of Cuthbert's hermit retreat on the Farne Islands, he reprimanded them and they returned in contrition bringing lard for him to oil his shoes.

And on the miracles went. He brought plague-dead back to life; saved villages from fires; cured the sick, including, posthumously, a paralysed man who regained the use of his legs when the saint's shoes were placed on his feet. All these unequivocal signs of holiness quickly spurred a cult around him and Cuthbert became England's most popular saint, unrivalled until the canonisation of Thomas à Becket in 1173. When Cuthbert's body was moved from Lindisfarne in AD 875 as the monks fled Viking raiders, his corpse was found to be uncorrupted and the shrine

in Durham Cathedral, where his relics were eventually laid to rest, was for centuries a place of pilgrimage and one of the holiest sites in the realm.

Even saints, however, need their proselytisers. Cuthbert found his in St Bede, who wrote three accounts of his life, drawing on the memories of the monks who had known him. Bede's writings helped ensure that the saint's memory remained strong, particularly in his home region, the Kingdom of Northumbria, which once covered most of northern England and southern Scotland and spread from coast to coast. As far away as Wessex, Alfred the Great was drawn by the potency of this northern divine and when, during his own travails with the Danes, the king saw a vision of the saint he co-opted Cuthbert into his nation-building programme. And later, during the 14th-century Scottish wars of independence, Cuthbert's altar-cloth was used as a banner and gave protection to English soldiers in battle.

St Cuthbert's most tangible miracle was not a hallowed tale, however, but an object. He was the inspiration behind the Lindisfarne Gospels, created in the early 8th century in a monastery on the tidal island of Lindisfarne, where he had served as prior and then bishop. The magnificently illuminated book is one of the foundational texts of English identity and perhaps the greatest artwork to survive from Anglo-Saxon times. Every one of its vellum pages not only refutes the idea that the Dark Ages – or Early Middle Ages – were creatively barren, but makes clear the reverence in which the saint was held, a reverence made explicit in an inscription attesting that the book was created “for God and St Cuthbert”.

To the chagrin of many north-easterners, the Lindisfarne Gospels have been in London for centuries. Just when they arrived is unclear but it was probably with Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s. The book was part of the Cotton Library that was gifted to the nation in 1702 and that became one of the founding collections of the British Museum at its institution in 1753, and it was later transferred to the care of the newly established British Library. This September, the Gospels are returning to their origins and will be on display at a special exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle (17 September – 3 December), where they will also be the focus of a series of other art events in the region.

The last time the book made the journey north, to Durham in 2013, it was seen by more than 100,000 visitors. Matters of both nationhood and regionalism have become more pressing in subsequent years, and the loan will cause mild trepidation in London, since there has been a long-running campaign for the Gospels to be permanently relocated to the north-east. In 1998 the Bishop of Durham stated in the House of Lords that “the questions surrounding the location of the Lindisfarne Gospels are far from being of interest to only one region of the country. The issue touches on matters religious, cultural, social and commercial which help to shape the whole nation.”

What is it about an artefact made in the early 8th century that has such power today? The book

**With a direct translation between the lines, the book is the first known full version of the gospels in English**





Divine hand: an illustration of Saint Matthew in the Lindisfarne Gospels

◀ contains the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, chapter lists, canon tables (a scheme for dividing the gospels into parallel passages), prologues and feast day readings. The four gospels, written in Latin, are taken from St Jerome's Vulgate version of the Bible. Each is prefaced by a full-page illustration of the author-saint and the gospels are separated by a "carpet page" – a rectangular geometric illustration of great elaborateness that resembles a Persian carpet.

Almost as important as the original text and decoration, however, is the colophon, or statement of information, added to a blank column at the end of the book by a priest named Aldred, who was provost of the community at Chester-le-Street, just north of Durham, in the 970s. It reads:

Eadfrith bishop of the Church of Lindisfarne/He, in the beginning, wrote this book for God and/St Cuthbert and generally for all the holy folk/who are on the island./And Æthilwald bishop of the Lindisfarne-islanders,/bound and covered it without, as he well knew how to do./And Billfrith the anchorite, he forged the/ ornaments which are on the outside and/bedecked it with gold and with gems and/also with gilded silver-pure wealth./And Aldred, unworthy priest, the lowest,/glossed it between the lines in English with God's help and St Cuthbert's.

For good measure, Aldred added a pen portrait in the margin recounting that his father was called Ælfred and that he himself is called "the excellent son of a good woman". This nice family touch aside, it is thanks to Aldred that we know who wrote, bound and ornamented the book and who was responsible for adding, between the lines, a direct translation into Old Northumbrian, a dialect of Old English. Aldred's gloss means the book is the first known, extant full translation of the gospels into English – starting a tradition that would ultimately lead to the most influential book in the English language, the King James Bible of 1611.

The decorative work of the goldsmith "Billfrith the anchorite" no longer survives: his "treasure binding" has long since disappeared and the current ornamentation on the book's cover was commissioned in 1852. The work of the other men remains intact. Of the three it is Eadfrith who is most important. Rather than being the product of many hands in a scriptorium – the usual practice for a work of such value, length and complexity – the script of the Lindisfarne Gospels is the work of this one man. And although the exact dates of its composition are not known, Eadfrith became Bishop of Lindisfarne in AD 698 and died in 721, so the book is usually dated around AD 715-720.

It is worth imagining the nature of his labour, working by daylight in a south-facing room in summer, augmented by tallow candlelight in winter, on a rocky speck in the North Sea, with cold and raiders a constant anxiety. He copied the text from another book, possibly brought back to Northumbria from Rome by one of the bishops of Wearmouth Jarrow some 60 miles down the coast. Before he could start work he needed to source the vellum – the skin of a

stillborn calf that has been thinned, stretched and abraded (the Lindisfarne Gospels required the skins of 150 animals). He had to make his pigments: it has been estimated that using just six natural ingredients – from lichens and lead to verdigris and chalk – he developed a palette of 90 colours which he then mixed with egg white as a binder. Finally, he needed to acquire both gold leaf and gold powder.

The routine part for Eadfrith was the writing, 259 pages in all. He wrote in insular script – a style that may have originated in Ireland and that was dominant in the British Isles between AD 500 and 900 and also used in the other great example of early decorated calligraphy, the *Book of Kells* (circa AD 800). Even before he dipped his quill into gall ink (made from iron salts and oak gall) he had to rule each and every one of his pages, and it has been suggested that Eadfrith was the inventor of the lead pencil.

**T**he glory of the Gospels, however, lies in their illuminations, which reveal a variety of sources. The four portraits of the saints show Graeco-Roman influences. The incipits, the highly decorated opening words of each of the gospels, contain Celtic knotwork deriving from Ireland and Iona in the Hebrides (the monastery at Lindisfarne was founded by an Irish missionary, St Aidan, in AD 635). The intertwined animal and bird forms that snake around one another are often associated with the German lands. Eadfrith had been exposed to a multiplicity of sources, some in books and manuscripts, some in metalwork, some in stone carving, and his genius lay in melding them in the Gospels. This emblem of Englishness is, like so much about the nation, a polyglot mixture that drew on faraway realms.

For all his extraordinary inventiveness, Eadfrith's flourishes were nevertheless kept within the tightest of designs. They are too intricate to have been drawn spontaneously straight on to the page and it would have been too expensive for him to work out his patterning on vellum, so he probably used wax tablets and then, when his forms were painstakingly perfected using compasses and rulers, transferred them in outline to the vellum, possibly using some form of 8th-century lightbox. His indentations, prickings and other planning marks can be seen on the back of the pages.

It is the carpet pages that show Eadfrith's technical skills at their most refined. Each is constructed on a grid and contains a different cruciform shape at its centre, around which skeins of knotwork and animal forms are braided or inset as panels. They bear similarities with the metalwork of the Sutton Hoo treasures in East Anglia, which, like the Gospels, contain elements from distant lands, including silverware from Byzantium and garnets from Sri Lanka. The Lindisfarne carpet pages are two-dimensional versions of Sutton Hoo's wrought objects.

Nevertheless, the meaning of the carpet pages – extraordinary pieces of abstract art – is unclear. There are five of them in all and they separate the four gospels and so act like further covers within the book, distinguishing the separate texts, and indeed their

**This emblem of Englishness is, like so much about the nation, a polyglot mixture that drew on faraway realms**



Founding father: St Cuthbert, depicted here in a 12th century manuscript, was the inspiration for the Lindisfarne Gospels

designs may be a visual nod to Billfrith's lost jewel covering, "bedecked with gold and gems". Eadfrith's intention was undoubtedly to honour St Cuthbert by creating patterns of almost divine difficulty that also delight and divert the eye of the reader. Their resemblance to Islamic prayer mats, however, suggests that they were also intended to function as aids to meditation, that by following the patterns the reader could get closer to the intentions of God. They serve as a visual metaphor too: God, in the form of the cross, is at the heart of each page, giving structure to the mass of surrounding patterns that mimic the infinite varieties of human life.

The Lindisfarne Gospels also contain an intertwined human story. Aldred's colophon lays out the names of the men responsible for the book but there was a posthumous coda too. When, in AD 875, the monks abandoned Lindisfarne to escape the Viking Halfdene Ragnarsson and his "Great Heathen Army", they embarked on years of wandering. Before they left, they placed their most precious possessions inside St Cuthbert's coffin: alongside the body of the saint they put the bones of St Aidan, the head of St Oswald, a miniature leatherbound gospel of St John known as the St Cuthbert Gospel, and not just the Lindisfarne Gospels itself but the remains of two of its creators, Eadfrith and the man responsible for its binding, Bishop Æthilwald.

For the next seven years, this rattling holy treasure chest was carried all over Northumbria. At one point, according to legend, the monks tried to sail to Ireland and during the passage the Gospels were somehow washed overboard. They floated ashore three days later, totally unaffected by the water (there are no water stains on the book today): Cuthbert had effected yet another aqueous miracle. The monks eventually made it to Chester-le-Street, where Aldred made his translation of the Gospels, and the book and relics remained there for more than a century before being moved in AD 995 to a permanent shine in Durham.

Although Cuthbert and the other holy men were finally separated from the Lindisfarne Gospels by Henry VIII's commissioners, they themselves remained together. The bodies had been reburied in 1542 after the Reformation and exhumed and reburied in 1827; in 1899 they were dug up once more. This time, however, while lifting the coffin the wood collapsed and the bones of Cuthbert, Eadfrith and the others fell in a jumbled heap to the bottom of the tomb.

There was a macabre poetry to the episode. Eadfrith, England's first great native artist whose name has survived, the creator of the work of art that encapsulates the nation's origins, had in life dedicated both himself and his wondrous book to the memory of St Cuthbert. Now, even in death, he would not be parted from him. ●

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# Interview

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## “I dream of a world without politics”

The French literary celebrity Édouard Louis on shame, autobiography and why his family abandoned the far right

By Lola Seaton

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In a 2017 interview with the French writer Édouard Louis, marking the translation into English of his explosive first “novel”, *The End of Eddy* (2014), the interviewer, treading with a caution, notes that “you have said that some of the vignettes are based on fact”. Given the book’s “blurring of fact and fiction”, how should we classify it? Every word is true, Louis insists, “every scene of this book I have experienced”.

The interviewer wasn’t the first to make the mistake. Louis’ manuscript – a searing autobiographical account of growing up in a stricken, isolated, deindustrialising village and being shunned for his queerness by his working-class family – was initially rejected because the publisher didn’t believe its setting was real. They couldn’t countenance that their advanced, prosperous country could harbour such an immiserated, self-enclosed world of alcoholism, pain, premature death, of virulent machismo, homophobia and racism.

After the book was published in France in 2014, when Louis was just 21, the press descended on his hometown – Hallencourt – to maliciously fact-check his depiction of it. Such incredulity attests to the cultural invisibility of the politically neglected milieu the book evokes, one that burst into public view again in 2018 with the *gilets jaunes* movement, of which Louis was a prominent supporter.

Most people write one autobiography, if that, near the end of their lives. But for Louis, 29 and already having enjoyed – or endured – nearly a decade of global and sometimes stormy literary celebrity, autobiography is a *métier*. When we met on a muggy day in early July he told me that memoir is his “revolutionary weapon” of choice, which he uses to

relentlessly “confront the dominant class” with a reality they’d prefer to ignore. In a talk in 2018, Louis, who studied sociology at the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris, said he “can’t” write fiction because he wanted his “real father to exist in a book”. His trenchant, unadorned style spurns any embellishment, of either reality or prose. “I want to write only the same story again and again,” Louis writes in his latest book, *A Woman’s Battles and Transformations*, about his mother’s escape from her dismal marriage to Louis’ domineering father and from their village (where the book’s translator, the novelist Tash Aw, happened to live for years). Louis has made it his mission to render with almost masochistic candour the suffering and humiliations engulfing his lonely childhood.

Yet, his unsparing, often unflattering family portraits are also designed to be impersonal, to show how the violence circulating between individuals originates in the class system. The title of his second book *History of Violence* (2016) – which is about being raped by a man he met on a street in Paris – could serve as a description of his oeuvre. “I don’t believe in individual responsibility. I believe in society,” Louis said recently, addressing an audience at a London bookshop that had gathered to mark the publication of his new book. “It’s not about me or about my mother. It’s about the world we live in.”

Louis and I met in London the day after his talk, on the terrace of a decidedly un-Parisian – half-hearted Italian, touristy – café in Russell Square. Given it’s all true, I asked Louis, why does he call his books “novels”? “Truth,” he replied, is not “immediately visible”: “You have to build it to find it.” Although he has renounced invention, his purpose-built books are highly wrought, stylised and, above all, selective depending on his polemical intention. In *The End of Eddy*, for example, Eddy’s father is a monstrous figure, but in the curated vignettes of his last novel, *Who Killed My Father*, he is sympathetic, a victim.

Louis’ slender books are not subtle psychological studies but lurid sociological parables about the transformations wrought on individuals by social circumstances, whether for good – as with his mother’s metamorphosis after escaping from her oppressive life in the village – or for ill. *Who Killed My Father* details his father’s decline after a series of insidious welfare policies forced him to sweep streets, despite his back having been mangled by machinery at the brass foundry where he had worked.

Nearly everyone in Louis’ village worked in the factory, and nearly everyone – including all of his family – voted for the far right, in what Louis diagnoses as a “desperate attempt to exist”. The family of Louis’ close friend, the sociologist Didier Eribon – a generation older and author of his own memoir about being the queer son of a conservative, working-class family, *Returning to Reims* (2009) – were staunch communists. By the time Louis was born in 1992, rust-belt families like his had long abandoned the left, which, neoliberalised in the 1980s, had abandoned them. In a 2017 essay for the *New York Times*, titled ▶



Édouard Louis, photographed for the *New Statesman* in London by Tori Ferenc

◀ “Why My Father Votes for Le Pen”, Louis explained that “modernised” left-wing parties had ceased to discuss “social class”, “suffering, pain and exhaustion”.

Louis’ work takes up these themes. When he was growing up, he tells me, his parents were always complaining that the political class had forgotten them. He is amusingly critical of the faddish, “bourgeois” notion that people must – that *only* they can – speak for themselves: “The bourgeoisie is a talkative class. They go to psychoanalysis, they go to couples’ therapy, they even talk with their children. They create art, they create literature, so they end up believing that everybody wants to talk, and so they frame all political conversation as about: how do you let people speak and how do you not take people’s speech? But it’s so class-centric. My mother would never say, ‘I want to talk.’ She was saying: *Nobody talks about us.*”

Louis’ project, at once aesthetic and political, is to rectify this silence – “to create a new language for the left”, as he put it to me, capable of articulating contemporary working-class experience.

I observed that the bookshop audience the previous evening had seemed a little star-struck. Louis’ dress was immaculately, almost impersonally, normal – skinny jeans, maroon New Balance trainers, blue hoody – with the impish exception of his subtly shimmering nails, painted with gold glitter. His otherwise unflashy demeanour couldn’t quite neutralise his striking looks – his white-blond hair, blue eyes, youthful, clear features. Reflexively self-effacing, Louis responded that memoir creates a strong “connection” with people. Autobiography – “the most collective form” – is “about dissolving yourself”, which “makes people able to recognise their own flesh, their own bodies, their own sufferings”. It’s fiction, Louis tells me, that is “narcissistic”, with its hubristic presumption that a made-up character “will interest the whole world”.

Except for his acute isolation, there are few indications in *The End of Eddy* that Louis would grow up to be the writer he has since become. There are no books in Eddy’s dilapidated, poorly lit house – only the unrelenting television. (Louis’ family hated books “because we had the feeling that books hated us”: “nothing was as assaulting”, as humiliating, as the sight of one.) Eddy exhibits no literary ambition or gifts, with the exception of his aptitude for theatre. This is his improbable portal to the cultivated, metropolitan world of the bourgeoisie: late on, he wins a scholarship to a performing arts school in the nearest big town, Amiens, barely a 40-minute drive away but in effect another universe. But Eddy only finds acting easy because he has spent his youth trying to eradicate his effeminate mannerisms and behave like a “tough guy” to fit in. His escape, we are to understand, is not down to personal brilliance but to luck and the desperation born of ardently sought but failed assimilation.

This determinism is essential to the remarkable equanimity with which Louis records the violence that enveloped his youth. A disciple of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Louis often speaks about the body. This is partly an effect of his experience of politics, he

told me, to which his family were intimately exposed: a €10 welfare cut might mean they went without eating for two days. “I always write with a sense of shame,” Louis said in a 2020 profile in the *New York Times*, and his preternatural stamina for harrowing self-exposure strikes me as a feat of near-physical endurance. At one point during his talk in the bookshop, retelling an instance of his own cruelty to his mother, Louis said he had “goosebumps of shame”.

Louis is also drawn to the body because it is irrefutable: “The body is the material expression of the violence of the social world,” he said, sounding as though quoting someone. (“A worker’s body,” I read later in Didier Eribon’s memoir, reveals “the truth about the existence of classes.”) Louis told me he is like “a surgeon” doing a “sociological autopsy”: “For me, bodies express what the world is, what society is. If you expose bodies properly, you expose the world properly.”

Yet however rigorously executed Louis’ autopsies, one has the sense that the emphasis on the body may be a means of managing unease about subjecting his upbringing to such gruelling scrutiny. It is also perhaps a way of banishing the spectre of responsibility – whether for his own class defection or for his parents’ treatment of him as a queer child. He doesn’t think about his family’s feelings, he told the bookshop audience: “I think politically, in terms of homophobia, in terms of class domination, in terms of racism. And for me bodies are a means to talk about those issues.” If Louis’ determinism can seem too ironclad, his sense of his task can seem too honed, precociously well-defined in a melancholy way. “Politics,” Louis told me, “is not a pleasure. My dream is a world without politics, a world that would be so perfect that we wouldn’t need politics” – nor, perhaps, strenuously political literature like his.

In the first round of the recent French presidential election, all of Louis’ family voted for the left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Although he did not make it to the final two, Mélenchon went on to assemble a progressive alliance that won an impressive 131 seats in the legislative elections, denying Emmanuel Macron, who was grudgingly re-elected over Marine Le Pen, his parliamentary majority.

Despite the advance of the right – Le Pen’s National Rally increased its seats eleven-fold, to 89 – Louis is optimistic. “The political question is which way do you provide to people in order to say, ‘I exist’, ‘I suffer’?” Do they say “I suffer because of migrants” – scapegoating that the extremist candidate Éric Zemmour helped to entrench – or because of “capitalism, or class domination”? Louis is confident that if “we build a strong left again, so many people will switch”. His father used to man the voting booths to make sure everyone in the family ticked the right box – the far-right box. But at the end of *Who Killed My Father*, his body ravaged by factory work and the callous policies of the French state, he agrees with his son: “You’re right – what we need is a revolution.” ●

*“A Woman’s Battles and Transformations” is published by Harvill Secker*

Louis’ project is “to create a new language for the left”, capable of articulating contemporary working-class experience

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# Film

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## The return of the road trip

*Joyride* and *Hit the Road* both have a long-distance car ride at their centre – but one takes a route less travelled

By David Sexton

When it comes to Irish road movies, you can't beat *Waiting for Godot*. "Well? Shall we go?" "Yes, let's go." [They do not move]." Always room for another, though.

*Joyride*, written by Ailbhe Keogan and directed by Emer Reynolds (best known for her documentary on the Voyager spacecraft, *The Farthest*), takes us for a trip around lush County Kerry. Twelve-year-old Mully (Charlie Reid) has lost his mum to cancer and now lives with his waster dad. When Da tries to steal money raised for charity in a local bar, Mully snatches the cash from him and makes his getaway behind the wheel of an unattended taxi in the street outside.

He doesn't notice until too late that 40-something "saucy solicitor" Joy (Olivia Colman), known to him as "Vodka-Tonic" after her regular order, is comatose in the back – along with her newborn baby girl ("fresh out of the box"). And there's our odd-couple meet-cute.

Joy, whose own family life was bitter, isn't up for motherhood. So she's taking the baby to be adopted by her sister and then escaping to Lanzarote. "I'm going forward, not back," she keeps insisting, hardly able to look at her daughter. Colman gives a more plausible and likeable reading of tormented motherhood here than she did in *The Lost Daughter*.

Foul-mouthed he may be, but Mully has a heart of gold and he's shocked. Joy's a "mentalist", he reckons. Fortunately, he knows all about babies from looking ▶



Getaway drivers: Joy (Olivia Colman) and Mully (Charlie Reid) are each running away from trying realities

◀ after his niece, urging Joy to change her mind and teaching her how to breastfeed when she runs out of formula. (The idea for the script came to Keogan on a walk after she had difficulty breastfeeding her firstborn.) Joy is so moved her tears drop on the baby's head. "You just baptised her there," Mully remarks, in case we missed that.

Meanwhile, the pair racket around the countryside – rowing at first, before beginning to trust and help each other – pursued by Mully's dad, after the cash. The regular road-movie tropes are all there in minor mode: breaking through a roadblock, running out of petrol, hitching a ride, stealing another car... They even manage a ferry ride across the Shannon, the kindly ferryman informing Mully that in parenthood, "there's no fractions in play, you can't half-love a child".

*Joyride* is almost as heartwarming as it wants to be, and Colman and Reid work beautifully together, but it is too emphatic and explicitly symbolic to be fully affecting. When Mully asks the baby's name, Joy tells him it's Robin, having just spotted a robin. Mully says his ma was a Robin, too. A robin then pops up repeatedly though the film, even on the ferry. The many songs all hit the spot with painful precision.

The concept of the road movie has been most radically reinvented in Iran, by Abbas Kiarostami and his follower Jafar Panahi, exploring the ways in which filming in and from a car can navigate between the public and the private, freedom and restriction. Panahi's 2015 *Taxi Tehran*, filmed almost entirely in a shared taxi by tiny high-definition fixed cameras, showed just how liberated cinema can be by the most severe limitations.

*Hit the Road*, which won best film at last year's London Film Festival, is the feature debut of Jafar's son and one-time assistant, Panah Panahi. It is directly in the line of their work, but has an ambition and humour all its own. A family of four is on a journey, in a borrowed SUV, through the immense and rugged landscapes of north-west Iran, accompanied by an ailing dog.

Grumpy, sarky dad (Hassan Madjoooni) has his leg in plaster; mum (Pantea Panahiha) is alternately serene and anguished. The elder son (Amin Simiar) is withdrawn and sullen, but his younger brother (the amazing Rayan Sarlak, just six when this was filmed) is a crazy ball of energy, both enchanting the family and driving them nuts. The kid thinks they are taking his brother to his wedding, but slowly it becomes clear he is "a traveller", heading to the Turkish border to be smuggled out of the country. They pick up an injured cyclist, they're flagged down by another motorist. The little boy delivers an incredible lip-sync performance to a pre-Revolutionary Iranian pop anthem.

Scenes unroll with little camera movement, many wholly within the car. One revelatory moment is filmed in extreme and distant widescreen while the soundtrack remains up close. Another takes us to the stars. The film feels like truly taking this ambiguous journey with this family. The road movie made new. ●

*"Joyride" and "Hit the Road" are in cinemas now*

# Television

## The anchormen of 1980s Australia

By Rachel Cooke

**The Newsreader**  
BBC Two,  
aired 24 July,  
9pm; now on  
catch-up

Oh, Lord. What a treat *The Newsreader* is. A person would have to be almost unimaginably flinty-hearted and lacking in taste not to enjoy this delicious Australian drama just a little bit. And because (ha!) I'm the polar opposite of both these things, every time I watch it, I feel as though I'm wrapped in a million-thread-count sheet. Obviously, it's an enormous relief at this point to find a well-written, well-acted show that has nothing to do with crime, whether true or not – and please, let it stand as encouragement to commissioning editors everywhere. But there's much more to its gorgeous, Poison-scented embrace than these things alone.

It manages to be so many things at once: a comedy, a love story, a pastiche, an homage, a soap. Come for the shoulder pads and the awful (but you like them really) songs by Mr Mister, Cutting Crew and Toto. Stay for the office politics, the rabid ambition and to revisit the news stories that shaped 1986: the Challenger disaster; the release from prison of Lindy "a dingo ate my baby!" Chamberlain; the meltdown at



Young gun goes for it: Sam Reid as junior reporter Dale Jennings

BBC/WERNER FILM PRODUCTIONS



Chernobyl. If it looks great – think carefully labelled video tapes and outsize gold Trifari earrings – it sounds even better, its dialogue at once cartoony and horribly convincing (the writer is Michael Lucas). Here is the authentic din of the Eighties Aussie male, a low and unrelenting grunt that sends even the toughest woman running to her dressing room for a good blub.

But I'm running ahead of myself; I should turn off A-ha and concentrate. The series is set in the newsroom of an Australian TV network, a bitchy realm in which egos are somewhat of a problem. The flagship early-evening news programme is presented by the veteran anchor Geoff Walters (Robert Taylor) and the younger (and vastly more proficient) Helen Norville (Anna Torv), and here's where all the trouble begins. The network would like Geoff to go; he is old and pompous, and when Helen isn't around, the ratings drop like a stone in a well. But he's determined to cling on, a limpet approach encouraged by his steely wife, Evelyn (Marg Downey).

And what of Helen, so beloved of the audience, and so smoothly confident in front of the camera? "You parade around this place like you're Barbara bloody Walters!" yells her snake of a boss, Lindsay (William McInnes). But the twist (spoiler alert) is that she's not half so invincibly fierce as she seems. Behind her TV mask, she's on the edge of a nervous breakdown. After a row in the office, she goes home and takes one too many pills – it's the Eighties; Valium is almost as popular as Cabbage Patch dolls – only to be found comatose by a hapless junior reporter, Dale Jennings (Sam Reid), who calls at Helen's house hoping to return her bag to her. What will Dale do, and how will Helen respond? Suffice to say that they forge a bond, the nature of which is both obvious and opaque, and thus keeps you wondering – is she? Is he? Are they? – for several episodes.

The backstage newsroom stuff is beautifully done: the struggles with the autocue, the disastrous live links, the grisly sense of triumph that follows the successful delivery of tragic breaking stories. Management insists that news be palatable (even cheery, if possible) and non-boring; reporters want it to be vital and crusading. I like all the sharp elbows, everyone in the newsroom desperate to get their turn doing an update (the bulletins that run throughout the day). And I adore the big set-pieces, such as Geoff's 60th birthday party, a black-tie event at which everyone dances in an authentically Eighties, bad-but-utterly-unembarrassed manner (the men all look a bit *Miami Vice*; Helen does something monstrous with her fringe that has Dale swooning at her sheer magnificence).

But it's Torv and Reid, and the chemistry between them, that makes this show truly irresistible. They look right, and they sound right, and there's something so touchingly sincere at the heart of their performances, in spite of the massive blow-dries. You're on their side. You long for them to succeed. You want them never to miss their cue, to fumble their lines, to gaze for too long at the wrong camera. ●

# Radio

## Surviving life after No 10

By Rachel Cunliffe

**Party's Over**  
BBC Radio 4,  
29 July, 6.30pm

Maybe someone in the Radio 4 scheduling department has a crystal ball, because the timing of series two of *Party's Over* is simply too perfect. Miles Jupp stars as disgraced former prime minister Henry Tobin, as he struggles to adapt to life beyond Downing Street, with the help (or not) of his status-obsessed wife, cack-handed bodyguard and besotted PA. In season one, Henry made various attempts at post-PM relevance, from chasing a publishing deal for his memoirs to launching a new political party, and his failures are no less entertaining for being completely inevitable. The second season kicks off with his plan to nab a seat on the Commonwealth Games committee and enjoy a lucrative jet-setting career. Needless to say, it does not go well.

What makes this show so entertaining isn't the plot (the storylines are pure, predictable sitcom), but the premise. Imagining the escapades of a fictional failed politician provides ample opportunity to comment on some real ones. There are gags about classified USB sticks left on trains and government procurement gone horribly awry that anyone who pays attention to politics will recognise, and the writers aren't afraid to name specific targets. Matt Hancock comes under fire at one point, while later Henry's wife berates him: "You know less about gymnastics than Nadine Dorries knows about culture, media and sport."

Of course, it's hard to write political satire more absurd than the recent reality. Partygate gets a reference ("I haven't seen that many people resign since Boris Johnson's last birthday party"), but the scripts must have been finalised long before Tory MPs ousted their leader. The joke of *Party's Over* is how comically inept Jupp's character clearly is: weak, self-serving and utterly unsuited to being prime minister in the first place. Having proved a disaster in office, what can someone so dogged by scandal possibly do now? Fortunately, it looks like as if we're about to find out. ●

Maybe someone in the scheduling department has a crystal ball: the timing of *Party's Over* is too perfect

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# THE BACK PAGES

## Gardening



**Alice Vincent**

I have relinquished control of my garden – and what it has done is beautiful

I've been looking at photos of the garden from this time last year, an act that invites forgiveness and a kind of envy all at once. I'd been resisting it because I suspected it might confirm my suspicions: the garden looked better last summer.

Few will remember 2021 as a golden year for anything, but my pictures suggest otherwise: elegant, otherworldly spires of *digitalis parviflora* mingling with fat, lilac cushions of scabious; fantastically ruffled poppies arriving, shedding and then leaving their spherical seed heads behind for structure; fountains of borage, not nearly enough of which went in gin and tonics. ▶



◀ Now there are large gaps in the bed and shrimpy little dahlias where last year there were flowers I had the temerity to curse for being the “wrong” shade of pink. I’d be very happy with the wrong pink now. The abundance of May and June – handfuls of sweet peas three times a week and roses appearing faster than I could deadhead them – has ground to an abrupt halt. The lawn, not mown since May, is the colour of an Andrex puppy. The tree has started to shed crispy leaves on the patio.

It’s easy to blame the weather: at the time of writing I can’t remember when it last rained properly, and I’m reluctant to water much beyond the pots because the planet’s on fire. But we should be examining the impact of the recent heatwave – further evidence that we are living through a climate catastrophe – for ways we can better future-proof our gardens.

Three miles away from my home, the gravel-planted Grasslands Garden of the Horniman Museum in south London is showing no signs of wilt. Bright pinks of echinacea stand, unstaked, alongside crocosmia and gladioli. The garden was originally the work of the Olympic Park landscape designer James Hitchmough, and are inspired by the prairies of North America and South Africa. It has not been watered in two years. When London reached 38°C, the Horniman’s head of horticulture, Errol Reuben Fernandes, posted a video on Instagram of the garden looking resplendent: “Imagine if the councils did this,” he told the museum’s social media followers, conjuring a vision of public space filled with pollinator-friendly beauty.

If we take anything from the raging, record-breaking temperatures that have forced this gardener, at least, out of the garden and cowering into the house, it’s that

we need to prioritise different things in the green spaces we tend to. We need to understand that in gardening we have an opportunity to counter climate catastrophe, rather than continuing to mindlessly attempt to prettify the planet we are turning to dust.

The current state of my garden is one born of a certain kind of inaction. I probably should have mulched better over winter – it gives the perennials a far better boost for the next year – and I purposefully didn’t sow the annuals or replace the biennials that filled in the beds so beautifully last summer. But this isn’t something I regret. In all honesty, I didn’t have the time nor the inclination for all that faffery in the spring, and it’s not a particularly sustainable way to garden.

Instead of fixating on its flaws, I’m choosing to look at this summer’s garden as being one of strength: the plants are all those that survived the winter, the squirrels and foxes, to return without any intervention from me at all. Perhaps I would have preferred some of the poppies to have come back, rather than the tree spinach, and ideally some of the chunkier perennials would have had the manners to sit at the back of the bed, rather than the front. But it’s still gratifying to see what’s grown while I’ve done pretty much nothing to encourage it.

The combinations wouldn’t win any prizes at the Chelsea Flower Show – there’s a lot of fennel, now jauntily in bright yellow bloom, with pale pink hollyhocks and a chorus of bobbly, pale blue erigeron – but it’s more intriguing to see what happens when one steps back. I’ve ushered some of these plants into life, now they’re finding the way that suits them best, in ever more challenging conditions. ●

## 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.*

### Hot property

A TikTok video of a man cooling down in a bin full of water during the heatwave has gone viral. The clip was recorded on the hottest day of the year and shows two men talking.

When asked if he’s enjoying the weather the man said: “Listen, if I want to have a swim

in my bin on the hottest day of the year in England then I’m entitled to do so.”

One TikTok user commented: “If this was London that bin would be advertised as a single bedroom apartment with pool for £900,000. Too late now.” *My London (Steve Morley)*

### Global worming

The heat spelled disaster for an annual worm charming contest – as just one worm was tempted to the surface. Hard, dry soil meant tactics including dancing and playing the didgeridoo had little effect in Falmouth, Cornwall. *Metro (Mike Berry)*

### Bulls-eye!

Arrests were made after police stopped a BMW in Lowestoft and discovered “enough

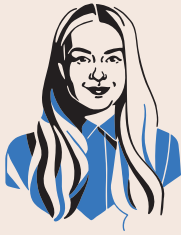
tobacco and cigarettes to cater an entire 1980s darts tournament”. *East Anglian Daily Times (Mike Ireson)*

### Daylight robbery

A pub charging £21.50 for a burger – and £2 to remove any ingredient – has been blasted by customers. One visitor to the George Hotel and Beach Club in Yarmouth, said that when they were told it would be more without bread “we had the bun and gave it to the seagulls”. *Metro (Amanda Welles)*



## Deleted Scenes



**Pippa Bailey**

### I swap the sunshine for the dark fatalism of Kurt Vonnegut

Sometimes you can tell a date isn't going to go anywhere within the first five minutes. I met a guy for a drink earlier this year who had "so it goes" tattooed on the inside of his forearm. "Ah," I said, "Kurt Vonnegut!" "What?" he replied. I thought of this exchange one recent Saturday when I left the sunshine revellers to their tinnies and entered the cool dark of my local Picturehouse to watch *Kurt Vonnegut: Unstuck in Time*. I had the screen entirely to myself – for good reason, you might think.

*Unstuck in Time* required two directors because the first one, Robert Weide, became so close to Vonnegut over years of filming (he first approached the American author about a documentary in 1982, and their working relationship ended with Vonnegut's death in 2007) that he became a character himself. It's appropriately meta for a film about an author who, at one point in *Breakfast of Champions*, enters the narrative to tell Kilgore Trout that he is a character in a book.

Vonnegut leaves Weide voicemails – "How the hell are ya? I guess you're out doing the twist or something" – counsels him about whether to get married, and eventually writes him into one of his novels, *Timequake*. Weide (best-known for directing *Curb Your Enthusiasm*) expresses his dislike of documentary-makers who insert themselves into their work – "Who cares? But when you take almost 40 years to make a film, you owe some explanation."

I first read Vonnegut's books – as did Weide – as a teenager, and fell for their crackling irreverence, their time- and genre-bending unreality, their shades of dark and light. If you've read Vonnegut then you know something of his story; he's not squeamish about writing his own experience: "It's all I have to talk about."

Vonnegut was captured by the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge and, like *Slaughterhouse Five*'s protagonist Billy Pilgrim, was a prisoner of war during the firebombing of Dresden. Of clearing bodies from the rubble afterwards he says: "I didn't feel particularly bad when I did it. I didn't feel much of anything." War, he says, "was a great adventure of my life". When this insouciance is relayed to his daughter, she says he's "full of it". He certainly had a dark sense of humour: he chuckles when remembering a fellow serviceman who died of spinal meningitis during training, having never seen combat, and guffaws about another man who was in the bath when he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, and was so surprised he hit his head on the faucet and died.

Vonnegut says he prefers laughter to crying, and it's easy to see why. Six months before he was captured in Europe, Vonnegut found his mother dead, on Mother's Day; she had taken her own life. In 1958, his beloved sister died from cancer two days after her husband was killed in a train accident, and Vonnegut and his first wife took in their four sons. It is hard not to consider the refrain "so it goes" – which appears more than 100 times in *Slaughterhouse Five*, every time someone dies – differently, knowing all this.

I don't mean to make *Unstuck in Time* sound melancholy; it is charming, too. It was Laurel and Hardy who "gave [Vonnegut] permission not to take life too seriously" – this early influence, at least, we have in common. He learned much about writing from reporting for his school newspaper: "Be clear and don't bluff," he says, and, "Say as much as possible as soon as possible." Vonnegut's daughters recount how he would write: hunched over a low coffee table, listening to elevator music and chain-smoking until the air was thick with fumes. (Animated tendrils of smoke drift upwards over every still in the film.) Vonnegut tells the story of how he came up with Tralfamadore, a fictional planet that recurs in his work. The extended family were at Lake Maxinkuckee in Indiana and Vonnegut's older cousin was pointing out stars and constellations in the sky. Then, a ten-year-old Vonnegut points and says: "There's Tralfamadore!"

It was, I thought, as I passed the now considerably more sozzled sunshine revellers on my way home, they who had missed out. God bless you, Mr Vonnegut. ●

Of clearing bodies from the rubble of Dresden he says: "I didn't feel particularly bad when I did it. I didn't feel much of anything"



## Down and Out



### Nicholas Lezard

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#### Here's a tip to allay anxiety about the heatwave: receive a death threat

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It is interesting having something to worry about other than money or not getting laid

**H**ow did you spend the heatwave? I spent mine paddling in the sea and being scared out of my mind. I'll tell you about the sea in a bit. It started with a call I received late at night from a number I didn't know. I was in bed and about to turn out the lights so didn't answer, even though I had a hunch who it might be. A follow-up text confirmed my hunch. Which was fine, as this friend disappears from time to time and I worry about her. A couple of days later, as the country baked, I thought I'd give her a bell to see how she was. The text itself bespoke someone at ease with things, which pleased me.

A man answered. "Ah," I said. "I was hoping to speak to —. Is she there?"

"Call this number again," said the man, "and I'll put a bullet through your head."

I have to say I was impressed by that "through". It gave the impression of someone who knew about ballistics, and had a big gun. The problem is that my friend knows where I live, and so presumably this gentleman did, too. Add to that the fact, as I told you all last week, that someone had asked after me at the pub, and I began to feel somewhat uneasy.

Of course, as a book reviewer, I am no stranger to death threats. I do not often write a stinker of a review but when I do it raises an author's hackles. I once wrote something sniffy about the Hay Literary Festival and someone told me that its organiser, Peter Florence, was going to send someone round to break my legs but a) they were joking, Pete would do no such thing, and b) it was, what, 16 years ago? All water under the bridge.

So I said, "oh, OK", for although I am fond of my friend I am also fond of my brain; we've been through a

lot together. But it is interesting having something to worry about other than money or not getting laid. It puts things into perspective. I even stopped worrying about the heat. But I also turned off the location on my phone. (This is bullshit, by the way. Your phone always knows where you are, and if it knows, then someone else can find out, too.)

A couple of days later my phone rang again. It was The Number I Must Not Ring Unless I Want Etc. This posed something of a dilemma. Was it my would-be assassin saying he was having trouble finding my address? They've been doing renovations and haven't stencilled the door number back on the gatepost, and it can get a bit confusing round here.

It turned out to be the friend I had been trying to contact in the first place. She sounded cheery. "Hello, Nick!"

I was a bit less cheery, although glad to hear her in a good mood.

"You do realise what happened the last time I called this number? Someone threatened to put a bullet through my head."

"Oh, that was just Pete." (Not his real name.) "He thought you were someone else."

"So he's not going to shoot me? Because it got me rather rattled."

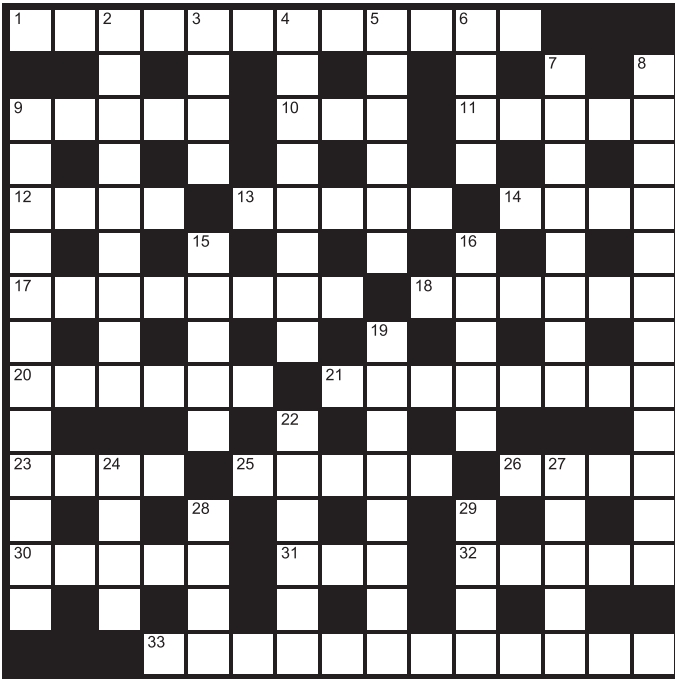
"Of course he isn't. Pete, say sorry to Nick."

"Yeah, sorry about that," said a voice from what sounded like the other side of the room.

I don't know if you've ever been apologised to by a potential assassin but the effect is liberating to say the least. I laughed a little hysterically for a few minutes and then went to the shop, spent the last of my money on a bottle of whisky and poured myself a large one. A really large one. Do you remember that scene in *Scarface* when Al Pacino has his ex-boss shot, and shoots a corrupt cop himself? The boss's bodyguard looks pretty scared, and Pacino and his friend confer on what they're going to do about him. Then they offer him a job. Pacino's pal slaps the bodyguard's back and says, "You got a job, man!" The bodyguard picks up a bottle of Jack Daniels and takes a big slug from it. It was like that, except I used a glass.

And then I went to the sea. I took off my shoes and socks and rolled my trousers up over my knees. ("I grow old, I grow old... I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled...") The sea was warmer than I have ever felt it in this country: Mediterranean. The breeze was coming down from the scorched interior of the country; it felt like a hairdryer. It was low tide and I lay on the damp shingle and had a smoke while looking out to the horizon and the winking lights of the Rampion array. I reflected on the fact that the beach slopes in such a way as to form a natural support for the back, like a sun lounger. The sun itself had set but there was still some light in the sky. Someone further up the beach was playing bongos, of course; a dog zoomed, kicking shingle up everywhere, out of its mind with happiness. I now had no money and I wasn't getting laid; but the main thing, and I'd like to think the best thing, was that I wasn't getting shot, either. ●

## The NS Cryptic Crossword 594: Next Door by Anorak



### Across

- 1 Army restates problem for Erinsborough road (6,6)
- 9 33's wife points out America (5)
- 10 Carpenter from Gloucester (3)
- 11 One hundred pounds I have for 26's partner (5)
- 12 Test English – 1000h (4)
- 13 Terese's youngest daughter is a Highland musician (5)
- 14 Guy Pearce's role before November (4)
- 17 Welsh girl's new Granada house (8)
- 18 King and Bishop married 25 (6)
- 20 Deceive daughter and escape artfully (6)
- 23 Sleep before starting exercising back of neck (4)
- 25 18's wife is crazy, say, on reflection (5)
- 26 "Superbrain" when a teenager aka Jean (4)
- 30 Railway union that is about to become accustomed (5)
- 31 Tom Oliver, initially, right on craggy hill (3)
- 32 Search risky surroundings for actor Milligan (5)
- 33 Cretan fellah disturbed Karl (4,8)

### Down

- 2 Joe's mother regularly marks washday item, we're told (3,6)
- 3/15 Red dye upset on D-Day, affected 8 (4,5)
- 4 Spoke of dirty vehicle for man of note (8)
- 5 Itineraries captain Joe's suggested (6)
- 6 Fruit – penny off, apiece (4)
- 7 They call in hiding it in helmets (8)
- 8 He loans out a new line for 3/15 (5,7)
- 9 Infant sensed trouble for 24/21 (6,6)
- 16 Daughter, very keen on 24/21's son (5)
- 19 Poorly written verse from sea area and the Spanish (8)
- 22 Family at no 32 in 1 gets the bird, Doc! (6)
- 24/21 No Labour spin affected 9D (4,8)
- 27 Shout of pain from new orphanage – not open (5)
- 28 2 or Toadie's daughter returning from Llangollen (4)
- 29 Glaswegian suggests Charlene's husband (4)

### Answers to crossword 593 of 22 July 2022 ("pair" answers are in parentheses)

Across 1) Costello (Abbott) 5) Sticks (Stones) 9) Trapping 10) Athena 11) Oleander 14) Rector 15) Deliver (Stand) 16) Heaven (Earth) 19) Winched 20) Hansel (Gretel) 21) Bangers (Mash) 26) Polish (Spit) 27) End-users 28) In toto 29) Elephant (Castle) 30) Grease 31) Ethylene  
Down 1) Cotton (Needle) 2) Shares (Stocks) 3) Expand 4) Lintel 6) Tattered 7) Creative 8) Seafroft 12) Delilah (Samson) 13) Ribcage 14) Reheard 17) Chopping (Changing) 18) Unclothe 19) Websites 22) Enlut 23) Supply (Demand) 24) Female (Male) 25) Tsetse

## Subscriber of the Week: Dan Wright

*What do you do?*  
Public policy.  
*Where do you live?*  
South London.  
*Do you vote?*  
When I'm able.  
*How long have you been a subscriber?*  
Six wonderful years.  
*What made you start?*  
I was interested in politics – and trying to impress university admissions tutors.  
*Is the NS bug in the family?*  
No, although they tolerate my mountains of back issues.  
*What pages do you flick to first?*  
Usually the columns.  
*How do you read yours?*  
At home over the weekend.

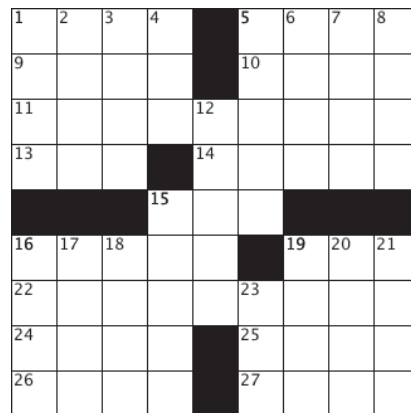


*What would you like to see more of in the NS?*  
Pieces on housing, climate, and the generational divide.  
*Who are your favourite NS writers?*

Helen Thompson and Jonn Elledge.  
*Who would you put on the cover of the NS?*  
Gareth Southgate.  
*With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?*  
Ted Cruz creeps me out.  
*All-time favourite NS article?*  
Helen Thompson on the "rotten edifice" of the Premier League.  
*The New Statesman is...*  
worth every penny.

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

## The NS Crossword In Brief 43: by Miriam Estrin



### Answers to crossword 42 of 22 July 2022

Across 1) Obi 4) Obese 9) Rim 10) Paves, 11) Bow Street 13) Als, 14) Rue 15) Twix 17) Jape 18) Oat 19) Tag 20) White hall 24) Ionias 25) iOS 26) Togas 27) Nod  
Down 1) Orb 2) Bio 3) I'm waiting 4) Opts 5) Bar 6) Ever again 7) See up 8) Estee 12) Six 15) To wit 16) Wahoo 17) Jah 19) Teas 21) Tia 22) Loo 23) LSD

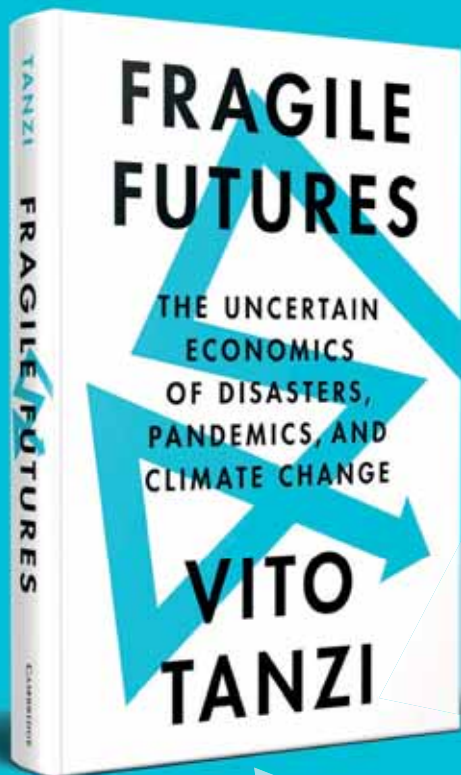
This week's solutions will be published in the next issue

### Across

- 1 Bowls over
- 5 "\_\_\_ well then!"
- 9 Boxing ring?
- 10 Tel \_\_\_
- 11 Emma Bunton alter ego
- 13 Alter ego lead-in
- 14 Azulejos, eg
- 15 Logician's "nailed it!"
- 16 Twickenham gathering
- 19 Chatter
- 22 Micheál Martin's title
- 24 Each
- 25 Start to tank?
- 26 Brooklyn basketball team
- 27 Silent interval, in music

### Down

- 1 "Waterloo" band
- 2 Like a bad link
- 3 Actor Idris
- 4 Foxy
- 5 Colourless
- 6 Fitting anagram for "vile"
- 7 Persian food staple
- 8 Footballer Bissouma
- 12 Derives (from)
- 15 Witticisms
- 16 Obsessive fan, in slang
- 17 Maleficent garb
- 18 Top directory, in computing
- 19 30 Rock actress Krakowski
- 20 V in "Henry V"
- 21 Jot



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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 (%)	Unemployment in 2022 (%)	Life expectancy (years)	Per capita CO <sup>2</sup> emissions from domestic aviation (kg)	Manufacturing's value added to GDP (%)	Alcohol consumption per person (litres/year)
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>81.3</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>11.5</b>
Brazil	0.8	9.8	75.9	42.9	9.8	7.4
Canada	3.9	4.9	82.4	168.3	9.9	8.9
China	4.4	5.5	76.9	45.2	26.2	7.1
France	2.9	7.3	82.7	69.7	9.4	12.3
Germany	2.1	5.3	81.3	18.4	18.2	14.5
Italy	2.3	8.1	83.5	37.1	14.9	7.8
Japan	2.4	2.6	84.6	74.0	20.3	8.0
Russia	-8.5	3.9	72.6	63.3	13.3	11.2
Spain	4.8	13.7	83.6	61.6	11.0	12.7
US	3.2	3.6	78.9	385.5	10.9	9.9

SOURCES: IMF, APRIL; TRADING ECONOMICS; UN POPULATION DIVISION; INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON CLEAN TRANSPORTATION; OECD, 2020

### Labour now on course for a majority

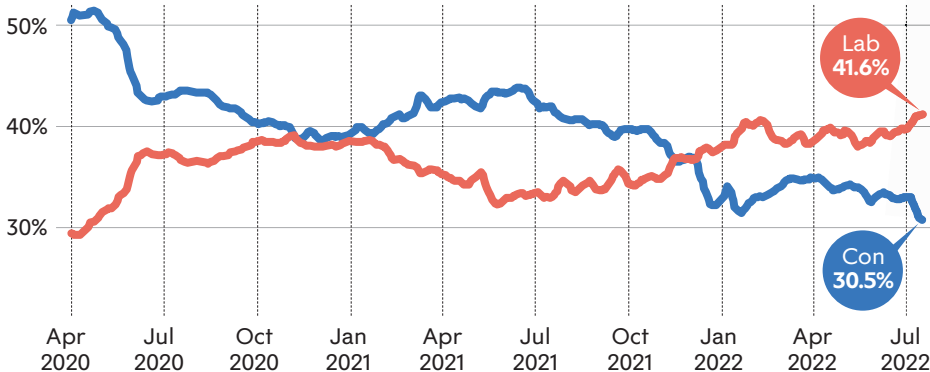
Latest forecast according to Britain Predicts (no tactical voting accounted for)



DATA FOR ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES ONLY. SOURCE: BRITAIN PREDICTS

### Britain Elects: Westminster voting intentions

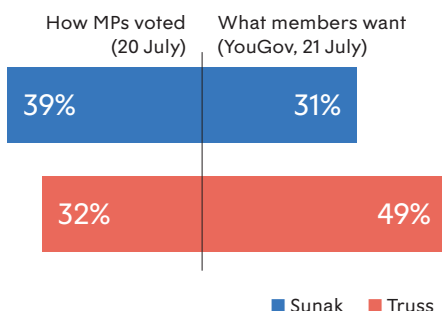
How popular is the Labour Party compared with the Conservative Party?



SOURCE: BRITAIN ELECTS

### MPs want Sunak, but members want Truss

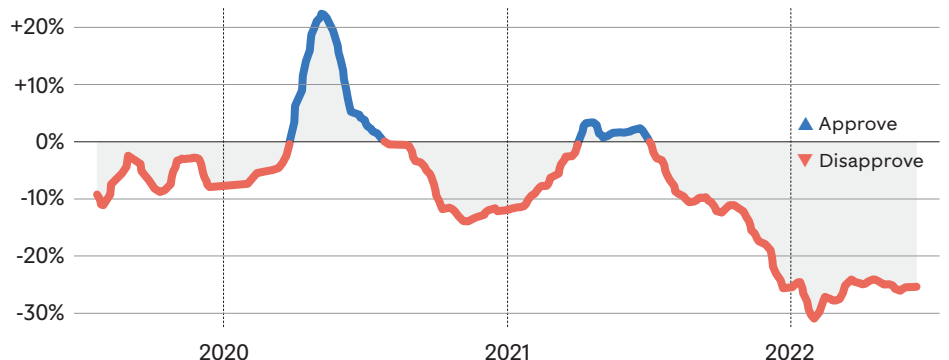
Opinion among Conservative MPs and party members



SOURCES: 1922 COMMITTEE, YOUNG

### Boris Johnson was never truly popular

Net approval of Johnson as prime minister



SOURCE: BRITAIN ELECTS

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## The NS Q&A

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“I still have a strong affection for the sound of a tent zip”

### Cold War Steve, artist



**Christopher Spencer was born in Birmingham in 1975. The creator of the Twitter account @coldwarsteve, he is known for his satirical collage artworks. He is the artist behind the cover of this NS summer special.**

*What's your earliest memory?*

I must have only been a few months old and was lying in my cot. I recall being frozen in fear, as a giant bear with a bird's head reared up on its haunches and repeatedly pecked down at my face. It was only a few years ago that I realised that this beaked, ursine tormentor could actually have just been a cuddly toy, being playfully waved around by my mum or dad.

*Who are your heroes?*

My childhood hero was the Aston Villa

striker Gary Shaw, shortly followed by Morten Harket of A-ha. As an adult I would name Marcus Rashford or my wife, Katy.

*What book last changed your thinking?*

*Rule, Nostalgia: A Backwards History of Britain*, by Hannah Rose Woods. It's brilliant and very timely.

*Which political figure do you look up to?*

Anyone who isn't afraid to call out Boris Johnson's bullshit and depravity in the Commons Chamber. Chris Bryant continues to do this very eloquently.

*What would be your "Mastermind" specialist subject?*

The 1986 Fifa World Cup in Mexico. I have never been as obsessed with something as I was with that Panini sticker album.

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

I'd love to be a dandy fop in Regency era Leamington Spa.

*What TV show could you not live without?*

It would be either *Inspector Morse* or *Top of the Pops* reruns on BBC Four.

*Who would paint your portrait?*

My mum, Charlotte Palczuk.

*What's your theme tune?*

The theme for *Wogan*, Terry Wogan's 1980s chat show.

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

I was 18 and had just started work at a building in Birmingham Airport where all the food canisters from the planes were cleaned and restocked. I was struggling to keep up with the machine and becoming very distressed. One of the older workers (a man with a yellowy quiff and a fag permanently hanging from his mouth) put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Don't panic, son. If you panic, you're fucked." Since then I've always tried to follow that advice, admittedly with varying levels of success.

*What's currently bugging you?*

Everything. I feel so fortunate that with art I now have an outlet for my indignation.

*What single thing would make your life better?*

A personal driver for my daughters. I'm constantly dropping one of them off somewhere or picking one of them up.

*When were you happiest?*

Family camping holidays to Towyn, Wales. Me and my two brothers in the back of a Mini Metro, perched on bin bags of sleeping bags, stopping at a lay-by for a beaker of warm orange squash. A big garish orange tent. I still have a strong affection for tinned potatoes and the sound of a tent zip. A few years ago I tried to rekindle those times with my own kids. It was a complete disaster and they've sworn that they will never go camping again.

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

I have had another life – all this came about quite recently. I worked for the West Midlands probation service for 12 years. It's a stressful job, but hugely rewarding (spiritually, not financially).

*Are we all doomed?*




Yes, I'm afraid so. ●

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