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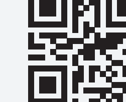

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THE NEW STATESMAN
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Putin must accept he cannot win

Vladimir Putin has gambled his future, and his place in Russian history, on the outcome of his war in Ukraine. It is clear now that the swift and total victory he imagined – and some Western observers feared – was a fantasy. Kyiv has not fallen. Volodymyr Zelensky has not fled. Ukrainians defiantly continue to fight the Russian forces. Yet Mr Putin is equally determined to avoid any scenario that might look like a defeat.

"Russia cannot afford to lose," the former Kremlin adviser Sergey Karaganov told the *New Statesman*'s Bruno Maçães in a widely noticed interview on 28 March. "So we need a kind of a victory." Mr Karaganov repeatedly referred to the possibility of a Russian "escalation" if Mr Putin felt that he was losing the war. When pressed as to whether he was alluding to the use of nuclear weapons, Mr Karaganov responded: "I wouldn't rule it out."

These are not empty threats. During a televised meeting with his defence minister and the head of his general staff on 27 February, shortly after the start of the war, Mr Putin ordered his nuclear forces to be put on high alert. He has called international sanctions against Russia "akin to an act of war" and threatened any country that attempts to interfere with his "special military operation" in Ukraine with "consequences greater than any you have faced in history". While it is important not to be cowed by the Russian president's ominous warnings, it would be a mistake to dismiss them as mere bluster.

The gruesome images of murdered civilians that have emerged from formerly occupied towns such as Bucha, outside Kyiv, have demonstrated what the Russian military is capable of in pursuit of victory. It is likely that further revelations of atrocities will emerge from cities still under Russian control, such as Mariupol and Kherson in southern Ukraine.

But while these atrocities are sickening, they should not come as a surprise. From Chechnya to Georgia to Syria and now Ukraine, Mr Putin's 22 years in power have been characterised by his willingness to use violence to get what he wants. He has long put his own interests above those of the Russian state, insisting that he is defending Russia from its enemies in the West. He tells his citizens that Russian troops are fighting "Nazis" and saving innocent civilians from "genocide" in Ukraine, and that those who say otherwise are "national traitors" and "scum" who must be cleansed from society.

Mr Putin is obsessed with history and sees himself as a great leader who will be remembered alongside the tsars

LINCOLN AGNEW

Russian state television, from where the majority of the population gets its news, assures viewers that the Russian military would never harm civilians. It claims Ukrainian nationalists are burning down their own cities, and footage of the massacre in Bucha is "fake". We should be wary of polling carried out under these conditions, but according to the independent Levada Centre, Mr Putin's approval rating has risen sharply since the start of the war, up from 69 per cent in January to 83 per cent in March. It is misguided, then, to believe that popular unrest will force an end to this war.

Yet this does not mean that nothing can be done. The West must make every effort to ensure the fighting does not spread beyond Ukraine and trigger an even larger conflagration. Within those confines, the Ukrainian military must be supplied with the ammunition and weaponry it needs to maintain its resistance. Russian energy exports must be sanctioned to sap Moscow's capacity to continue fighting this war. Western leaders must also pressure China to distance itself from its strategic partner and condemn its atrocities. It is unconscionable for Beijing to continue the pretence that it is a neutral observer given the horrors that have come to light.

By all accounts, Mr Putin is obsessed with history and sees himself as a great leader who will be remembered alongside the tsars. He will not tolerate a humiliating defeat in Ukraine, but it is increasingly clear that he cannot win on the terms he once envisaged. He must now be convinced that he cannot hope to sustain this war in the long term, and that the only way to secure his legacy and claim anything approaching a "victory" is to call an end to the fighting. Otherwise, a long war and a dark future lie ahead, not only for Russia and Ukraine, but also Europe. ●

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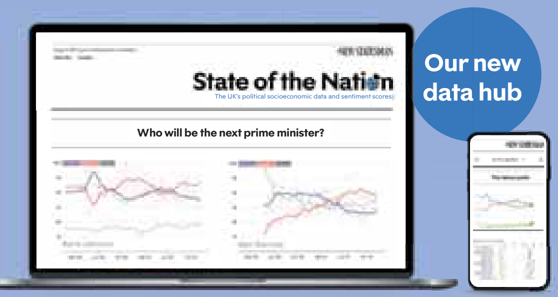

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Outside the box By Becky Barnicoat

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JASON COWLEY

Editor's Note

Identity in crisis, understanding England, and the joy of a cherry tree in spring

In recent days I have been doing some interviews for my new book, *Who Are We Now? Stories of Modern England*, which is in part about the complex, ever-changing nature of our shared national home. Covering the period from New Labour's landslide election victory in 1997 through to the aftermath of the pandemic, it explores what George Orwell called the social atmosphere of the country and, in a different context, Georges Bataille called "the politics of atmosphere". For too long the political atmosphere in Britain has been rancidly divided, especially during the long Brexit wars. But during the pandemic there were glimpses of renewed social solidarity even if a new politics of the common good remains out of reach.

On Radio 2's Jeremy Vine show, I was asked by the amiable host if England was "right-wing". Can a country as opposed to its government be left- or right-wing? I don't think so but this much we do know: the question of what England is, and what part it can play in the huge events that are happening, remains as unresolved as ever.

***

"Everyone understands English," Jean-Claude Juncker, the former president of the European Commission, once quipped, "but no one understands England." "England" here serves as a synonym for Britain, or the UK, but Juncker was broadly correct. England is hard to understand – but so are other countries. What he surely meant was that England has its own unique peculiarities and vulnerabilities as the dominant nation in the fragile, post-imperial multinational British state, the only country ever to have left the EU.

What makes nations cohere or find common purpose? Should England have its own parliament and political institutions? Does it want regional assemblies and greater internal devolution? Who even speaks for England? Sadiq Khan? Boris Johnson? Gareth Southgate? Certainly not the Labour Party, which still seems afraid of the English Question, and doesn't seem to understand the calamity that has befallen it. Routed in Scotland and abandoned in many of its former English heartlands, Labour is an outlier in Europe, where many social democratic parties are back in power: a party of the left that keeps losing and doesn't know for whom it speaks.

***

After all these years Tony Blair has no such uncertainty, as he showed in his recent *NS* interview with Michael Sheen. Blair once declared in a 1995 speech to the Labour conference that "we will be a young country". He repeated it emphatically as if tradition and the past could simply be wished away. As prime minister Blair set a liberal-modern Britishness against a conservative-traditional Englishness and thought there could be only one winner. Riding the wave of globalisation, he wanted to remake Britain as progressive, open, dynamic and Europhile. A young country – and a new country. He favoured open borders, free markets, the deregulation of finance, and the free movement of goods, capital, services and people. He later dreamed of "reordering the world" and proselytised for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He seemed to believe he was on the right side of history. But as the historian Robert Tombs wrote, "Those who claim that history is on their side are abusing it: and the abuse of history is one of mankind's oldest cultural endeavours."

The story didn't end as Blair – or indeed David Cameron – would have wished. What they didn't know, or perhaps chose to ignore, was that during the New Labour years, and after them, other powerful forces were in play, in peripheral England, far from the great cities. Something was stirring in the old industrial towns, the provincial shires, the neglected postwar new towns and the run-down coastal regions: an inchoate English revolt. It would sweep the Cameroons from office and, in time, open the way for Boris Johnson to win the 2019 general election on a pledge to "get Brexit done", whatever that means. And then the pandemic struck. So, here's the question, again: who are we now, after Brexit, after the pandemic, as war rages in Ukraine and we face the most serious cost-of-living crisis since the 1970s?

Labour is afraid of the English Question and doesn't know for whom it speaks

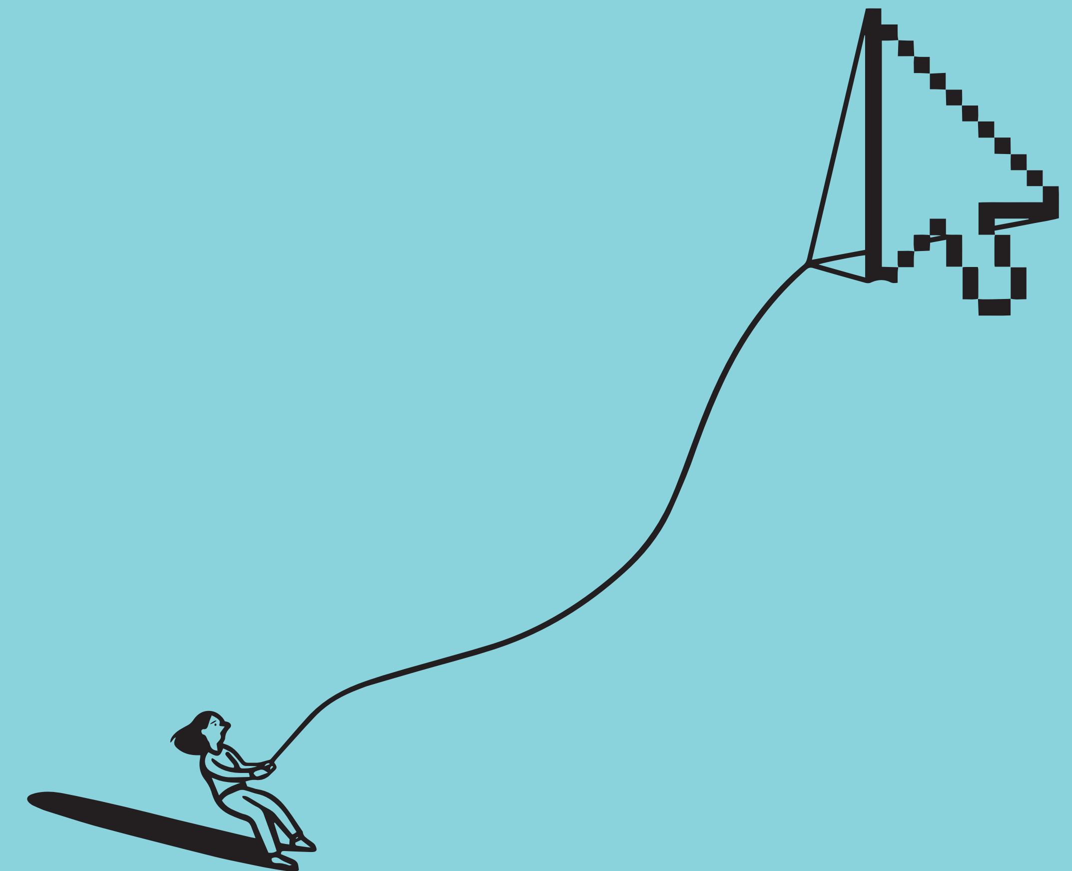
***

At the start of the pandemic, I planted a cherry tree, a gift from my sister, in our front garden. I'd been worrying about it because it hadn't flowered, though mature cherry trees in nearby gardens had. On Saturday 2 April I woke to discover it was aflame with blossom. In the cold of early spring the delicate pink, white-turning flowers were radiant against the sombre greens of the hawthorn, ivy and laurel surrounding them.

In the final years of his life, when he was terminally ill yet determined to keep writing, Clive James published some wonderful poems, several in the *NS*. Looking at the cherry tree as fine rain began to fall, I recalled one of James's late poems, "Japanese Maple", in which he writes of his wish to live just long enough to see for one more time, one last time, the leaves of the tree planted by his daughter in his back garden turn to flame in the autumn: "When did you ever see/So much sweet beauty as when fine rain falls/On that small tree." May I wish all our readers a happy Easter. ●

"Who Are We Now? Stories of Modern England" is published by Picador. Jason Cowley will be in conversation with Helen Lewis on 23 April at the Cambridge Literary Festival

MARTA SIGNORI



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At your service: Corbin & King founders Chris Corbin (l) and Jeremy King, pictured at the Beaumont Hotel in Mayfair, London

Newsmaker

How the Wolseley lost the battle for its soul

By Emma Haslett

In the mid-2010s, there was a rumour in journalism circles that one reporter had published so many news items based on conversations he had overheard at the Wolseley that he had been banned from the establishment altogether. Although the story was almost plausible – the restaurant is somewhere an unknown could easily find themselves seated next to a pair of gossiping celebrities and later emerge on to Piccadilly with a great story – it fell down at the journalist's being banned. That was simply too crass to happen at the Wolseley.

The rumour captured the essence of a restaurant in which it has never mattered who you are. If you or I turned up we would be seated in the same sumptuous black and white, art-deco dining room, order the same food and drinks and – crucially – receive the same service as the beautiful, the rich and the famous.

The point of the Wolseley – and the Delaunay, and Brasserie Zédel, and all the restaurants run by Corbin & King, the restaurant group founded in 1981 ▸

◂ by Chris Corbin and Jeremy King – is that they are frequented as much by celebrities as they are by people taking business meetings, celebrating birthdays, or treating hangovers with the group's trademark smoked salmon and vivid yellow scrambled eggs.

The Thai hospitality group Minor International, which announced on 1 April that it had bought for £60m the 26 per cent of Corbin & King it didn't already own, has missed this. The group's founders – in particular King, who has taken the reins in recent years – enforced its egalitarianism. They are the business's soul, and now they have been forced out.

The details of the ousting make for grim reading. In 2017 Corbin & King took a £58m investment from Minor International. In the years that followed, King reportedly fell out with his investors over their plans to franchise the Wolseley name. Earlier this year the company went into administration after Minor called in £34m of loans. On 31 March the administrators held an auction, and Minor won.

King sent an email to his staff and customers in the small hours of 1 April, saying he had taken part in the auction but that his attempt had failed. "As a result, I no longer have any equity interest in the business."

Jay Rayner, the *Observer*'s restaurant critic, reported on 3 April that Minor International had banned King from entering the restaurants he had created. A staff meeting at Brasserie Zédel led by the Minor International chief executive Dillip Rajakarier ended in disarray: "He kept referring to us as a brand," one baffled staff member told Rayner. "He told us that founders come and go," another said. "That was when he completely lost us."

When Lucian Freud died his favourite table was covered in a black cloth, lit with a single candle and left empty

King is not just a founder. The outpouring of grief that has followed his departure is testament to his very personal management style. The *FT* called him the "gentleman restaurateur": he visited each of his restaurants often, on his bike or in his sleek 1973 Bristol. Even the morning after he lost the auction he was at his usual table at the Wolseley, to the right of the bar, impeccably dressed. He did the rounds in the dining room, greeting customers and shaking hands. His approach invited great loyalty from both staff and customers.

Of course, celebrities adore King's restaurants: "Chuck a dart in a recent *Who's Who* and they'll have a favourite table inside the [Wolseley's] 'horseshoe' – the most coveted set of banquettes at the centre of the dining room," wrote *Tatler*. On the day Lucian Freud died his favourite table was covered in a black cloth, lit with a single candle and left empty. Critics adore them, too: the late AA Gill loved the Wolseley so much he wrote a book about it. Rayner's jazz ensemble plays a monthly set at Zédel. Several journalists recalled receiving handwritten notes from King, thanking them for writing articles about his restaurants.

Chris Salt, the chief executive of the communications agency Headland, was so impressed by King's attention to detail that he invited him to speak to his staff. "He talked about the importance of the small things," Salt said. King's advice was to listen. "To the common question 'How are things?', listen carefully for the reply – it might be a bad day, or a day to celebrate. All such times enable a moment of care, and acting on small moments of care brings a small delight and embeds loyalty."

The best stories come from ordinary patrons. "I wanted my friend's birthday to feel special after lockdown... so I took her to the Wolseley for oysters and cocktails," the journalist Helena Horton told me. "She was utterly charmed and left feeling like a princess." "I took my lovely mum there for her 70th. It was her last birthday, but we didn't know that at the time... they made a real fuss of her," read one tweet.

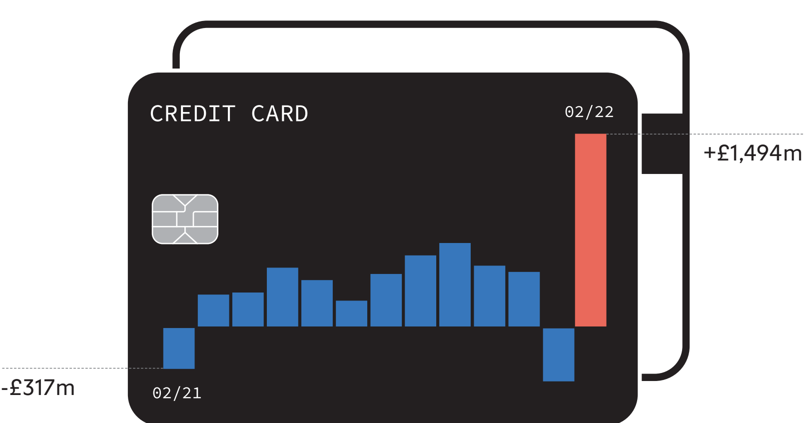
A customer recalled marvelling at the breadth of the offering at Zédel when he found himself seated at a table next to a newspaper editor browsing the menu with a colleague before a meeting. "If they're paying, it's a dozen oysters, fillet steak, cheese and Châteauneuf-du-Pape," the editor said. "If I'm paying, it's the two-course Prix Fixe and a glass of house plonk."

Shortly before the auction, King insisted he was too young to retire, telling the *FT* that if he was ousted, he might "do another hotel". His clientele – and competitors – will follow him wherever he goes. "They are the godfathers of our industry – they have hospitality in their blood," Duncan Stirling, the co-founder of Inception Group, which owns restaurants such as Bunga Bunga and Maggie's, told me. As for the Wolseley, the Delaunay, Brasserie Zédel and their sisters – the future is a lot less clear. ●

Emma Haslett is associate editor, business at the New Statesman

Chart of the Week

Credit card borrowing rises by largest margin in three decades
Month-on-month change in net credit card lending to individuals, seasonally adjusted (in £m), February 2021 to February 2022



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The Diary

Home-front warriors, why my desk is my safe space, and on best behaviour for Francis Bacon

By Howard Jacobson

So now we know what tyranny actually looks like up close and personal, we must wonder what those intrepid warriors who faced the might of Priti Patel to defend their right not to wear a paper mask have to say about their struggle. "I suppose we were being a mite silly"? Not a bit of it. "We stand vindicated" is my bet. "See? Isn't this exactly what we warned against? Allow them to stick a needle in our arms today and they'll be occupying the Isle of Wight tomorrow."

And what of those who've been bowdlerising *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* lest it creates panic in the playground? How are they explaining the horrors of war to their little ones? "Darling, they're only lying down to take a rest. It's a game, like paper, stone and scissors, only don't use the word scissors in this house. Now dry your eyes, turn off the television and get back to reading that comic of *King Lear* I bought you, the one without the naughty daughters, the rude clown, the bad weather and the blinding scene."

Screen solace

I can't pretend I've been any more heroic myself. I too was waking wet-cheeked until I stopped doom-scrolling before bed. In fact, what I was doing was more like false-solace-scrolling. Tell me the Ukrainians have shot down the entirety of the Russian air force. Tell me the Russian people have suddenly begun to wonder why opposition politicians in their country are always going away and not coming back. Tell me Zelensky's flying in to do *Live at the Apollo*. Sing me a nice hymn. "All things bright and beautiful..."

> We play happily with plasticine bestiality until the real thing bursts into the nursery

Writing is reality

Beyond that, I'm making a reasonable fist – sorry, sorry, not fist, job – of following Kingsley Amis's advice to writers to forget all about a book the minute they finish writing it and get stuck into a new one. This is to forestall the disappointment that invariably waits on publication. The world will look no different the day it appears in print, he warned. And he's right. A few appreciative words from an astute reviewer, a handshake dipped in Novichok from an embittered fellow writer, someone mistaking me for Alan Yentob on Regent Street, otherwise all is as it was before.

So it's back to the desk and the pleasure of actually writing, which must never be confused with the siren distractions of praise or dispraise, publicity or the lack of it, and worry about one's legacy. A writer's only legacy is the sentence that comes after the one before.

Paint and politeness

I suspect Francis Bacon would have agreed with me. My only subject is paint, he said to someone. By which I take him to have meant his only lasting purpose and pleasure was paint. As opposed to getting sloshed in Soho. I usually leave it too late to go to the great art shows in London, which must bespeak some deep reluctance to see them, or at least to being told I must, but I made it just in time to catch *Francis Bacon: Man and Beast* at the Royal Academy, on the way to which I was mistaken twice: once for Waldemar Januszczak and, for a second time, though not by the same person, for Alan Yentob.

It was a bold, well curated show with informative wall notes in the English language, rather than that academic socio-speak that squeezes the vitality out of every canvas it describes in the name of precisely those abstractions art abhors. How much I like Bacon's work I can't decide. There's some disconnect that bothers me between the raw animality of what he paints and the serenely civilised demeanour of those looking at it. What beasts we are, except when we're looking at Francis Bacon!

You can't blame him for the way he's looked at, of course, but you can wonder why work so obviously intended to be disturbing barely disturbs a hair of his admirers' heads. How do I know that? Well, put it this way: it barely disturbs a hair of mine. Are we too used to it now? Has Bacon dated already? Or was it always less harrowing than it purported to be – more kitsch than horror, more partygate than Mariupol?

We play happily with plasticine bestiality until the real thing bursts into the nursery. Suddenly I find myself thinking Boris Johnson's not so bad. When hell unlooses demons, what's a scoundrel more or less? ●

Howard Jacobson's memoir "Mother's Boy: A Writer's Beginnings" is published by Jonathan Cape

Encounter

"We're at the most dangerous point in human history"

Noam Chomsky on war and climate catastrophe

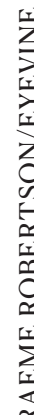
By George Eaton

It was as a ten-year-old that Noam Chomsky first confronted the perils of foreign aggression. "The first article that I wrote for the elementary school newspaper was on the fall of Barcelona [in 1939]," Chomsky recalled when we spoke recently via video call. It charted the advance of the "grim cloud of fascism" across the world. "I haven't changed my opinion since, it's just gotten worse," he sardonically remarked. Due to the climate crisis and the threat of nuclear war, Chomsky told me, "we're approaching the most dangerous point in human history".

At the age of 93, as perhaps the world's most cited living scholar, Chomsky could be forgiven for retreating from the public sphere. But in an era of permanent crisis, he retains the moral fervour of a young radical – more preoccupied with the world's mortality than his own. He is a walking advertisement for Dylan Thomas's injunction – "do not go gentle into that good night" – or for what Chomsky calls "the bicycle theory: if you keep going fast, you don't fall off".

The occasion for our conversation is the publication of *Chronicles of Dissent*, a collection of interviews between Chomsky and the radical journalist David Barsamian from 1984 to 1996. But the backdrop is the war in Ukraine – a subject about which Chomsky is unsurprisingly voluble.

"It's monstrous for Ukraine," he said. In common



with many Jews, Chomsky has a family connection to the region: his father was born in present-day Ukraine and emigrated to the US in 1913 to avoid serving in the tsarist army; his mother was born in Belarus. Chomsky, who is often accused by critics of refusing to condemn any anti-Western government, unhesitatingly denounced Vladimir Putin's "criminal aggression".

But he added: "Why did he do it? There are two ways of looking at this question. One way, the fashionable way in the West, is to plumb the recesses of Putin's twisted mind and try to determine what's happening in his deep psyche.

"The other way would be to look at the facts: for example, that in September 2021 the United States came out with a strong policy statement, calling for enhanced military cooperation with Ukraine, further sending of advanced military weapons, all part of the enhancement programme of Ukraine joining Nato. You can take your choice, we don't know which is right. What we do know is that Ukraine will be further devastated. And we may move on to terminal nuclear war if we do not pursue the opportunities that exist for a negotiated settlement."

How does he respond to the argument that Putin's greatest fear is not encirclement by Nato but the spread of liberal democracy in Ukraine and Russia's "near abroad"?

"Putin is as concerned with democracy as we are. If it's possible to break out of the propaganda bubble for a few minutes, the US has a long record of undermining and destroying democracy. Do I have to run through it? Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Chile in 1973, on and on… But we are supposed to now honour and admire Washington's enormous commitment to sovereignty and democracy. What happened in history doesn't matter. That's for other people.

"What about Nato expansion? There was an explicit, unambiguous promise by [US secretary of state] James Baker and president George HW Bush to Gorbachev that if he agreed to allow a unified Germany to rejoin Nato, the US would ensure that there would be no move one inch to the east. There's a good deal of lying going on about this now."

Chomsky, who observed in 1990 that "if the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every postwar American president would have been hanged", spoke witheringly of Joe Biden.

"It's certainly right to have moral outrage about Putin's actions in Ukraine," he said of Biden's recent declaration that the Russian president "cannot remain in power". "But it would be even more progress to have moral outrage about other horrible atrocities… In Afghanistan, literally millions of people are facing imminent starvation. Why? There's food in the markets. But people who have little money have to watch their children starve because they can't go to the market to buy food. Why? Because the United States, with the backing of Britain, has kept Afghanistan's funds in New York banks and will not release them."

Chomsky's contempt for the hypocrisies and contradictions of US foreign policy will be familiar to anyone who has read one of his many books and pamphlets (his first political work, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, published in 1969, foretold the US's defeat in Vietnam). But he is now perhaps most animated when discussing Donald Trump's possible return and the climate crisis.

"I'm old enough to remember the early 1930s. And memories come to mind," he said in a haunting recollection. "I can remember listening to Hitler's speeches on the radio. I didn't understand the words, I was six years old. But I understood the mood. And it was frightening and terrifying. And when you watch one of Trump's rallies that can't fail to come to mind. That's what we're facing."

Though he self-identifies as an anarcho-syndicalist or a libertarian socialist, Chomsky revealed to me that he had voted for Republicans in the past ("like them or not, they were an authentic party"). But now he said, they were a truly dangerous insurgency.

"Because of Trump's fanaticism, the worshipful base of the Republican Party barely regards climate change as a serious problem. That's a death warrant to the species."

Faced with such existential threats, it is perhaps unsurprising that Chomsky remains a dissident intellectual – in the manner of one of his heroes, Bertrand Russell (who lived to 97 and similarly straddled politics and philosophy). But he also still spends hours a day answering emails from admirers and critics, and teaches linguistics at the University of Arizona, the state where he lives with his second wife, Valeria Wasserman, a Brazilian translator.

Chomsky is also still engaged by British politics. "Brexit was a very serious error, it means that Britain will be compelled to drift even further into subordination to the US," he told me. "I think it's a disaster. What does it mean for the Conservative Party? I imagine they can lie their way out of it, they're doing a good job of lying about a lot of things and getting away with it."

Of Keir Starmer, he scornfully remarked: "He's returning the Labour Party to a party that's reliably obedient to power, that will be Thatcher-lite in the style of Tony Blair and that won't ruffle the feathers of either the US or anyone who's important in Britain."

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci advised radicals to maintain "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will". What, I asked Chomsky at the close of our conversation, gives him hope?

"A lot of young people; Extinction Rebellion in England, young people dedicated to trying to put an end to the catastrophe. Civil disobedience – it's not a joke, I've been involved with it for much of my life. I'm too old for it now [Chomsky was first arrested in 1967 for protesting against the Vietnam War and shared a cell with Norman Mailer]… It's not pleasant to be thrown in jail and beaten, but they're willing to undertake it.

"There are plenty of young people who are appalled by the behaviour of the older generation, rightly, and are dedicated to trying to stop this madness before it consumes us all. Well, that's the hope for the future." ●

"Civil disobedience is not a joke, I've been involved with it for much of my life"

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Commons Confidential

Jealous Johnson's poppy-lopping, a Brexiteer at Ofcom, and succession in question

By Kevin Maguire

A **former high-profile Conservative minister** muttered that Boris Johnson cultivates the lowest poppy field in politics, scything cabinet rivals who grow too tall. The Prime Minister is barely concealing his delight at the wilting of Rishi Sunak, a chancellor who didn't bother to mask his ambition at the height of the partygate scandal. Score-settling Johnson is currently "peeved", whispered a well-placed Downing Street source, that he must share the international limelight with Liz Truss. After an uncomfortable dressing-down from Putin stooge Sergei Lavrov shortly before the Ukraine invasion, Truss is enjoying something of a renaissance. Jealous Johnson, basking in his public best-mate status with Volodymyr Zelensky, bristles at her developing contacts with the Ukrainian government. A senior Tory MP mumbled that Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, widely considered to be fighting a good war (which coincidentally enhances his political prospects), avoids any sniping from No 10 only because he could put his tanks on the PM's lawn.

Ofcom's new chair, Tory peer Michael Grade, suddenly backs Channel 4 privatisation despite opposing its sale as the "pornographer-in-chief" who ran the station back in the day. Yet it was his Brextremism that clinched the £142,500 three-day job. The ermined Tory's pro-Leave position was the deciding factor for culture wars secretary Nadine Dorries. I'm reliably informed she took against the Europeanism of the other Tory baron on the shortlist of two, the pollster and one-time deputy party chair Stephen Gilbert. He was favoured by No 10, but working for the Remain campaign was a black spot for Dorries. Grade admitted to MPs that he isn't on Twitter, Facebook, TikTok or any social media platform. Labour figures sniff that unless he's immediately able to list substantial economic benefits from Brexit, Grade should use his Ofcom role to ban £2-a-day roaming charges introduced by mobile phone operators when the UK left the EU.

The Prime Minister is barely concealing his delight at the wilting of Rishi Sunak

Militant moderate Keir Starmer's motto could be "Safety first" in his quest for votes, so MPs, trade unionists and activists were surprised when he quietly popped into a Justice For Colombia meeting over the road from parliament. Blink and you might've missed him, observed a figure at the TUC-backed crusade against Colombian human rights abuses, but the muscle-memory visit recalled the more radical days of the former human rights QC and chief prosecutor. Angela Rayner and a charabanc of Labour's shadow cabinet (including Wes Streeting, Bridget Phillipson, Lou Haigh, Jo Stevens and Jonathan Reynolds) also attended the 20th-anniversary bash. No doubt somebody from the embassy was lurking to note names for the right-wing regime in Bogotá.

Davie Cameron's Resurrection Tour is raising eyebrows in Westminster as the former austerity PM who lost Europe spins frenziedly to burnish a reputation further tainted by the Greensill cash-for-access scandal. His announcement that he volunteers at a food bank (his benefit cuts did generate demand) and drove a van to Ukraine is reinforced by regular self-serving interviews. The Foreign Office was "surprised", I was told, that Dodgy Dave popped up in the US on rabid Fox News – a favoured outlet of the Kremlin, which ordered broadcasts in Russia of Fox presenter Tucker Carlson challenging Western condemnation of the invasion. Cameron defied a convention that recent ex-PMs notify government departments of interventions, particularly overseas. The first King Charles Street knew of his appearance on Fox was a media monitoring note from the Washington embassy. Perhaps Johnson's predecessor-but-one thinks he doesn't matter any more.

Either Conservative whips are braced for the detonation of another scandal or a blameless MP has a sure-fire defamation case. Tory chatter and WhatsApp feeds speculated that a different backbencher was about to be the subject of sex and cocaine allegations in the *Sunday Times* before the newspaper named the Somerset rock'n'roller David Warburton. "We thought it was somebody else," cried an MP. Does the wrongly fingered member know he was privately traduced?

Republican MPs are understandably keeping their heads down during the Queen's platinum jubilee, but I hear rumours that a new parliamentary group may be formed to challenge Charles's automatic succession, highlighting shamed Andrew in order to rubbish hereditary superiority. Watch this space. ●

Kevin Maguire is the associate editor (politics) at the Daily Mirror

ANDREW MARR

Politics

Labour could face an election next spring. Keir Starmer needs a big idea, and fast

Talk to any poor so-and-sos who have done the job and they'd grimly agree. Being leader of the opposition is important – and uniquely miserable. You must shape a story about the future of the country, but without any power, hardly any machine and largely without the support of the media.

You face an opponent whose words weigh more than yours because a prime minister can make things happen. Journalists who rely on access to ministers often can't be bothered to report your latest policy thinking. Yet they leap, with glee, on the smallest slip. It's like trying to ice-skate on tarmac. Or having to practise arias in a public library. (Sorry to younger readers; that was a reference to times long past.)

In many ways, as I have argued here before, Keir Starmer has been doing well. In the Commons his tone – that of a perplexed grown-up in hard times – has been shrewdly judged. He comes across as patriotic, reasonable. He has been asking the right questions and refusing to rise to endless baiting from a grinning Boris Johnson. My impression is that he is a thoroughly nice guy, strongly grounded in his family and motivated by the best principles of public service.

So it is with genuine regret that I say that, in addition, he is not doing well enough. Under him, the opposition has so far failed to paint a convincing picture of an alternative Britain. There isn't enough political courage. There is no front-foot excitement about the big change coming. Where's the relish for the fight?

We don't yet know what will happen in the May local elections; Boris Johnson and the Tories may be punished severely for "partygate". If so, that's down to them more than Labour. But meanwhile, the reports are that Johnson's latest line, that Starmer is "a man without a plan", is working with voters. It is being spontaneously recited back to Labour door-knockers.

And yes, I know, the Labour leader's position is particularly difficult. It's hard enough to rally voters during a pandemic when the country depends on government support and advice; doubly hard, perhaps, during a European war when most of the country is solidly behind Ukraine, alongside the British government.

Meanwhile, Starmer has successfully de-Jeremyed his party. The Corbynites aren't completely done yet – there's more news to come from that camp. But Starmer has also kept an iron grip on candidate selections. (Because of the age of Labour MPs, the next election is likely to see an unusually large replacement of people; the loyalties of the new candidates in winnable seats matter more than ever.)

None of this is enough to carry the opposition over the line at a general election. It is ground-rolling, the preparing of the pitch. To then win on it, you need a big idea.

> There isn't enough political courage or excitement. Where's the relish for the fight?

Enough carping: what might it look like? Here are a few obvious areas Labour should focus on. First, there's the massive cost of living crisis coming this year, not just for unemployed people on benefits but for what is fast becoming the pivotal electoral group, the underpaid. Maybe we are all over-talking it but right now it looks like a gigantic social crisis in the making.

To respond to it, Labour needs a big, bold, income-support offer, something that matches the radicalism shown by Lloyd George and Winston Churchill before the First World War. The Conservatives have come up with micro-measures. So Labour needs something properly imaginative in response. No money? Find ways of raising it.

Second, as argued here before, Labour must stop pretending that Europe doesn't exist. Yes, Johnson wants to return to the subject of Brexit and will keep saying Starmer wants to take us back into the EU, even though he knows it's nonsense. But Britain's place in the world, and our future as a trading nation, are not issues the opposition can avoid. In power Labour would have to confront the lack of strong trading relationships with the continent and begin remaking strategic friendships. Starmer can't go to a general election campaign pretending this isn't so. As Volodymyr Zelensky would confirm, some battles, however perilous, have to be fought.

Then there is Britain's crumbling public realm, from the scandal of the House of Lords, to the funding of parties, to the decay of local government. The Tories have their arguments – from a stubborn defence of the status quo to the promotion of elected mayors. How much does Labour have to say?

Underlying all this is funding. With public debt levels very high – 104 per cent of GDP at the end of 2021 – as well as overall taxation higher than it's been since the 1940s, and relatively feeble economic growth, this is the British political nightmare. It has been caused by the financial crash, Brexit, Covid and now the war. But with the shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves keeping a white-knuckled hold on spending promises, the choices it leaves are particularly painful for Labour. It means there is almost no attacking agenda for Labour on the NHS. Opposition politicians have been told to keep off this terrain during the local election campaigns – because there is no money.

A new Labour programme could be funded by a wide-ranging tax rise on the rich (a windfall energy tax is fine, but it's not a long-term solution). But everyone is too scared of that. I hope that at least

Labour will come out clearly against the promised income tax cut. The necessary higher spending could be funded by borrowing – a long-term national "security bond" issue, for instance, to get us through this mess. But so far, not a cheep.

Finally, how can Labour fight the next election campaign, and hope for a real opposition majority, without any substantive talks with either the Liberal Democrats or the SNP? There is, minimally, a political-reform, anti-corruption agenda to be discussed with Ed Davey. Scotland is a bigger problem for Labour, but also a bigger opportunity. It still seems to me that the SNP has a serious problem looming – Ukraine, Nato, economic mayhem – over its promised referendum next year. There is at least a conversation to be had about a maximalist-devolution or federal proposal that stops short of building a border between Berwick and Gretna.

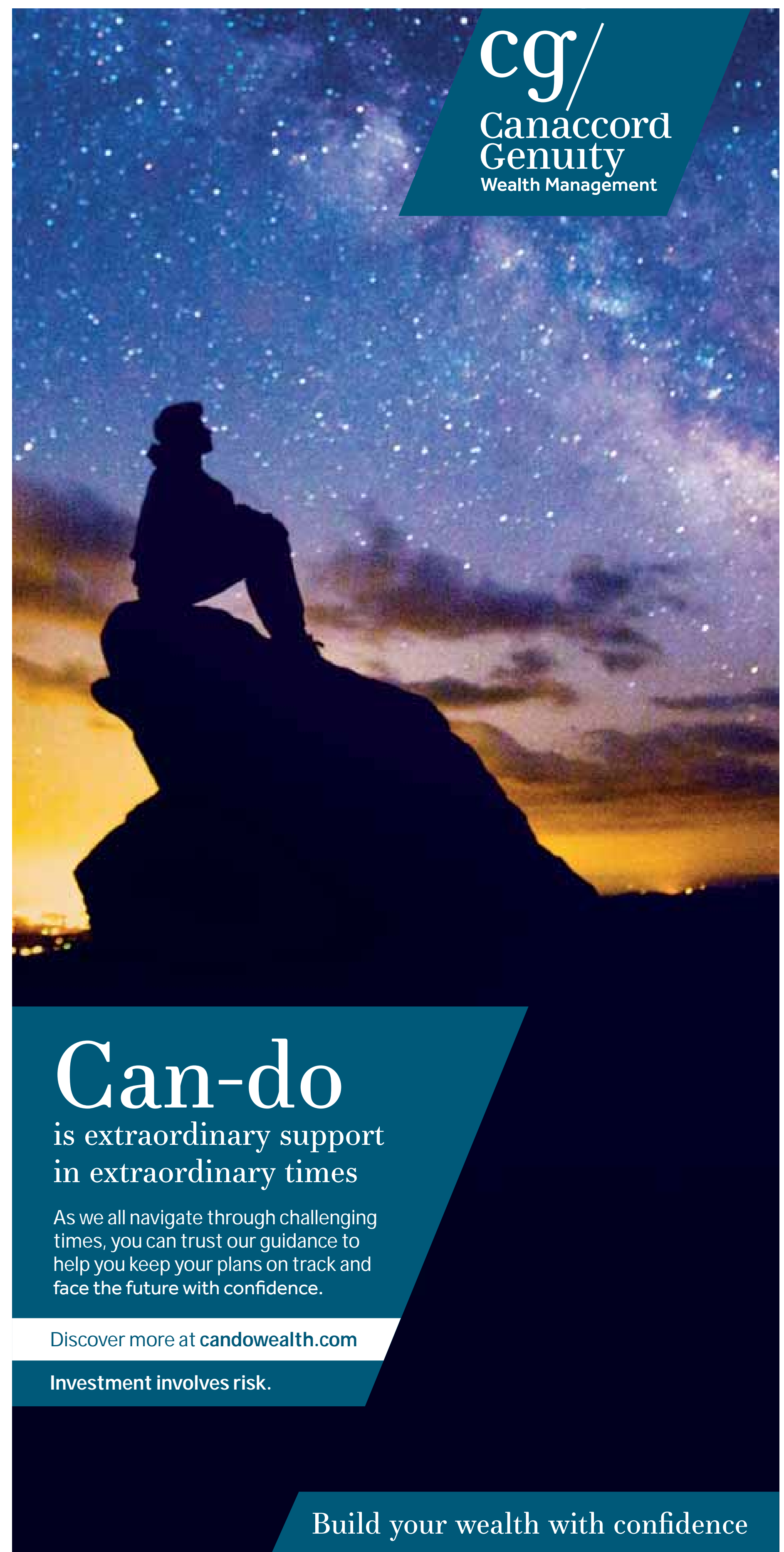
This is politically difficult territory. But as with the EU, Labour should not believe that by keeping quiet on the subject it will prevent the Tories from accusing it of a plan to break up the UK. Better to start quiet negotiation ahead of time than face wild accusations during the campaign.

There are areas where Labour does sound as if it has a plan: on the drive towards net zero, including the need for new nuclear and onshore wind provision. But away from public events and television studios, the mood in the shadow cabinet is somewhat darkening. Starmer's many allies are disciplined and nowhere near being publicly mutinous. But there is a strange depression, a creeping lassitude.

There is buzz and money in the next generation: in England, Wes Streeting and, in Scotland, Anas Sarwar are having no difficulty raising funds and getting attention. Andy Burnham lurks in his northern fastness. None would dream of public disloyalty. Burnham and Streeting might want to be leader and, along with Lisa Nandy, have the talent to do the job – but not before the election.

The trouble is, time is short. That election could come next spring, so the need for a clearer, bolder Labour offer will have to be thrashed out before and during the autumn party conference.

Indeed, a conference characterised mainly by discipline and order would be a bit of a disaster. Labour needs vigour, even disputation. It should really be going on in the shadow cabinet but if it isn't happening there, it needs to happen somewhere else. Easter is a time for renewal and optimism; this year Labour needs a brave Easter message of its own. ●



CORRESPONDENCE

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Letter of the week

Double standards

Thank you for Jeremy Cliffe's enlightening article on Estonia ("Europe enters a dark new age of division", 1 April), and the *New Statesman*'s ongoing coverage of the Ukraine catastrophe. Might it be possible for the *NS* to shed light on two murky areas in the logic of realpolitik? First, why Nato's nuclear weapons did not deter Russia from invading a sovereign country, yet Russia's nuclear weapons do deter Ukraine's friends from defending that country? Second, how can Russia openly invite portions of the Chechen army to assist in the invasion when Nato troops are being withheld from supporting Ukrainian resistance for fear of being seen as some kind of provocation?
Tim Pears, Oxford

Royal rumble

In an issue with outstanding pieces by Andrew Marr, Gordon Brown, Jeremy Bowen and Richard Calvocoressi it was disappointing to read the anti-monarchy diatribe by Tanya Gold ("The royals' Caribbean tour was doomed to fail", 1 April). Yes, there are lessons to be learned from the tour but she failed to describe any alternative. Presidents in other countries tend to be retired politicians (President Thatcher or Blair, anyone?) or complete non-entities. Prince Charles offers us a slimmed down monarchy that would retain that essential non-partisan mystique.
David Steel, House of Lords, London SW1

"No monarchy can be a fair society," writes Tanya Gold. It all depends what you mean by "a fair society". If you mean one in which there is greater economic equality, the situation in most of the Nordic countries and Japan suggests that, insofar as any existing society can approximate to fairness, the presence or absence of a monarchy is not by itself a factor.
Andrew Connell, Cardiff

After reading Tanya Gold's pointed piece, I thought I'd write in to suggest that she should be your royal correspondent.
Dave Beer, York

oil & gas
hydrogen
wind
CO2
carbon capture
EVs
sustainable fuel
solar
H2

Why the Union works

Nicola Sturgeon (Another Voice, 25 March) addresses neither the practical economic problems caused by breaking up the UK nor the consequent loss of identity felt by those many of us with roots across the UK who identify as British. She makes no mention of the Brexit mess that would lead – with Scotland part of the EU – to checks on goods between Scotland and England/Wales, as between Northern Ireland and Britain. Perhaps we should remember that the NHS was created by a Welsh secretary of state, in a government led by an Englishman and by a political party founded by a Scot, and work together to create a just, tolerant and outward-looking multicultural UK.
Joyce Quin, House of Lords, London SW1

The educated working class

It bucked me up no end to read that TV in the 1970s mattered to Mark Gatiss ("On not going to Oxbridge", 25 March), as it did to me. Working-class children like us gained access to elite knowledge that our families paid for, but had been excluded from for generations due to segregated education. Sadly, investment through funded student grants and fees was a short-term civic project that was too successful. The elite could not compete with an educated working class.
Helen Gunter, professor emerita, University of Manchester

Welfare wars

Gordon Brown (Another Voice, 1 April) is right that poverty has worsened under the Tories, but New Labour can't escape that lightly. In 2006 Tony Blair welcomed 11 private healthcare providers into the NHS. As Phil Whitaker wrote in the *NS* in March 2015: "The coalition government seized on the [privatisation] inroads made by New Labour."
David Murray, Wallington, Surrey

Gordon Brown's column is him at his very best – passionate and forensic. The Labour Party should adopt this analysis of the local effects of Tory welfare cruelty for every area in the country.
Mike Gibbons, Cartmel, Cumbria

Britain between the lines

I enjoyed your timely series of contributions about national identity (A Dream of Britain, 25 March). What struck me most was the absence of any solutions, with the exception of Tony Blair's (Face to Face, 25 March). Maybe that reflects that diversity, toleration and muddling through are what it means to be British, and that's a little understated to work as a slogan.
David Crowther, Oxfordshire

Laurie Penny's 600-odd words on Brian May and badgers in Parliament Square ("Postcards from a small island", 25 March) did more to restore my battered pride in being British than anything else anyone has said or done for decades. Thank you.
Kimon Roussopoulos, Cambridge

The Reacher man

I enjoyed Kate Mossman's profile of Lee Child ("A most wanted man", 1 April), but readers may be amused by an omission. It is not only Margaret Drabble and Philip Pullman who admire his thrillers. I gave his first novel, *Killing Floor*, a tiny review in the *New Statesman*, which for many years was quoted on his paperbacks. What is more, when I met the author many years later, he remembered this, and thanked me.
Amanda Craig, London NW1

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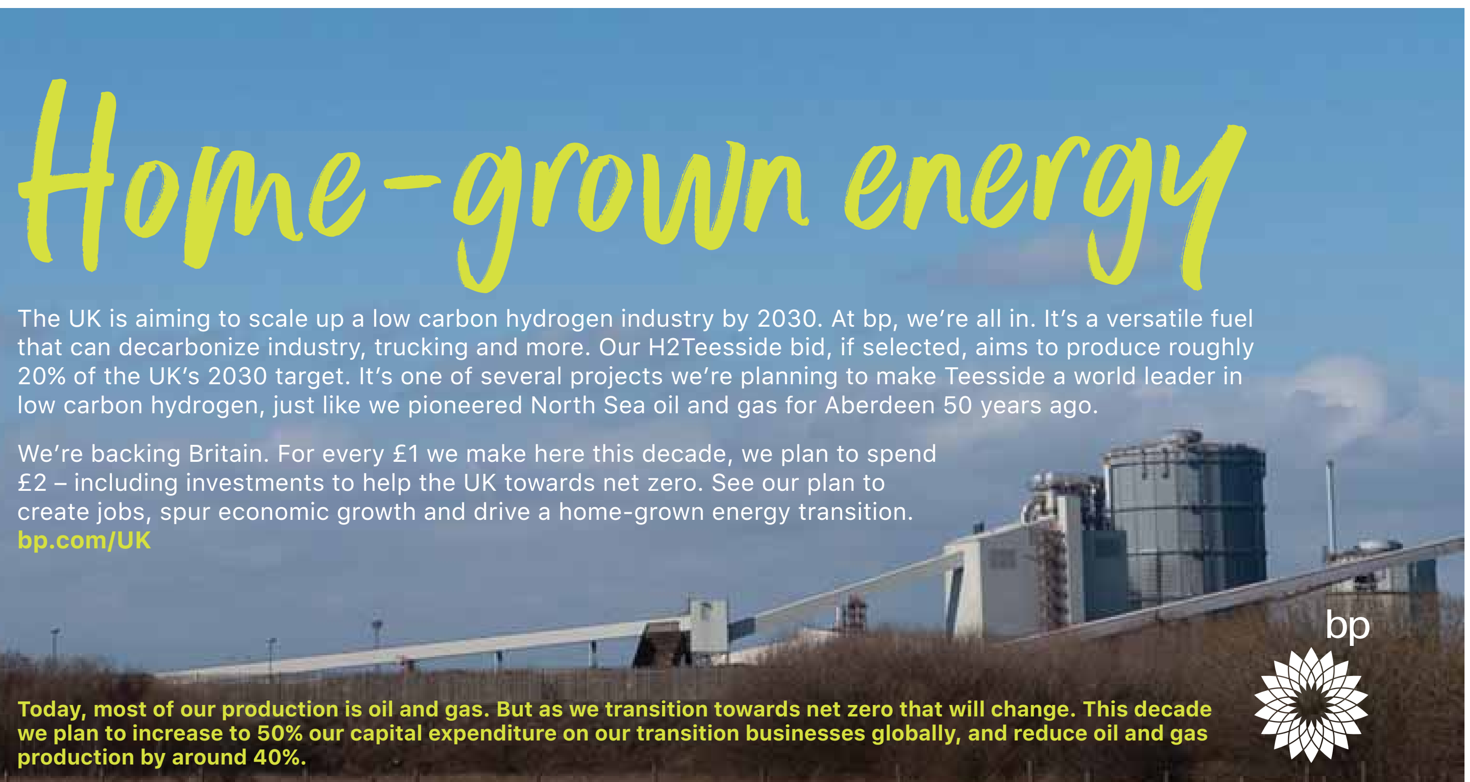
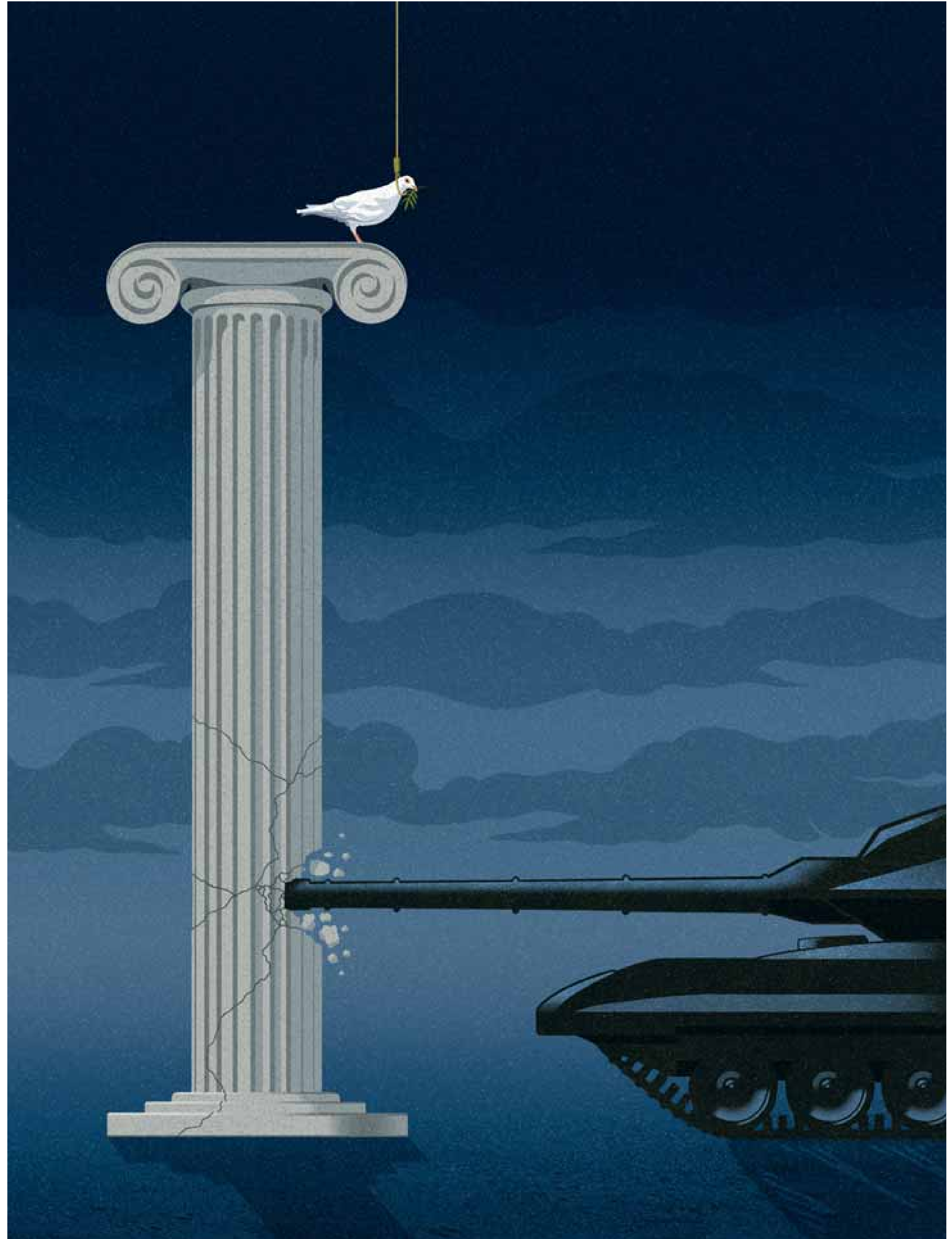


War at the end of history

Will Putin's invasion of Ukraine lead to a new world order, or an era of grinding compromise?

By Adam Tooze


PETER REYNOLDS

It was the French Revolution that defined the stakes in modern war as an existential clash between nations in arms, in which fundamental principles of rule were in question. War was the world spirit on the march. That is what the German poet Goethe thought he witnessed at the Battle of Valmy in 1792, where a rag-tag revolutionary army unexpectedly turned back a much better-equipped counter-revolutionary invasion by royalist and Prussian forces. "From this day forth," he wrote, "begins a new era in the history of the world." Two days later, the French Republic was declared.

A "world-soul" on horseback is what Hegel thought he saw, as Napoleon cantered through the city of Jena in October 1806 on his way to the battle that would push the Prussian state to the brink of extinction. War was not simply a violent practice of princes, a duel writ large. War was History with a capital H – the "slaughter-bench", Hegel would call it – "at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimised". It was something both fascinating and horrifying. Transformative and yet also on the edge of tipping over into absolute violence, as in the horrors of guerrilla war in Spain, depicted by Goya. Two centuries later, in the commentary on the war in Ukraine, one can feel the same spirit stirring.

The spectacle of war has always evoked mixed emotions. On the one hand, enthusiasm and something akin to relief: here, finally, is real politics, real freedom. And, on the other hand, horror at the violence, suffering and destruction.

In the wake of Waterloo in 1815, both diplomacy and contemporary social science tried to put the genie back in the bottle. For all his grandeur, Napoleon had been defeated. Millions had died in the global wars sparked by the French Revolution, and his project of modernising empire had come to naught. The lesson, according to the followers of the sociologist Auguste Comte, was that the future belonged to industry, not to the soldiers.

War, however, refused to be tamed. Contrary to myth, the 19th century was not an era of peace. Colonial wars and massacres merged in the middle of the century with a surge of violence triggered by the formation of nation states: in Italy (1861), in the US (1865), in Japan (1868) and in Germany (1871). Massed armies, mobilised by railways and equipped with lethal modern weapons, wrought terrifying destruction. The violence escalated further in the 20th century, with the series of wars spanning Eurasia that began with the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and ended in Korea in 1953.

Peace between the great powers was secured thereafter not by treaty, but by a Cold War stand-off that was balanced on the threat of mutually assured destruction. The idea that the "postwar period" was one of demilitarisation is far from the truth. As a share of population, the US had more people in uniform through the late 1960s than the Kaiser's Germany had before 1914. France and Britain maintained a substantial colonial military presence throughout Asia and Africa. West Germany in the 1980s had 450,000 men in uniform and fielded two battle-ready armoured corps. Defence spending as a share of GDP was as high as it had been at the time of the dreadnought arms race.

That this terrifying stand-off ended with the largely peaceful overthrow of the communist regimes in Europe in 1989 persuaded Francis Fukuyama, then a member of the policy planning staff at the US State Department, that we had reached "the End of History". This is often described as a triumph of capitalism and democracy. It was certainly that, but no less significant was that the West had won the military contest without firing a shot in anger. The Warsaw Pact folded. By the time of Leonid Brezhnev, from the 1960s onwards, the Soviet system no longer seemed worth dying for. Mercifully, that spared Nato the question of whether the world was better off dead than red.

Anchored in American power and depoliticised neoliberalism, Fukuyama's vision of the End of History remains a compelling interpretation of the decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The ideological contest seemed settled in favour of a one-dimensional vision of liberal democracy, the rule of law and markets.

The achievement of the End of History consisted in not just the triumph of the liberal model, but in that it was attained bloodlessly. That gave it both its sense of inevitability and, as Fukuyama wrote, its post-heroic quality.

> The defining characteristic of the invasion is the sense of history repeating itself as farce

Of course, the End of History did not mean the end of events or the end of war. That threat of nuclear destruction continued to hang over us. Under the de-targeting agreement of 1994, the coordinates of major cities were removed from the computers of Russian and American intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). But they could be loaded back if required. We still live under the menace of absolute atrocity. Meanwhile, actual wars have continued to be fought. But war has changed.

The Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s was perhaps the last conflict in which two sides commanding substantial armed forces had everything at stake; any means could be mobilised to secure victory and neither side could afford to lose. The bloodiest wars in more recent decades – notably those in the former Yugoslavia, central Africa and Syria – were sprawling civil wars, often involving multiple non-state actors. In Iraq and Afghanistan the stakes were existential, but only for the locals. The US, which led the invasions, was shaken by the 9/11 attacks, but the global war on terror was always more of a policing action than a conventional war.

The question posed by Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is whether in this fundamental sense the spell of the End of History has finally been broken. Has history restarted in a tragic key, as President Macron has recently put it? Have we reached the end of the end of military history?

The answer we give to that question initially depends on the interpretation of Putin's motives.

The most obvious reading is that he has never accepted the verdict delivered by history in 1991. He is not reconciled to the collapse of the Soviet Union. He does not accept the claim of the US and its allies to define the international order. Already in 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, he announced his challenge to the West. He has since been waiting for the moment to revise the terms of Ukraine's independence. He could have done so in the spring of 2014 when, following the Maidan Revolution, the Kremlin considered a full-scale invasion. Instead, he opted for the annexation of Crimea and supporting the Donbas breakaway. Twice Russia forced the Ukrainians to the bargaining table at Minsk because Kyiv thought there was a real risk of being overrun by Russian forces. In the years since, much as the Bush administration regretted the failure to overthrow Saddam in 1991, Putin came to regret his cautious approach.

But if this is his basic motivation why in 2022 was he willing to risk the ultimate trial of battle? War may be the extension of political intercourse by other means, but making that leap into armed struggle changes the terms

A world-soul on horseback: Napoleon at the Battle of Jena on 14 October 1806

of international affairs irrevocably. As a tool of policy war is highly unpredictable. The violence tends to escalate. It is by nature zero sum. It involves huge risks. As the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz first laid out in the wake of Napoleon's defeat, victory can only be achieved by articulating success on the battlefield, geopolitical calculation and the balance of political energies and passions. It is a rare feat to pull that off. As the Israelis have found to their cost since the Six Day War in 1967, even the most overwhelming military victory can become an albatross.

One argument is that Putin gambled because he is a man of war. As such, he is at odds not only with the geopolitical boundaries that defined Fukuyama's End of History moment; more fundamentally he is at odds with the liberal vision of a world ruled by commerce and the Western conception of international norms. Putin sees history as being moved by the struggle of dark forces and there is merit in casting off hypocrisy and bringing that struggle into the open. He stamped his authority on Russian politics in 1999 with the bloody second invasion of Chechnya. In 2008 he seized the opportunity to deliver a humiliating military punishment to Georgia after it made a bid for Nato membership. In 2015 he threw Russia's backing behind Bashar al-Assad and decided the Syrian civil war.

This embrace of war leads some analysts to describe Putin as a man of the 19th century. That is perhaps unfair to the 19th century. In that era, a brutal arriviste like Putin would never have been allowed near the levers of power. For the eminent Russian historian Stephen Kotkin, Putin instead embodies the Russian tradition of expansionism that goes back half a millennium to the age of Ivan the Terrible.

These are pleasingly simple ideas. Putin invokes them himself. And that should make us suspicious. We would perhaps be better advised to turn back to Fukuyama. In the final chapter of *The End of History* (1992) – titled "Immense Wars of the Spirit" – he ponders the question of "how long megalothymia will be satisfied with metaphorical wars and symbolic victories". In the early 1990s Fukuyama was already warning that the moment would come for a figure like Putin, who would break out of the stifling conventions of post-history to launch "a nihilistic war against liberal democracy", a bloody battle for prestige, "only this time with modern weapons". On this reading Putin would not be so much the lineal descendant of Ivan the Terrible, as a postmodern, time-warped avatar. Indeed, amid the Vegas glitz of the Kremlin's public rooms, his regime seems something closer to a cosplay re-enactment.

The defining characteristic of the Russian invasion, other than its brutality, is the sense of history repeating itself as farce. There is little to suggest that Putin imagined he was embarking on an existential trial of strength. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. His approach to invading one of the largest countries in Europe, with a population of more than 40 million, was nothing short of frivolous. He thought of war as a bagatelle – asymmetric, swift, decisive, like Georgia in 2008 or Crimea in 2014. It would be little green men writ large.

In this reading, far from rupturing the End of History, or forcing a return to primal conflict, Putin saw himself as adjusting an anomaly created by the overthrow of Ukraine's pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych government in 2014. And though the West has responded to Putin's violence with outrage, we should admit that at first we shared Putin's framing of the war. Our backing of Ukraine was lacklustre at best. We too thought that if Putin was fool enough to launch an attack, it would be over soon. We did not take Ukraine seriously as a state. We stood back and left it to its fate. Ukraine was, and remains, beyond the protection of Nato's Article 5.

Perhaps the most telling moment came when the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, denounced Putin's invasion of Ukraine as a "war of choice". Whether consciously or not, his phraseology aligned Russia with the United States and Volodymyr Zelensky's Ukraine with Saddam Hussein's moribund dictatorship.

Putin's invasion and the attack on Iraq in 2003 by the US-led coalition have in common a disregard for both international law and geopolitical logic that left much of the rest of the world aghast. The least one can say for the US and its allies, however, is that when they launched their attack they made sure to do so with overwhelming force. The "shock and awe" aerial bombardment was vastly more intense than anything Putin's forces have so far delivered. What frustrated the invaders was not the Iraqi army but the subsequent insurgency.

In the war in Ukraine, the wildcard is the Ukrainians. What no one seriously expected was that Ukraine's military would stand up so well to Russia's inadequate assault. In this sense it is not Putin but Ukraine that has ruptured the End of History paradigm. Ukrainians are willing to die to resist Russian overlordship and to hold open the possibility of membership of the EU and Nato. If anyone has taken us back in time to the dramas of 19th- and 20th-century history, it is not Putin but Zelensky and his people. They are enacting a drama of heroic resistance, sovereignty and self-determination, worthy of their neighbour Poland, the *locus classicus* of romantic, and often doomed, bids for self-determination.

But we should beware our Eurocentric prejudices. It is not Ukraine's call to arms that marks this war as distinct. The Iraqi insurgents and the Taliban too saw themselves precisely in these terms. In their own ▸

◂ cultural sphere, they made appeals no less far-reaching than Zelensky's. Nor is this the first war to be broadcast through social media. For the past decade anyone who wanted to could follow the gruesome fighting in Syria, siege by siege, day by day.

What marks this war as different is that the Ukrainian resistance has stopped Putin's invasion in its tracks. The Iraqi and Afghan resistance were never able to do that. And the Ukrainians have been able to do so in large part because the outside world to which they appeal is not a diffuse religious or cultural community, but the armed alliance of the West, which has responded with a flood of modern anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry. The Taliban scrounged their Stingers second-hand. The Ukrainians get them fresh from Nato stores.

The result is that Putin awakens from the resentful nightmare of Russia's post-Cold War memory into a bona fide, existential crisis, a "real war" that the Russian army is far from certain of winning. And in which the charge sheet for war crimes is clocking up.

Again, the experience of defeat and discredit on the part of the larger power is not itself novel. The US was discomfited by the failure of the war in Iraq and decided to cut its losses in Afghanistan. But though that hurt the incumbent president it did not put America's regime in question. For Putin, at this point, everything is at stake.

To escape the nightmare, Putin may choose to escalate the invasion, even toying with the nuclear option. But, as the extent of Russia's military frustration has sunk in, the Kremlin seems to be concentrating more on finding a way to claim a victory, perhaps by gaining territory in the east or the south, a success that would enable Moscow to agree some kind of settlement.

Putin may have challenged the post-Cold War order but, given the liminal status of Ukraine – neither a member of the EU nor of Nato – and the underwhelming performance of the Russian military, which makes an attack on the Baltics or Poland seem unlikely, it is up to others, principally China and the Western alliance, to decide what to make of this clash. Since China has so far acted with notable caution, realistically the initiative lies with the EU and with the US. The end of the End of History will be what we make of it.

Ukraine, of course, has every interest in using the momentum of its early successes to widen the conflict. Its people know that they have upset the expected course of events. They know that their resistance has prised open a historic opportunity. Their fear must be that history will close over them, that the weight of Russian power will impose itself and that the West will stick to its commitments to stand clear. Kyiv counters this by insisting that its struggle is "everyone's struggle". Like it or not, they insist, we are all already engaged in a Third World War. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is just the beginning.

Clearly, if it so chose, Nato could turn this war into World War Three. All it would need to do is attempt to impose a no-fly zone. On the basis of Russia's incompetent performance so far, there may be some who would fancy the West's chances in such a war. Europe's governments have already gone far further than anyone thought likely. Sweden and Germany have delivered weapons. Switzerland has imposed financial sanctions. Faced with Russia's egregious breach of international law, the West lectures India and China that there can be no such thing as neutrality. But for all that, the EU and the US have avoided joining the fight. The flow of weapons delivered to Ukraine has been dramatic and it may ultimately defeat Russia. But those weapons are carefully selected. They equip the Ukrainians to repel Russia; they don't put Ukraine in a position to attack Russia.

Putin's allegation that Ukraine was being developed as a base from which to strike at the soft underbelly of Russia seems less plausible now than it did before the war. Offensive weapons are precisely what is not in the arsenal that the West has delivered. Nor has Kyiv asked for them. Economic sanctions are far-reaching, but they have stopped short of an all-out global campaign against Russia's energy exports like that which the Obama administration initiated against Iran in 2012. The sanctions do damage Russia's economy and they confirm that the West was serious when it said that Putin would pay a price for an attack. But beyond that there is a deliberate obscurity about their rationale.

Although Joe Biden has blurted out his indignation that bad characters like Putin are in charge of modern states, the West remains shy about embracing regime change as its ultimate goal. This is an important concession to diplomacy. Were Putin's overthrow to be adopted as the official Western policy goal, it would be a return to the End of History thesis in its most militant form. Indeed, it would be a return to the origin of the economic weapon 100 years ago, in the war waged in the name of liberalism against Germany and its allies in the First World War. It was not for nothing that the economic blockade was the chief weapon with which the League of Nations attempted to enforce peace. The networks of communication, transport and trade would be weaponised to erase those who sought to deviate from the forward march of liberal modernity.

As critics of the interwar order like Carl Schmitt sensed, the hegemony of the victorious powers in 1918 threatened the first End of History. Churchill, Stalin and Hitler all sensed as much. To challenge that order in the 1930s, to restart history for the first time, Hitler, Mussolini, the Japanese and Stalin's Soviet Union undertook Herculean efforts, out of all proportion to anything that Putin has contemplated. Nevertheless, the Axis powers were crushed by overwhelming material superiority, setting up the Cold War that followed.

In 2022, if Putin were to be brought down by military frustration and economic exhaustion, and were his regime to be replaced by one that was pro-Western and ready for peace, all those who have levelled cheap criticism at Fukuyama over the years would owe him a giant apology. It would be the most dramatic and unexpected vindication of his prediction that the Western model would triumph and would do so by means short of open warfare.

However, if the war does not escalate to a Third World War and Putin's regime does not collapse, there will be no option but to face the difficult business of diplomacy and peace-making. It will be a bitter task for both sides. Like the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of March 1918, which first gave international recognition to a sovereign Ukrainian state, it will likely involve harsh and divisive compromises. In light of the crimes perpetrated by the Russian invaders, it will be a supreme test of Ukraine's political system. But it will be precisely in those compromises and the vision for the future that they imply – for Ukraine and Russia, for Europe and Nato – that the meaning of this war will ultimately be defined. It will be in that process that history is truly made. ●

TOM CHITTY

JEREMY CLIFFE

World View

The atrocities in Bucha show that remembrance without resolve is empty

Some European capitals stand as grand proclamations of past glories. Not today's Berlin. The rebuilt centre of the reunified German capital can feel like an open-air museum to Nazi crimes. An entire block has been given over to the 2,711 concrete slabs of its sprawling Holocaust memorial. Pavements glint with brass plates bearing the names of victims at the addresses where they once lived. Money has been lavished on exhibitions, plaques, ceremonies and educational initiatives commemorating the darkest chapters of German history. As a resident of Berlin, I have long admired this mature commitment to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (the processing of the past) and *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture). Yet today I find myself wondering: what ultimate purpose does it serve?

When Russian troops retreated from Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv, on 30 March they left behind scenes seemingly torn from Europe's history books – but which belong inexorably to its present. Corpses of civilians lined the streets. Some had their hands tied behind their backs. Others lay where they had fallen; one body under a bicycle, another strewn amid dropped groceries. "They had been torturing people," one resident told the *Times* of the scene in one basement. "Some of them had their ears cut off. Others had teeth pulled out." Bodies of children and teenagers were among the mutilated. The ghastly likelihood is that these were just early glimpses of Russian crimes unfolding across the occupied territory of Ukraine.

"Never again" is our instinctive reaction to this nightmare, just as it was in 1995 when more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslims were massacred at Srebrenica during the Bosnian War. Yet the grim pattern post-1945 is that this refrain's every incantation marks the start of a countdown to the next such mass atrocity. The US diplomat Samantha Power has called it "the world's most unfulfilled promise", arguing that time and again realpolitik has stymied preventative action.

Take the case of Vladimir Putin. That the Russian president is capable of genocidal violence has been clear for decades. His first major act after coming to power in 1999 was to launch the Second Chechen War, in which his troops raped, tortured and carried out summary mass executions of civilians. His wars in Georgia in 2008, in eastern Ukraine from 2014 and in Syria from 2015 all brought further crimes. None of it stopped Western governments from doing business with him. In this respect Germany is far from uniquely hypocritical. Yet it is galling that a country with its 20th-century history has based its 21st-century energy strategy on gas, oil and coal imports filling the coffers of a power led by a man such as Putin. And it is all the more dismal that this country, shown the horrors of Bucha, still declines to stem that enabling flow of euros.

Western sanctions so far have not stopped Russia. The rouble has recovered and its value is now close to what it was when Putin's invasion of Ukraine began. The one thing sure to change this would be a comprehensive energy embargo, especially from the country that buys more Russian energy than any other. According to the respected economist Moritz Schularick, an embargo by Germany would be economically "manageable" for Berlin, costing a short-term hit to GDP of between 0.5 and 3 per cent (between about €100 and €1,000 per capita). Significantly reducing Russia's ability to wage genocidal war at a cost to the average German of a mid-range holiday? It should not be a difficult decision. Yet at the time of writing the federal government deems it a step too far.

> Memory should never get too settled or smooth. It must remain raw and alive

This all raises some difficult questions about the country's vaunted memory culture. Remembering history is the first step towards learning its lessons and then acting on them. But what use is it without the follow-through? "Every year politicians repeat 'never again'," Volodymyr Zelensky chided the Bundestag on 17 March. "And now, we see that these words simply mean nothing." On this point, I would go further than Ukraine's president. Remembrance without resolve is actually counterproductive, functioning as a substitute for action rather than a spur to it; sanitising and distancing the past rather than preserving its immediacy; breeding complacency rather than vigilance.

Some counter that to link the Holocaust with current events risks relativising an act of singular and incomparable evil. Yet recently historians have sought to nuance the debate, even suggesting that cordoning off the Holocaust as a detached, unique object of contrition risks diminishing other terrible crimes in other times and places. In a provocative essay in the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* last year, the historians Jürgen Zimmerer and Michael Rothberg called on their compatriots to "End the taboo on comparison!" (subtitle: "Globalise history writing, pluralise thinking: why the German memory landscape must change").

Their call was and is welcome, especially in light of recent events in Ukraine. Memory should never get too settled, smooth or polished. It must remain raw and alive, open to comparison and contestation, spiky and awkward. The darker its content the more it should discomfort, not comfort, those who hold it in contemplation. To be sure, today's Germany is capable of great moral courage. But in moments like this it also stands as an example of the perils of memory becoming overly shrouded in reverence; of remembrance becoming separated from action; and of the present becoming too blithely vulnerable to the atavistic furies of the past as they rise up through the ether of history once more. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

War in Ukraine

Inside the mind of the Kremlin

Sergey Karaganov, former adviser to Putin, has for decades guided Russian regimes on advancing their global interests. Now, with theory turned to grim reality in Ukraine, he discusses what he views as a "proxy war between the West and the rest"

Interview by Bruno Maçães

A former presidential adviser to both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, Sergey Karaganov is honorary chair of the Moscow think tank the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy. He is associated with a number of key ideas in Russian foreign policy, from the so-called Karaganov doctrine on the rights of ethnic Russians living abroad to the principle of "constructive destruction", also known as the "Putin doctrine". Karaganov is close to Putin and his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, and he formulated many of the ideas that led to the war in Ukraine – though he has also expressed disagreement with the idea of a long-term occupation of the country.

Karaganov has promoted the concept of "Greater Eurasia" and has defended a closer partnership with China. He is known as a foreign-policy hawk, and has argued that the long reign of the West in world politics is now at an end. On 28 March the *New Statesman* columnist Bruno Maçães interviewed Karaganov about his views on the war – including controversial statements on Ukrainian nationhood and denazification that would be disputed by those outside Russia – and the future of the liberal international order.

Bruno Maçães Why did Russia invade Ukraine?

Sergey Karaganov For 25 years, people like myself have been saying that if Nato and Western alliances expand beyond certain red lines, especially into Ukraine, there will be a war. I envisioned that scenario as far back as 1997. In 2008 President Putin said that if Ukraine's membership of the alliance became a possibility then there will be no Ukraine. He was not listened to. So the first objective is to end Nato's expansion. Two other objectives have been added: one is the demilitarisation of Ukraine; the other is denazification, because there are people in the Russian government concerned with the rise of ultra-nationalism in Ukraine to the extent that they think it is beginning to resemble Germany in the 1930s. There is also an aim to free the Donbas republics of eight years of constant bombardment.

There was also a strong belief that war with Ukraine was inevitable – maybe three or four years from now – which could well have taken place on Russian territory itself. So probably the Kremlin decided that if you have to fight, let's fight on somebody else's territory, the territory of a neighbour and a brother country, once a part of the Russian empire. But the real war is against the Western expansion.

BM On 25 February Putin called on the Ukrainian army to overthrow President Volodymyr Zelensky. More recently, however, the Kremlin seems to be suggesting that it is interested in negotiating with Zelensky. Has the Kremlin changed its mind? Does it accept that Zelensky is the president of Ukraine and will remain the president of Ukraine?

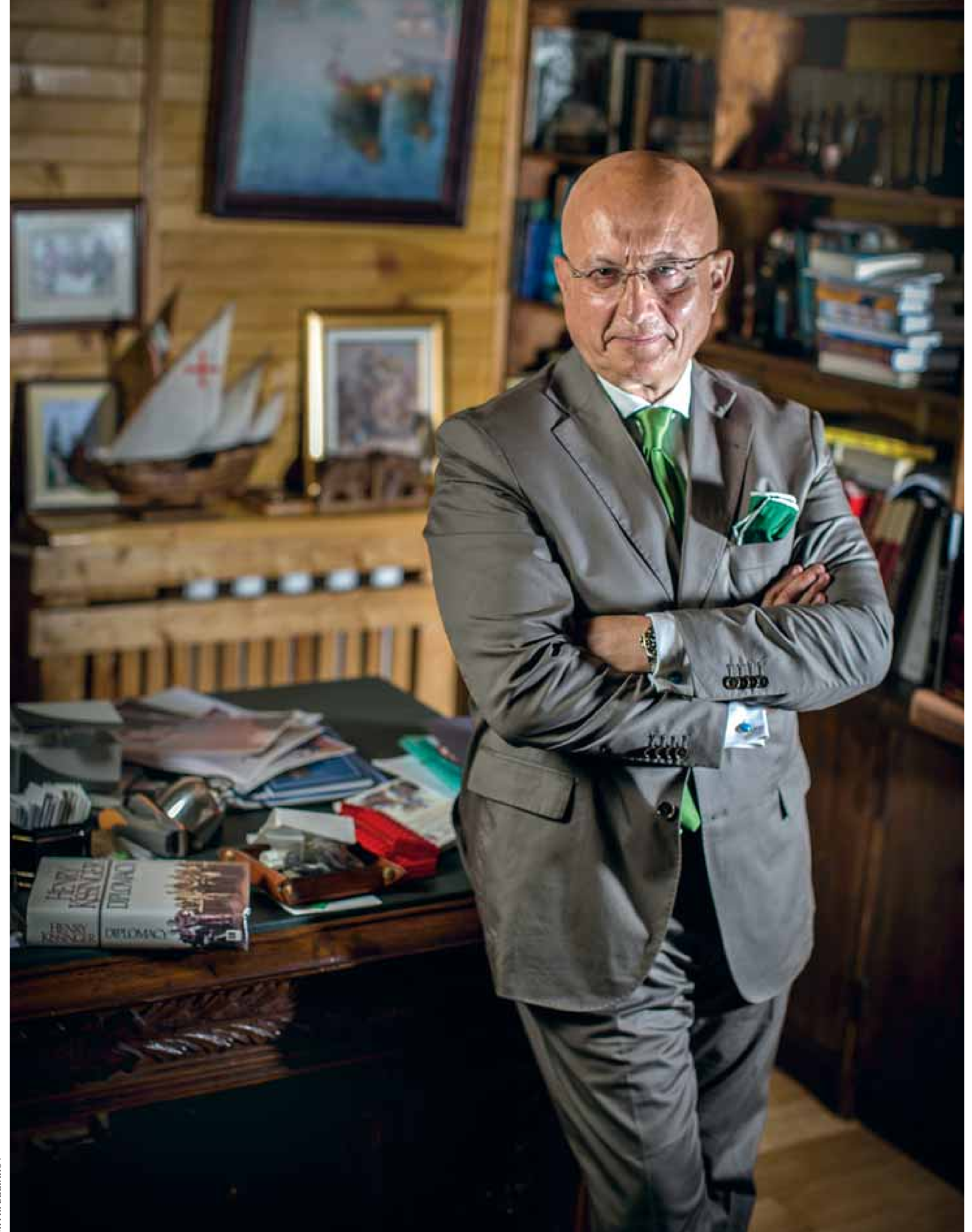
SK It is a war, and we're in the fog of war, so opinions change, aims change. At the start, maybe some thought that the Ukrainian military would arrange some kind of a coup so we would have a real power in Kyiv with whom we could negotiate – recent presidents, and especially Zelensky, are considered puppets.

BM You personally do not consider President Zelensky a Nazi, do you?

SK Of course not.

BM What do you think would be the final goal for the Kremlin at this point? What would be considered a successful outcome for the invasion?

SK I don't know what the outcome of this war will be, but I think it will involve the partition of Ukraine, one way or another. Hopefully there would still be something called Ukraine left at the end. But Russia cannot afford to "lose", so we need a kind of a victory. And if there is a sense that we are losing the war, then I think there is a definite possibility of escalation. This war is a kind of proxy war between the West and the rest – Russia being, as it has been in history, the pinnacle of "the rest" – for a future world order. The stakes of the Russian elite are ▸



DMITRI BELIAKOV

The view from Russia: Sergey Karaganov believes that "democracy in its present form in most European countries will not survive"

◂ very high – for them it is an existential war.

BM You talked about demilitarisation of Ukraine, but it seems that such a goal would not be achieved if the West continues to provide Ukraine with weapons. Do you think Russia will be tempted to stop that flow of arms, and does this risk a direct clash between Nato and Russia?

SK Absolutely! There is a growing probability of a direct clash. And we don't know what the outcome of this would be. Maybe the Poles would fight; they are always willing. I know as a historian that Article 5 of the Nato treaty is worthless. Under Article 5 – which allows a state to call for support from other members of the alliance – nobody is obliged to actually fight on behalf of others, but nobody can be absolutely sure that there would be no such escalation. I also know from the history of American nuclear strategy that the US is unlikely to defend Europe with nuclear weapons. But there is still a chance of escalation here, so it is an abysmal scenario and I hope that some kind of a peace agreement between us and the US, and between us and Ukraine, can be reached before we go further into this unbelievably dangerous world.

BM If Putin asks for your advice, would you tell him that Article 5 is to be taken seriously or not? I understand from your words that it is not to be taken seriously in your view.

SK It might be that Article 5 works, and countries rally to the defence of another. But against a nuclear country like Russia... I wonder? Put it this way: if the US intervenes against a nuclear country, then the American president making that decision is mad, because it wouldn't be 1914 or 1939; this is something bigger. So I don't think America could possibly intervene, but we are already in a much more dangerous situation than several weeks ago. And Article 5 does not presume automatic obligations.

On Ukraine's right to exist

BM What was your reaction to President Biden's comment that President Putin cannot stay in power?

SK Well, President Biden often makes all kind of comments. [Afterwards,] he was corrected by his colleagues, so nobody's taking the statement seriously.

BM Putin has argued that Ukraine does not exist as a nation. I would imagine that the conclusion from the events of the past weeks is that Ukraine does exist as a nation, when you have the whole population, including civilians, willing to sacrifice their lives to preserve the sovereignty and independence of their country. Does Ukraine exist as a nation, or is Ukraine just a part of Russia?

SK I am not sure whether there is a massive civilian resistance as you suggest, rather than just young men joining the army. In any case, I don't know whether Ukraine will survive, because it has a very limited, if any, history of statehood, and it doesn't have a state-building elite. Maybe something will grow from below, but it's an open question... We shall see... This war – or military operation; however you call it – will decide. Maybe the Ukrainian nation will be born: I will be happy if Ukrainians have an effective, viable government – unlike the situation during the last 30 years. They were the absolute losers after the Soviet Union, because of their lack of a state-building elite.

BM If there is a partition, would the Russia-controlled section of Ukraine preserve a nominal independence, or would it be absorbed by Russia?

SK If the operation is to turn Ukraine into a "friendly" state, then absorption is clearly not necessary. There might be some kind of absorption – which has happened, effectively – in the Donbas republics. Whether they will be independent or not – I think they might be. Certainly there are calls for referendums there, but how you could run referendums during a conflict I do not know. So my judgement would be that some of Ukraine will become a friendly state to Russia, other parts may be partitioned. Poland will gladly take back some of parts in the west, maybe Romanians and Hungarians will, too, because the Hungarian minority in Ukraine has been suppressed along with other minorities. But we are in a full-on war; it is too hard to predict. The war is an open-ended story.

BM One argument is that Russia will fall under Chinese control, and this war does not help – because by isolating Russia from the West, it turns Russia into easy prey for Chinese economic influence. Are you worried that this could be the beginning of a "Chinese century" for Russia?

SK There are two answers to your question. One is that China's economic influence in Russia and over Russia will grow. China has most of the technologies we need, and it has a lot of capital, so there is no question about that. Whether Russia would become a kind of a satellite country, according to the Chinese tradition of their Middle Kingdom, I doubt it.

If you asked me how I would describe Russia in one word, it is "sovereignty". We defeated those who sought to rule us, starting with the Mongols, and then Carl [Charles XII] of Sweden, then Napoleon and Hitler. Also, recently, we had years of Western domination here. It was almost overwhelming. And nevertheless, you see what has happened: Russia revolted against all that. So I am not afraid of Russia becoming a part of a great China. The other reason I'm not afraid is because Chinese civilisation is very different. We have our Asian traits in our genes, and we are in part an Asian country because of this. And Siberia is at the core of the Russian empire: without Siberia, Russia wouldn't have become a great country. And the Tatar and Mongol yoke left many traits in our society. But culturally, we are different, so I don't think it is possible that we will become a subsidiary country.

But I am very concerned about the overwhelming economic predominance of China over the next decade. People like me have been saying precisely [that] we have to solve the Ukraine problem, we have to solve the Nato problem, so that we can be in a strong position vis-à-vis China. Now it will be much more difficult for Russia to resist Chinese power.

> "I'm tremendously saddened. But as a Russian, I only wish we win, whatever that means"

On winners and losers

BM Do you think the US is benefiting from this war?

SK At this juncture, yes, because the big losers are, in addition to Ukraine, Europe, especially if it continues with this mysterious zest for independence from Russian energy. But China is clearly the victor of this whole affair... I think the biggest loser will be Ukraine; a loser will be Russia; a great loser will be Europe; the United States will lose somewhat, but still it could very well survive as a huge island over the ocean; and the big victor is China.

BM You have argued that in the future there could be some kind of alliance between Russia and Europe – or at least some European countries, if not others. Surely now you must think there is no possibility for Europe and Russia to come closer together.

SK If we could have solved the crisis peacefully there's no question that parts of Europe would have orientated themselves not towards Russia itself but Greater Eurasia, of which Russia would be a key part. That scenario is now postponed, but Europe needs to develop a relationship with Greater Eurasia. We lived through world wars and cold

Aftermath: a destroyed house following bombardments in the village of Krasylivka, east of Kyiv, 20 March

ARIS MESSINIS / AFP

wars, and then we rebuilt our relationship. I hope that we shall do that in ten years. I hope I shall see that before I pass.

BM Do you think this is a moment of supreme danger for Russia?

SK I would say yes, this is an existential war. If we do not win, somehow, then I think we will have all kinds of unforeseen political repercussions which are much worse than at the beginning of the 1990s. But I believe that we will avoid that, first, because Russia will win, whatever that victory means, and second, because we have a strong and tough regime, so in any event, or if the worst happens, it will not be the dissolution of the country or collapse. I think it will be closer to a harsh authoritarian regime than to the dissolution of the country. But still, defeat is unthinkable.

BM What would qualify as defeat?

SK I do not know. That is the question. We need victory. I don't think that, even if we conquered all of Ukraine and all the military forces of Ukraine surrendered, it would be a victory, because then we will be left with the burden of a devastated country, one devastated by 30 years of inept elite rule, and then of course devastation from our military operation. So I think at one point we need a kind of a solution which would be called peace, and which would include de facto the creation of some kind of a viable, pro-Russian government on the territory of Ukraine, and real security for the Donbas republics.

BM If the current stalemate were to continue for years, would that be a defeat?

SK Stalemate means a huge military operation. No, I don't think it is possible. I am afraid it would lead to escalation, because fighting endlessly on the territory of Ukraine – even now, is not viable.

BM It's the second time you've mentioned that if there is no progress it would lead to an escalation. What does "escalation" mean in this context?

SK Well, escalation in this context means that in the face of an existential threat – and that means a non-victory, by the way, or an alleged defeat – Russia could escalate, and there are dozens of places in the world where it would have a direct confrontation with the United States.

BM So your suggestion is that, on the one hand, we could have an escalation towards the possible use of nuclear weapons – if there is an existential danger to Russia – and, on the other, an escalation towards conflict in other areas beyond Ukraine. Am I following you correctly?

SK I wouldn't rule it out. We are living in absolutely a new strategic situation. Normal logic dictates what you have said.

BM How do you feel personally? Do you feel tormented by what is happening?

SK We all feel like we are part of a huge event in history, and it's not just about war in Ukraine; it's about the final crash of the international system that was created after the Second World War and then, in a different way, was recreated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. So, we are witnessing the collapse of an economic system – of the world economic system – globalisation in this form is finished. Whatever we have had in the past is gone. And out of this we have a build-up of many crises that, because of Covid-19, we pretended did not exist. For two years, the pandemic replaced decision-making. Covid was bad enough, but now everybody has forgotten about Covid and we can see that everything is collapsing. Personally, I'm tremendously saddened. I worked for the creation of a viable and fair system. But I am part of Russia, so I only wish that we win, whatever that means.

On the decline of European democracy

BM Do you sometimes fear this could be the rebirth of Western power and American power; that the Ukraine war could be a moment of renewal for the American empire?

SK I don't think so. The problem is that during the last 500 years the foundation of Western power was the military preponderance of Europeans. This foundation started eroding from the 1950s and 1960s. Then the collapse of the Soviet Union made it seem for a while that Western predominance was back, but now it is done away with, because Russia will continue to be a major military power and China is becoming a first-class military power.

So the West will never recuperate, but it doesn't matter if it dies: Western civilisation has brought all of us great benefits, but now people like myself and others are questioning the moral foundation of Western civilisation. I think geopolitically the West will experience ups and downs. Maybe the shocks we are experiencing could bring back the better qualities of Western civilisation, and we will again see people like Roosevelt, Churchill, Adenauer, de Gaulle and Brandt back in office. But continuous shocks will of course also mean that democracy in its present form in most European countries will not survive, because under circumstances of great tension, democracies always wither away or become autocratic. These changes are inevitable. ●

Spring Reflection

What tadpoles taught me

By Helen Macdonald

It was as reliable a sign of spring as daffodils flaring in flowerbeds or blackbirds breaking into song. It was a schoolroom tradition, but lots of us did it at home, with varying levels of sophistication. Sometimes it was buckets by the back door, or big glass jars. Like me, some went all-in and set up a home aquarium. We filled them with rain and river water and introduced frogspawn harvested from ponds. Adding fronds of aquatic weed, we refreshed the water regularly and waited, and watched, and hoped.

Children aren't renowned for their patience, but we never lost interest over the months it took for our precious clumps of spawn to turn into frogs. The dark dots of eggs evolved into twitching commas, then hatched into tadpoles the soft black colour of a dead television screen. At first, they hung on the emptied jelly like fur. Then they swam: tiny moving ink-strokes with feathery gills, mouths scouring algae from waterweed. Slowly they grew into chunky beasts whose skins were spattered with gold. Their gills shrank away, and they began gulping air. Ballooning in size, their faces turned so sardonic they resembled miniature Jabba the Huts.

About 16 weeks in, tiny bumps by their tails thickened and grew into legs, transforming them into weird, chimeric creatures that failed to fit the familiar categories of the world. Then their bodies wrested angularity from roundness and suddenly there were miniature, perfect, part-tailed frogs with jewelled eyes in the tank, sitting on top of wooden rafts or stones we'd piled into the water, creatures so cute it burned to look at them.

Teachers explained that tadpoles were raised at school to teach us the life-cycle of the common frog, but there were more lessons here than simple biology. The aquarium was a flicker in the corner of the room, its denizens always busy; to me it always felt somehow like a promise that not everything was, or would always be, school. And unlike fish tanks – arranged with care to perfectly replicate river or reef or pond – the tadpole tank didn't try to mimic anything. It was only ever a container for growing life. One can have favourites in a tank of fish. But I couldn't have favourite tadpoles. There were too many, they all looked the same. They were crowds, not individuals, and their purpose was to grow and change. Their slow metamorphoses chimed with my childish comprehensions of what it meant to grow up and leave home.

Being the provider for so many tiny lives taught us lessons in care. Many of us learned the hard way that without sufficient food, larger tadpoles turn to cannibalism, and the inevitable casualties among even well-fed aquarium inhabitants taught us uncomfortable facts about death. Staring at tadpoles' tiny eyes was the first time I knew the world doesn't operate only on the human scale; that inside and alongside our own worlds are a million others that aren't ours to share.

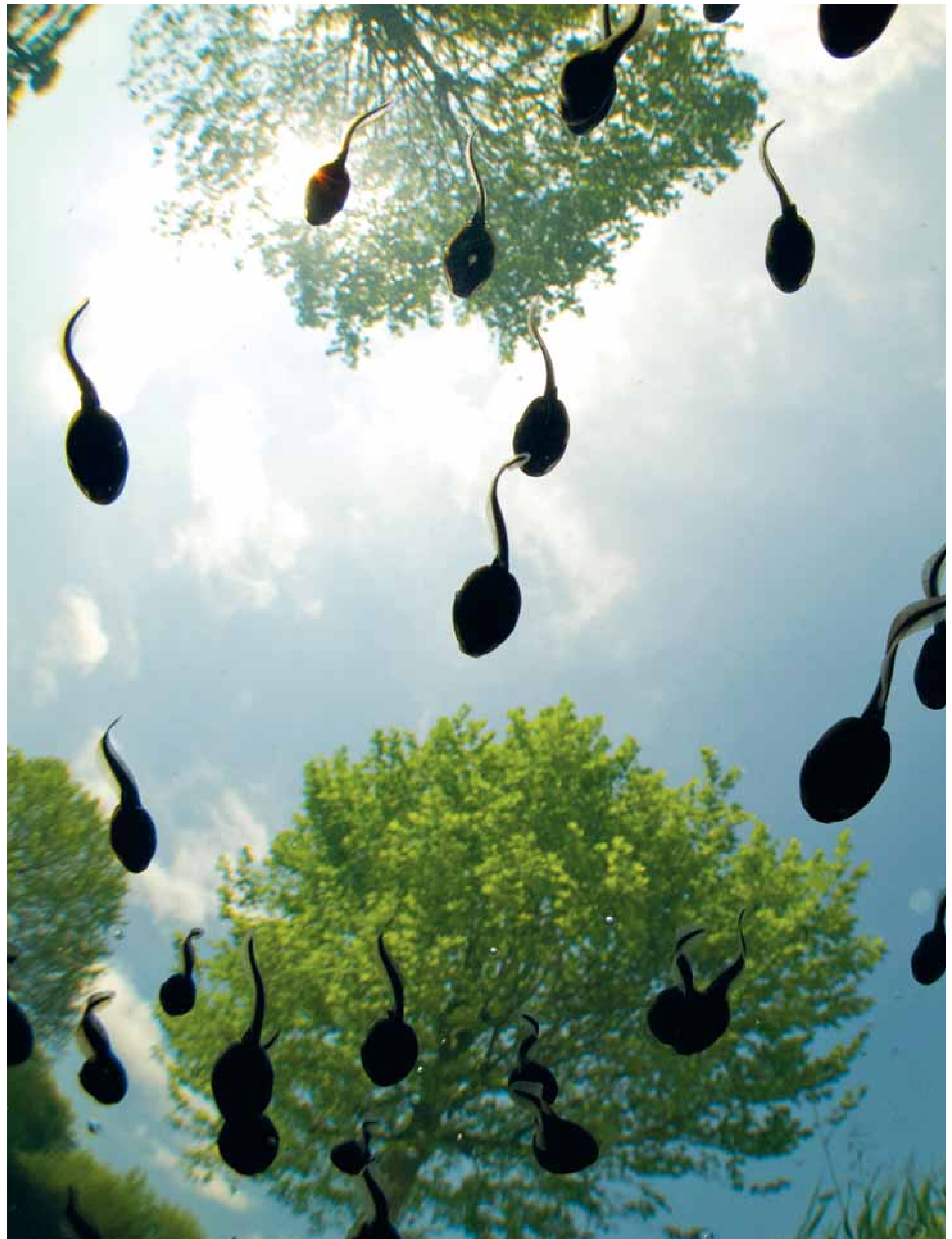
> Suddenly, there were perfect frogs with jewelled eyes

For us, the tadpoles weren't ever wild animals. But they weren't pets, either. When they turned to fingernail-sized, tailed froglets, we knew they had to be returned to the wild, and it was always an ambivalent experience to watch them scramble into damp long grass or vanish into the shallows of a pond's edge. That was a lesson about the limits of possession, about giving things up, letting go.

There were many tadpole horror stories. We were children, after all. A friend still winces at the memory of trying to pick hosts of squirming tinies out of soaked shagpile carpet after tipping over the jar they swam in. Back then we were advised to feed well-grown tadpoles on bits of liver or bacon, and sometimes kids were a little exuberant with the portions and a little lax in changing the water and all their tadpoles died. Millions of tadpoles must have suffered the same fate – which, along with frogs and other amphibians being in serious decline from habitat loss and disease, may be why this activity is less common these days, though it's still legal to raise tadpoles at home.

Husbandry failings are part of why many people dislike keeping tadpoles, and they give me pause, too. But despite these misgivings, I still hope the activity continues. In its small way, tadpole-rearing can work against narratives about the natural world that portray humans simply as agents of destruction whose dealings with nature inevitably lead to its decline. These stories suggest that we shouldn't interact with nature at all, which radically attenuates our ability to forge hands-on, emotional connections with it. These are the very connections that can foster a life-long interest in nature and a keen sense of ecological and environmental responsibility.

Not all the kids in my class turned into naturalists. But keeping tadpoles worked a very particular magic on me. It turned frogs from slippery, mysterious creatures into lovable, familiar characters, which is why over the years I've done my best to look out for them, digging ponds, leaving grassy areas in my gardens uncut, piling up logs as refuges and avoiding insecticides. Those childhood aquaria coursing with animate punctuation marks helped me see the natural world as an extended community of humans and non-humans alike. Today I know the landscape around me is a place coursing with bonds of reciprocity forged decades ago, after I first lifted a quivering mass of frogspawn from the chill waters of a small suburban pond. ●



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The forgotten nuclear threat

As the West remains focused on the war in Ukraine, North Korea's Kim Jong Un has begun testing his most powerful missile to date

By Katie Stallard

Even by the bombastic standards of North Korean propaganda, the video that accompanied Pyongyang's missile launch on 24 March was extraordinary. The opening sequence showed Kim Jong Un, apparently channelling the late 1980s and Tom Cruise in *Top Gun*, striding out of a hangar in slow motion, wearing a black leather bomber jacket and dark sunglasses. Kim checked his watch. His generals checked their watches. He checked his watch again. The footage cut back and forth between them as the dramatic soundtrack reached its crescendo. Kim removed his sunglasses, also in slow motion, and nodded.

While the action movie-style montage was somewhat dated, the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test that followed demonstrated significant, and seriously concerning, new capabilities. The missile, which South Korea claimed was an updated version of a previous model rather than the weapon shown in the video, reached a height of more than 6,000 kilometres, 15 times higher than the International Space Station, putting the entire US mainland within range if it was fired at a shallower angle. Kim congratulated his scientists and engineers on achieving "overwhelming military power that cannot be stopped by anyone" and vowed to continue developing North Korea's "formidable striking capabilities" and "nuclear war deterrence".

The last time Kim tested long-range missiles and nuclear weapons, in 2017, he brought the Korean peninsula to the brink of conflict. The then US president, Donald Trump, threatened him with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" as the North Korean leader launched three ICBMs and detonated what he claimed was the country's first thermonuclear bomb. Trump later told the journalist Bob Woodward that war with North Korea had been "much closer than anyone would know". According to Woodward, the US defence secretary at the time, Jim Mattis, had a flashing light and a bell installed in his home that would alert him to a North Korean launch, and slept in his clothes so that he would be ready to give the order to shoot down an incoming missile. Now Kim is clearly signalling his intention to embark on a new round of provocative weapons tests that could result in an even more serious crisis.

North Korea has steadily increased the pace and scale of its missile tests in recent months, launching newly developed weapons from submarines and trains, and test-firing what the regime said was its first hypersonic missile. This would be significant if confirmed as these highly manoeuvrable

Put to the test: Kim Jong Un oversees the launch of a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile in Pyongyang, North Korea, 24 March

weapons, which travel more than five times faster than the speed of sound, can evade conventional missile defences. US officials have also warned that Pyongyang may be preparing to carry out an underground nuclear test – its first since 2017 – after satellite imagery recorded new activity at North Korea's main nuclear facility, which it previously claimed to have destroyed.

"Kim has told us what he wants," said Ankit Panda, a senior fellow in the nuclear policy programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the author of *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb*. "He wants better missiles, more precise missiles, and larger missiles capable of carrying multiple warheads." Kim has also called for the development of tactical nuclear weapons, Panda told me, and the regime is likely to carry out new nuclear tests as it experiments with smaller warheads and more compact designs.

But unlike in 2017, when China and Russia worked with the US to impose tough UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea, the international outlook now is very different. As Washington DC's relations with Beijing and Moscow deteriorate, the prospects for cooperation between the three powers in response to a new crisis are vanishingly slim. The regional security environment has also become more fraught, with Japan increasing military spending and South Korea buying American stealth fighter jets and building up its own missile arsenal. Whereas South Korea's liberal president Moon Jae-in played a crucial role in defusing tensions five years ago by pushing for talks with North Korea, he will be replaced in May by the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol. A former prosecutor with no foreign policy experience, Yoon has indicated he will take a harder line on North Korea. He has also refused to rule out conducting pre-emptive strikes against Pyongyang.

John Delury, a professor of Chinese studies at Yonsei University in Seoul, told me he was concerned that in the coming months a dangerous cycle of escalation could return, with consequences that would extend far beyond the Korean peninsula. "The conservative government in Seoul would be inclined to react in a hawkish manner to each test," he explained. The Biden administration, with its focus on the strategic rivalry with China and countering Vladimir Putin, would strengthen its security ties with South Korea and Japan. "Beijing and Moscow would naturally close ranks with Kim Jong Un," Delury said. "Even if Xi Jinping might feel Kim is overdoing it, as in 2017, there would be acrimony rather than consensus at the UN Security Council." ▸

When Kim Jong Un first came to power following the death of his father in December 2011, there was a degree of optimism among some Western observers that he might take his isolated and impoverished country in a new direction. He was the third member of the Kim family to rule North Korea, following in the footsteps of his father and his grandfather, who had presided over the country since its founding in 1948. But the new leader was young – thought to be in his late twenties at the time, although his exact age wasn't clear. He had also been educated at an expensive private school in Switzerland, where his classmates said he was obsessed with video games and basketball, the Chicago Bulls in particular, and so had seen what life was like beyond Pyongyang.

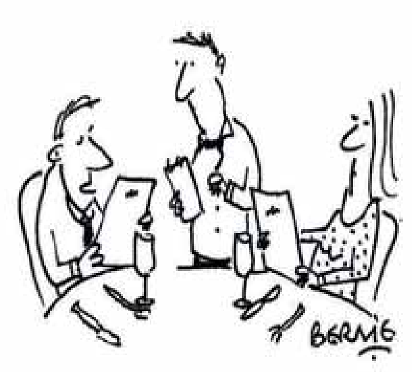
During an early speech in April 2012, Kim urged his officials to adopt a "creative and enterprising attitude" and stressed the importance of improving living standards and developing the "people's economy". He vowed to strengthen North Korea's military, but he also promised that his citizens would "never have to tighten their belt again", acknowledging at least some of the economic hardship they had endured in the previous decades. (Although he did not mention the terrible famine that devastated the country under his father's rule during the 1990s, which is thought to have killed at least half a million people.) Kim announced what he called the Byungjin, or "parallel advance", policy in 2013, which meant simultaneously pursuing nuclear weapons and economic development, even though the former brought sanctions that stifled the latter. He has long insisted that his weapons programmes are essential to securing the country's survival, describing his nuclear arsenal as a "treasured sword" that protects North Korean citizens.

Following the long-range missile and nuclear tests that provoked the crisis of 2017, Kim abruptly declared his nuclear force complete in 2018 and announced he would shift his focus to economic development as he embarked on a diplomatic offensive that included a series of high-profile summits with Donald Trump. It was the first time a North Korean leader had held talks with a sitting US president, and the meetings were presented to Kim's domestic audience as proof of his prowess as a global statesman and the country's status as a nuclear power. But the talks between Kim and Trump broke down in 2019, and the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic the following year caused North Korea to seal its borders to the outside world. With the country in the grip of a new economic crisis, and fears that North Korea may be on the verge of famine once again, Kim has tried to shift the blame, insisting he is defending his citizens from their "imperialist" enemies (chief among them the US) and ramping up the pace of weapons tests.

"Kim has had in effect to apologise for his failure to deliver on promises of economic improvement, even crying as he spoke to the nation in October 2020," Delury said. "For now, the rockets are once again the only thing he can really celebrate and do his best to convince the public to feel the same." As the Pyongyang bureau chief for the Associated Press, Jean Lee saw first-hand how the Kim regime tried to increase popular support with the celebrations that followed missile tests. "When a major launch was announced, they would do it with so much fanfare and propaganda to create a real sense of pride," recalled Lee, who is now a senior fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington DC. "It was designed so that North Koreans would look at these weapons and marvel at the fact that, even though they have so little in relation to the rest of the world, their country was clever enough to make these weapons. I do think that pride was genuine."

With North Korea due to mark several important anniversaries this year, Lee said it was likely that Kim would use those events to showcase more of the powerful weapons the country has developed under his rule. She pointed in particular to the 110th anniversary of his grandfather Kim Il Sung's birth on 15 April, which is known as the Day of the Sun and celebrated as the country's most important holiday. "Kim uses these milestone anniversaries to instil a sense of unity and to glorify his family and, by extension, himself, often with very provocative launches," she explained. "It is an opportunity to bring the people back together and to show that he's the right person to lead them, and I think he needs that now more than ever."

As Kim resumes his long-range missile launches, the most notable difference so far is the comparative lack of interest they have attracted. Whereas five years ago, the growing threat from North Korea dominated international headlines and provoked urgent discussions at the UN, this time his behaviour has been overshadowed by Russia's war in Ukraine and met with something closer to a shrug. "Washington is distracted, and the salience of North Korean nuclear developments is lower now than it was in 2017," said Ankit Panda. "The seriousness of the threat hasn't changed, but Washington seems somewhat resigned to tolerating these advances in North Korean capability." That, in turn, could lead to an even more dangerous situation, as Kim is emboldened to carry out ever more ambitious tests, and all the while his formidable arsenal grows. ●



"I'd like my steak blue and yellow"

BERNIE

PHILIP COLLINS

The Public Square

Laura Kuenssberg deserves praise for her seven years in a near-impossible job

As Laura Kuenssberg completed her seven-year stint as the BBC's political editor, she posted her last piece in the job on the BBC website. During her time, Britain has lurched through the Brexit referendum and negotiations, the capture of Labour by the left, three different Tory prime ministers of contrasting tempers, and a pandemic that shut down the country. So much has gone wrong it is tempting to conclude that she must have been a jinx – and there are plenty of critics who would agree.

The job of the BBC political editor has become all but undoable in the social media era. The BBC board found the candidates left on the shortlist uninspiring enough to want to reopen the process. It is reported that Chris Mason, who hosts *Any Questions?* on BBC Radio 4, has been asked to apply. He might well pause before he does so because Kuenssberg has had to endure extraordinary abuse – personal and political. She has been accused of being embedded within the Tory party, of being the personal tribune of Dominic Cummings, of being too light on lying Leavers, of being openly dismissive of the Corbyn leadership. Most common of all, she is often accused, sometimes by people who are otherwise rational, of being the channel through which Brexit was communicated. If only the BBC had turned up for the fight, they allege, the British people would not have been duped. It is now a minority opinion to venture that almost all of that is patronising rubbish, and that Kuenssberg did a near-impossible job pretty well.

It is worth trying to regain the sense of proportion that has lately been lost. Delving into John Cole's memoir *As It Seemed to Me* is a pleasant immersion in a world that has disappeared, but it is instructive all the same. A few nights before he took over from John Simpson as the BBC's political editor in 1981, Cole was a guest at a party thrown by Shirley Williams at her Hertfordshire home. As Cole left, Williams said to him with a sad smile: "You have just witnessed the wake of Labour's old establishment."

There are two interesting aspects to this. The first is that Cole writes, in frank terms, that he regarded the Labour split as a grave and historic error. He had trenchant views, as an old labour correspondent, which in 1981 were never raised in relation to his ability to do the job. The second is that *As It Seemed to Me* is full of anecdotes of Cole meeting Jim Callaghan at a party or having a drink with Tony Benn. Imagine if Kuenssberg wrote a memoir of the beer she shared with Dominic Cummings. The balloon would go up.

The times, in other words, have changed. As Kuenssberg herself said in her outgoing post, "technology has allowed toxicity to spread more easily into our debates". The next BBC political editor, whoever it is, would be well advised to turn off the Twitter machine, or at least to use it more sparingly. Social media is so much faster than proper journalism. It was, in fact, her Twitter game – not something that ever concerned John Cole – that raised the only real question mark about Kuenssberg's time as political editor.

> Whoever is the next BBC political editor would be well advised to turn off Twitter

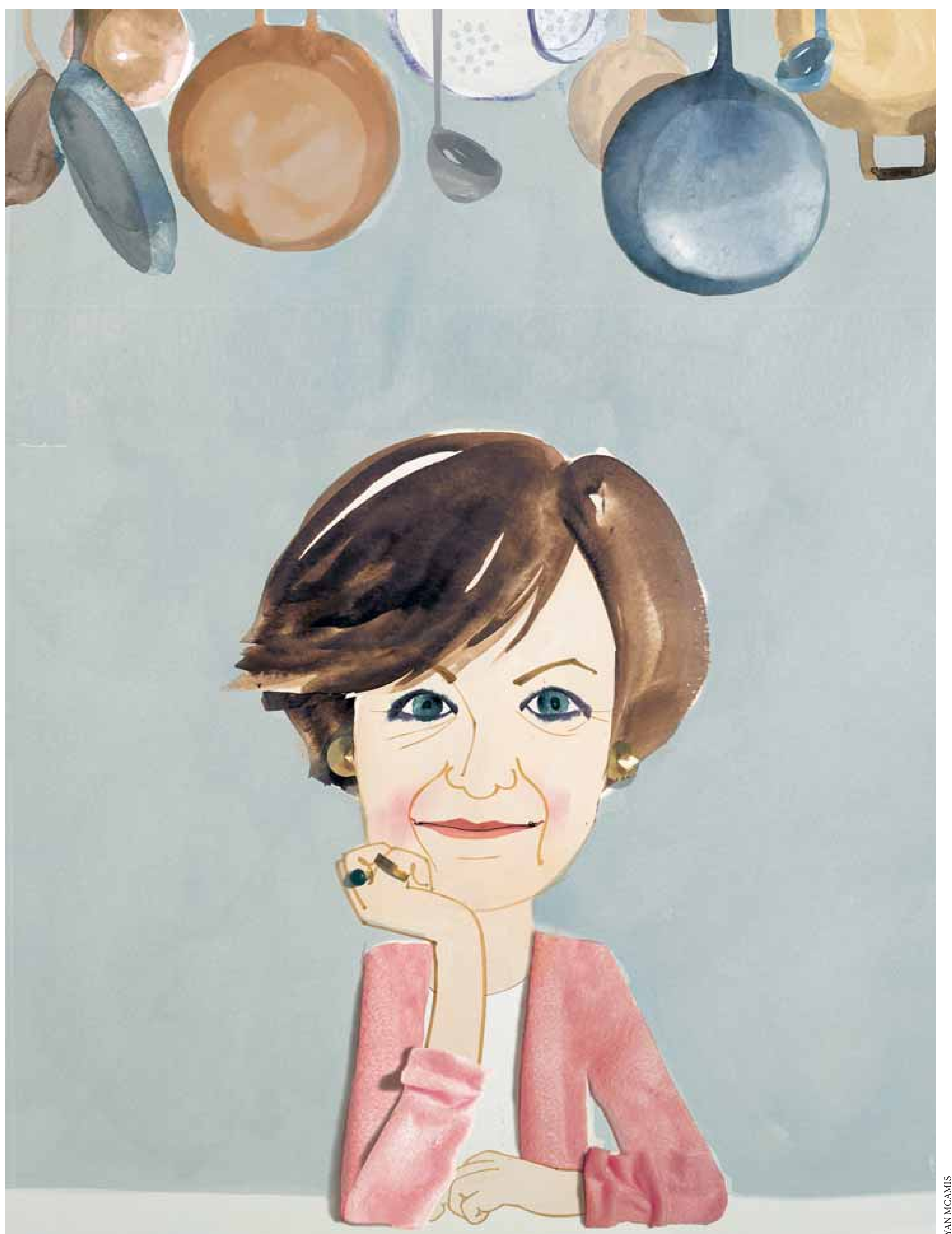
That question is: what should the job really amount to? John Cole and Robin Oakley were more chief political reporters than political editors. Andrew Marr approached the job as the editor he had been, and Nick Robinson continued the process of editorial interpretation. Despite the loud accusations that she was editorialising, Laura Kuenssberg's problem was that she tried to return the job to its roots in reporting.

And that is the only thing that might calmly be said against her. If a reporter receives a text from the chief consigliere to the prime minister it is, in one obvious sense, "news". Or if the prime minister himself gets in touch, it is surely news to report what he says. Yet both those characters might be pulling a fast one. Once upon a time, John Cole would have had all day to assess whether a juicy thought whispered in his ear by Bernard Ingham was really worth the candle. These days, it is straight to social media to announce, "sources close to the Prime Minister say that the moon is made of green cheese".

There must, therefore, be an editorial aspect to the job: some degree of filtering and assessment of what to include and what to discard. This will only be possible if the audience is prepared to allow that the political editor is capable of being, or at least is trying to be, non-partisan. Nobody ever questioned whether Jack Hardiman Scott, the BBC's first political editor, thought Harold Macmillan was a good egg, or what David Holmes made of the election of Mrs Thatcher. I always knew which horse Robin Oakley fancied in the 3.45 at Newmarket but his politics were not on show. Marr and Robinson came to the job with political histories but laid them aside for the duration.

The contested truth is that Laura Kuenssberg did the same. And the legacy of the job as she leaves it is not that she won a referendum for Nigel Farage. It's that, as media power scatters, BBC political editor is both a less desirable job and a less powerful job than once it was. I wouldn't say that in the Brexit saga the BBC didn't matter at all, but it didn't matter much. Laura Kuenssberg had no magical power to make Brexit happen, even if she had wanted to. She was just a decent journalist doing an impossible job well, in an era in which its power was slowly dissolving. ●

MARTA SIGNORI



RYAN MCAMIS

The Kate Mossman Interview

The world according to Delia

The no-nonsense guru of home-cooking has published her first book of philosophy. What took Delia Smith so long?

Five years ago, at the age of 75, Delia Smith downloaded the Apple Typist app and learned to type for the first time. She can't use all ten fingers, "but what a joy! I could just get on my knees and bow down to it," she says. Working on a computer after a lifetime of handwriting, Smith no longer has to worry about spelling, as she keeps the dictionary function on all the time. Since she was in her twenties, writing duck-and-cherry recipes for the *Daily Mirror*, her husband, Michael Wynn Jones, has checked her spelling and punctuation: he was once her editor on that paper, and now softly brings homemade ginger cookies into the conservatory of their cottage in Suffolk. The sun beats in through the window, into a homely but clutter-free space familiar from Smith's old TV demonstrations. She tells me she has "a dyslexic thing", but hates being edited. In 2016 she wrote an article for the *Daily Mail* in support of the Remain campaign ("I may be mocked for my views but, again, bring it on!") and they wanted to make some changes – so she took it back and gave it to the *Guardian* instead.

The book for which she learned to type is *You Matter*, her new manifesto for modern spirituality – chances are you might have heard of it by now. "The emphasis with the cookery was never on me," she says of her life's work in the kitchen, which is to instruct. "It was, I want you to be able to cook. And now, I want you to know you've got a spiritual life that you might not know you had. Does that make sense?"

You nod fiercely. Nigella Lawson once said that Smith was the home economics teacher whom the nation wanted to please, and it's true: she activates a powerful pupil-teacher transference somewhere deep inside. Perhaps this explains why her off-piste book, a series of short meditations on love, introspection and human potential, has been taken so seriously by interviewers, pored over as closely as her instructions for the full Christmas roast. No one has made fun (there was an event with Alastair Campbell). There have been few snarky reviews, though you can tell by the way Smith watches you ask your questions that she is half-expecting it. After publication she suffered *l'esprit de l'escalier*, she tells me, wishing she'd written a note of encouragement to readers on the back: "Remember my recipes always work."

You Matter was rejected by six publishers – a fact that has been advertised with some pride. "They all wanted more of me in it," Smith explains. It was eventually taken on by the veteran publisher Richard Charkin, formerly of Bloomsbury and other houses, who set up Mensch publishing at the age of 69 with "no mission statement and no stated editorial strategy". Charkin tells me that other people missed a trick because they ▸

◂ were focusing on the book and not the name: "If I was at Penguin Random House, who've sold 20 million copies of Delia's books, I'd feel very bad about saying no. The thing that makes a difference between failure and success with celebrities is whether you're liked. Many celebrities are frankly not liked, and their books don't sell."

Charkin came to see Smith at the cottage before he signed her up. She told him she didn't like being edited: he told her he didn't pay advances, she would get only royalties – but he has reprinted twice already, and there are just 200 or so copies left in his warehouse. Her editor had a tough time; she even wanted to change one word just before the book was sent to the printers. "She is unbelievably stubborn, and sometimes wrong," says Charkin. "But the book was hers. I felt it was the right time for it. The world is a complete mess, we're all a bit depressed, and frankly religion isn't helping. *You Matter* is perfectly Delia, a straightforward simplification of very complicated things. No one trusts our Prime Minister, but people trust Delia. They know she won't let them down." In *You Matter*, Smith writes that her entire thesis can be summed up in the lyrics of "Within You Without You" by George Harrison. She didn't realise, until the book was ready to submit, that she couldn't legally reproduce Beatles lyrics. So – stubbornly perhaps – she paraphrased each verse, one by one, instead.

Wynn Jones, who is three months younger than his wife, made the biscuits using one of her recipes. Smith likes to say that he does all the cooking these days; it is one of the ways in which she helps to shift the focus away from food. The kitchen door remains closed.

The pink thatched cottage near Stowmarket, which the couple bought in 1971, lies rather far from the high road, so Smith is stuck with any visiting journalists should they miss the hourly train back to London (I do). They have added to the house, extension by extension, so that it has grown like a living thing over the years.

Her focus these days is a luxury shed she bought at the Chelsea Flower Show, positioned near the lake in her landscaped garden: here, she wrote her book from nine to five during the pandemic, with just an apple for lunch. "I don't ever want to have weight problems. It's something I can't cope with," she explains. "I've got to be disciplined, because if you're in a life of food and you're not disciplined, you're enormous."

On the shed shelves there are reference books: the writing of Hannah Arendt and Socrates, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a controversial Darwinian Jesuit who linked evolution to the salvation of man, and who inspired much of *You Matter*. In 1997 a charity called the Bible Reading Fellowship approached Smith and asked her whether she would comment on a scripture for every day of Lent. She agreed as long as she could choose her own – "the one thing about me is I know scripture really well" – and some religious books followed. Just as her recipe books turned non-cooks into cooks, they attempted to turn non-believers towards God, with rather refreshing concepts such as "God as mother", and prayer as "tenderness towards oneself".

Smith always had "a thirst to know about spiritual things", she tells me. First came the congregationalist Brownies as a girl growing up in Bexleyheath, south London; then Methodist Sunday School, and Church of England youth groups. And "then, when I was 22, someone took me to a Catholic mass and I thought, 'That's authentic.'" That someone was a boyfriend, a charismatic young man raised in Switzerland and the US, with whom she spent the early 1960s in London. He was also her introduction to food, via the swinging restaurant scene. He spoke regularly of a cordon bleu ex-girlfriend whose cooking she became determined to trump. The boyfriend left her to train for the priesthood in Holland, but by then she was a convert. You could say that love introduced her to both food and religion: for years she drove an hour to mass each morning. Does she still pray?

"Well, I don't know," she says. "I think there is God in the deepest part of ourselves, but I've had a lot of trouble with prayer and now I wouldn't use the term. I just say be still, be silent. I don't think you have to say 'God'. You can say universe, you know?" As with her recipes, she wants to appeal to the broadest audience – but you wonder where she put that little crucifix she used to wear on TV.

Apart from her food and her love of football (she is a majority shareholder in Norwich City), there is one other thing most people know about Delia Smith: that she is a lifelong Labour supporter. But she turned down a peerage from Tony Blair in 1997, saying that she wouldn't have time to do a good job in the Lords, with all her TV shows. Today she says, "Party politics is finished. It's dated. Politics isn't finished, but party politics is." She describes a turning point: watching a rally for the Remain campaign with politicians from five parties on the stage, all united in one eventually hopeless cause.

"We don't worry about something different each day of the week"

GRIZELDA.NET

Perhaps it is not surprising that someone might turn their back on both organised religion and Westminster in their 80th year: it suggests a certain impatience, or weariness, with the rituals and machinery surrounding the bigger questions in life. In *You Matter* she doesn't argue for a creator, but does she believe in one?

"I do, but what I'm saying is that it's deeper than religion. No religion at the moment is reaching out. They're not reaching people! We all have a deep spirituality that unifies us but religion is top-down, like governments and party politics. We're past getting any great gurus or leaders, living in a world of chaos and turmoil. Change has to happen from the bottom up. I have faith in human life, I really do. What we've achieved is amazing. What I'm asking is, why can't we just sit down and understand what we have? We've got to grow up!"

At moments like these, Smith seems genuinely concerned that she's not getting her thoughts across. Her speech is punctuated with "Does that make sense?" and "I'm not sure how to explain it"; she is the nation's home economics teacher, covering a class in philosophy and finding a new language for her children.

On her 1970s TV show, *Delia Smith's Cookery Course*, Smith demonstrated the recipe for a dish called Alpine eggs, originally created by Mrs Beeton. A vast amount of grated cheese is laid in a baking tray – "like a wall-to-wall carpet" – with six eggs cracked on top, followed by another deep layer of grated cheese. It is less the calorie count – 3,000? – that marks this as a moment from another age than the show's production values: no incidental music, just the buzz of the mic as Smith walks across the floor – clop, clop, clop – to an oven, to take out the dish she prepared earlier. She does not slice her creation open for the camera. And, unlike Lawson, she has always baulked at tasting anything on screen. "What I did was as live, but today they have a very clever way of filming people, their faces, and then filming their hands, so they can do it all separately and cover mistakes," she says.

Canaries fly: Delia Smith and husband Michael Wynn-Jones celebrate after Norwich City win the Sky Bet Championship at Villa Park, Birmingham, 2019

PA IMAGES

She believes that today's food programmes exclude, rather than invite, people to learn. "If you watch *MasterChef*, all it's telling you is, you won't ever be able to do this. And I can't do *Bake Off*. I'm not very keen on people judging people, you know? I'm trying to get people to feel confident, and I think these programmes make people feel, you know…" Bad about themselves? She wrinkles her nose.

If modern cookery shows are consumed less for instruction, more as visual satisfaction and vicarious pleasure, Smith's first book contained premonitions of the elite culinary age to come. In the opening line of 1971's *How to Cheat at Cooking*, she writes: "If you're one of those dedicated cooks who's a keen early-morning mushroom gatherer and wouldn't dream of concocting a salad without using the 'just-picked' variety then this book is not for you."

She maintains an aversion to the pretentious. "I mean, food is a subject that lends itself to snobbery," she tells me. "Food, wine and art lend themselves to being exclusive." It is hard to believe, but there was a public chef-spat around the turn of the millennium, when Smith's approach was beginning to look old-fashioned, and Antony Worrall Thompson and the late Gary Rhodes were still on air. Rhodes mocked her for teaching people "how to boil water" (a reference to her instructions on waiting for the rolling boil, when getting an egg just right). Egon Ronay described her methods as the "missionary position" of cooking, while Worrall Thompson said she was "the Volvo of cooks". Smith responded by saying Worrall Thompson was "just repulsive", and revealed that after filming, she and her crew liked to sit down and laugh at his show. Apart from Lawson, she was the only female chef on TV at the time.

"But Nigella and I are not chefs," she corrects me, teacher-like. "So that's it, really – TV went into the chef era. When I came out of it, it was starting to be cheffy."

What does that mean?

"Well, kind of a bit precious."

You were a cook?

"Yes. Definitely a cook, never, never a chef."

I asked Jamie Oliver, who is arguably both, about this distinction. Does it matter? "Chefs sometimes fail to connect with their audience because they can fall into the trap of thinking like chefs and not like cooks or parents," he told me. "I've learned this from Delia – that the key is to create incredible food that I know my own family would want to eat. There's something very comforting and maternal about Delia's food – she always manages to create a feeling of home, and that resonates with the public. She is the queen of cooking in my eyes and I won't have anyone say anything different." Then he added, "Viva Delia!"

Did the mockery from Worrall Thompson, Ronay and others hurt Smith?

"I nearly lost it all," she says, "because a controller at the BBC at the time said, 'Oh, no, she's not sexy enough.' Lovely, it was. Very hurtful. I do think to be criticised the way I was – and I was severely criticised by the glitterati of cooking – was very hurtful, but I didn't want to change. That's what I wanted to do. And you see, people really couldn't understand, 'Why are all her books selling, when they're so boring? Why?'"

In her early twenties, Smith worked at a French restaurant at 41 Connaught Street, near Hyde Park, called The Singing Chef. It was a rather happening place: some of the waitresses were models. She would bend down to open a wine bottle between her ankles, wearing a mini-skirt.

Smith began to wonder why most of the food celebrated in the UK was French. A knowledgeable customer told her that England had gradually lost its connection to the land through the Enclosure Acts. "But in the 18th century, he said, we were eating better than any other country in Europe, and if you want to find evidence of that, just look at the cartoons." Smith had no O-levels, and had failed the 11-plus, but conceived of an (unpublished) book about these 18th-century recipes, and researched them in her spare time in the British Museum Reading Room.

Fifty years on, her shows and books have become living channels of social history. In 1980 she was joined on *Delia Smith's Cookery Course* by Kate Bush. "Quite honestly, I don't think our future is going to contain as much meat as we've been used to," Bush told her. She had lived off chocolate and tea for a week after giving up meat, not sure how to proceed. *How to Cheat* (1971) acknowledged the social anxieties of the 1970s dinner party: "Sell on sight" Smith wrote – "no vulgar 'boats' and 'nests' and 'baskets'". And of the labour-saving gadgets beloved of the 1960s, she wrote: "Steer clear of lady demonstrators in department stores. They make it look so easy, but you never see them washing up!"

Smith's tone – still there today – is an unusual mixture of prim and anarchic. *Frugal Food*, from 1976, was reissued at the start of the 2008 financial crash with the strap line "Now more relevant than ever". It had been written after that year's potato crisis, when blight and drought prompted people to grow their own. Tom and Barbara from *The Good Life* (1975-78) swim before the mind's eye, as Smith responds to the new self-sufficiency trends with gentle disdain – "1976 must surely be the year that Britain took to the spade" – before obligingly sharing a recipe for marrow.

Smith recently said that she and Wynn Jones are "too old for money". She plans to leave all hers not to Catholic charities, which she's financed in the past, but to the International Rescue Committee, the humanitarian aid organisation headed by David Miliband. Norwich City, meanwhile, remains the couple's single, unruly child, pulling them up in hope, and ▸

◂ dashing them back down to the bottom of the Premier League, with awful regularity.

Wynn Jones, a Norfolk boy, became involved with Norwich City in 1953. Since then, they have poured money into the club. In a 2019 interview, Smith said: "We've been through a lot of pain in our time at Norwich, being in debt. Going to a board meeting, all you talk about is how to service the debt. Never-ending debt..."

How does she deal with the emotional chaos?

"I've learned," she tells me. "I feel disappointed and I feel hurt, and sometimes I feel angry, if it's the referee's fault."

Will she ever sell to a wealthy foreign buyer? We are speaking before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, after which Roman Abramovich was forced to give up Chelsea. "Well, you can never say never. We get criticism, you know, when things aren't going well: 'They should give up now, let us have a nice rich whatever.' But I wouldn't be able to do it without being sanctioned by the supporters. Because I wouldn't like to go to bed at night and know I'd given it to the wrong ones, and there's a lot of very, very wrong ones in football."

As we drove to intercept the London train at Ipswich, Smith and Wynn Jones's driver told me that in their ninth decade, the pair are at Norwich's Carrow Road stadium three or four times a week – for board meetings, food and wine workshops at the Yellows restaurant, which Smith oversees – and, of course, for games: they travel 200 miles to away matches and return the same day. When they lose, the journeys back are painfully silent, he says. The pandemic dealt a blow to that routine and Smith recalls, in *You Matter*, watching the first smattering of fans allowed back into the stadium and feeling a swelling of love – the kind of love that goes beyond an individual.

"Community is where people are at their best, and football is community," Smith says. "If you're a football supporter, there's no chance you could be alone or lonely. Imagine if you could catch a little bit of the fire you feel at a match, and think about humanity."

She suggests a minimum of half an hour in stillness and silence each day. Could she ever have joined a nunnery?

"No. My teeming mind would be brrrrrr all the time," she says, making a whirring sound with her lips. "But if you sit down, and be still and silent, then you begin to see a different life. When we know ourselves, then we see other people differently."

When does she think she first knew herself?

"I'm still learning!"

Delia Smith has two anxiety dreams these days. One is that she is on live TV, cooking, and doesn't have the right ingredients. The other is that she has left her mother, Etty, somewhere in an airport and is unable to find her. Etty, who lived just up the road, passed away at the age of 100 in November 2020. A tiny and charismatic woman who came to Norwich games and publicly backed Labour in 2015 along with her daughter, she passed on all her culinary skills to Delia. This, Smith points out, is something else that belongs to another age: "The art of cooking was handed down from mother to daughter – we would argue with that now – but it was, it was!" she says, knowing you're not supposed to say things like that. And as Michael clears away the coffee cups, there's another gentle history lesson. After the Second World War, Britain had to learn to eat again. "It was chips and margarine, and *Woman's Weekly* magazine, doing things with baked beans..." ●

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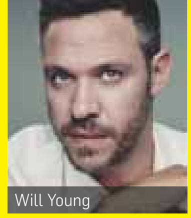

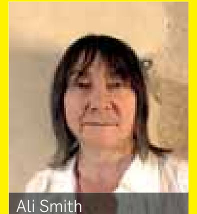
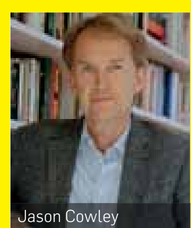
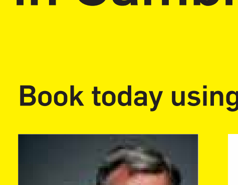
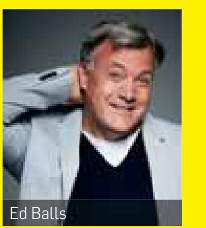

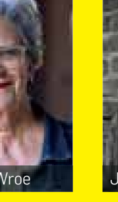
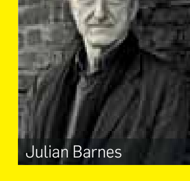

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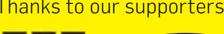

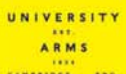

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HELEN THOMPSON

These Times

Could Vladimir Putin's great gamble turn Russia into a Chinese vassal state?

The story of a rising China has been a pervasive one in geopolitical analysis over the past decade. It has also driven strategic thinking in cabinets and chancelleries across the world. Reflecting on China's infrastructure investment, Joe Biden declaimed in February 2021, "If we don't get moving, they are going to eat our lunch." Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China also appears to have strengthened its position relative to Russia. For some, Vladimir Putin's hubris will now accelerate Beijing's ascendancy over Moscow to the point where Russia will become in effect a Chinese resource colony.

China's rise from its relative insignificance five decades ago is indisputable. Its economic size alone also makes it relatively resilient to Washington's efforts to contain its advance. Although Donald Trump declared a trade and technological war that Biden has continued, China remains far too attractive a market for large Western companies to forsake. Over the past few years of supposed decoupling, Wall Street has deepened its presence in the Middle Kingdom: in 2021, Goldman Sachs and BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, unveiled joint ventures with Chinese banks giving them unprecedented access to the Chinese savings market. China also dominates the supply chains around those metals that are essential for the green energy transition.

The war in Ukraine is a watershed moment. In inciting horror in European capitals by its artillery and air assault on Ukrainian cities, Moscow has inflicted an energy shock on itself as well as the world. With European governments now committed to eliminating energy dependency on Russia, Gazprom and Rosneft – the country's leading gas and oil companies, respectively – must increase Asian, and especially Chinese, sales. Since it is difficult to send gas from the west Siberian fields to Asia, Russia will have to provide its supply from elsewhere, including the underdeveloped Arctic fields. The imperative invites serious logistical adversity. As one Russian energy executive admitted in 2017, since Russian "reserve quality is going down, year on year", advanced technology is essential for new production, and what is available internally is inadequate for the task. With the Western oil majors, such as Shell, announcing that they will end their equity partnerships with Gazprom and BP abandoning its stake in Rosneft, Russia's state-led energy firms urgently need Chinese capital and technology.

But China's geopolitical strength should not be overestimated. Like Russia, China is a revisionist power courting high risks. Its actions have already incentivised a coalition of Pacific powers into an alliance against it. It is pursuing a project of territorial reunification that incites resistance from those subject to its ambition. For China, the "century of humiliation", which began with the arrival of British ships in the Pearl River in 1839, will not be over until Taiwan is once more part of China. But since there appears no plausible pathway to a peaceful union, this ambition commits China to a military confrontation with the US and, quite probably, Japan and Australia. It would also entail an amphibious invasion by an army with no battle experience and soldiers who would be asked to kill fellow people of Chinese extraction in the name of unity.

> Moscow has inflicted an energy shock on itself as well as the rest of the world

China also has acute vulnerabilities with respect to energy. Its advances in green energy can't change the fact that 84 per cent of its primary consumption comes from fossil fuels, leaving its economy and military with a foreign-dependency problem. China is the world's largest importer of oil. For nearly two decades, strategic Chinese thinking has been permeated by what former president Hu Jintao named the "Malacca dilemma": how to prevent the US navy from blockading tankers bringing China's oil imports from the Persian Gulf and Africa through the Malacca Strait – the narrow body of water that is the shortest passage between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Meanwhile, China's growing demand for gas cannot be satisfied by its domestic sources: China's gas imports grew by 20 per cent in 2021, with purchases from Russia increasing by 50 per cent. Even China's coal supply is not secure. Between September and November last year, a coal shortage led the State Grid Corporation to ration electricity to the industrial sector.

History suggests that dominant powers need their own energy-resource base. When in the 1970s the US became a large-scale oil importer, its monetary and financial power served as compensation by ensuring it could pay for foreign energy purchases in its own currency. China does not have this luxury, and its reliance on foreign oil as a proportion of its total consumption is more than 10 per cent higher than the US peak in 2005. Lacking American conveniences, China's options are more like Germany's. From the late 1950s until February this year, Germany prioritised a fossil-fuel relationship with resource-rich Russia in exchange for access to technology and finance. After the Cold War ended, German energy companies also sought production partnerships in Russian fields, to the point where Gazprom and Rosneft ended up owning large German gas storage facilities and refineries – an involvement that now constrains German decision-making.

The balance of power between Russia and China pits the forces of energy against those of technology. In this battle, China is unlikely to reap the rewards of its technological prowess until the age of fossil-fuel energy ends. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

The History Essay

Watergate in the age of Trump

Fifty years ago, a break-in at an office in Washington DC started a chain reaction that would expose Richard Nixon's criminal abuses of power. The flaws revealed by the scandal still haunt American politics today

By Colin Kidd

In the early hours of 17 June 1972, a chance discovery by Frank Wills – an African-American nightwatchman at the Watergate Office Building in Washington DC – began a sequence of events that brought down the presidency of Richard Nixon. In the course of his rounds, Wills noticed a door in the Watergate's basement garage whose locking mechanism had been stuck open with duct tape. Thinking little of it, Wills removed the tape. Checking the door later, he discovered it had been re-taped open – by burglars presumably – and called the police.

By a further quirk of fate, the nearest available police were casually dressed, undercover officers in an unmarked vehicle, whose arrival at the Watergate did not immediately alert the burglars' lookout man stationed in the Howard Johnson motor lodge across the street. The burglars – including a former CIA electronic eavesdropping expert, who now worked for Nixon's re-election campaign – were caught red-handed in the offices of the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

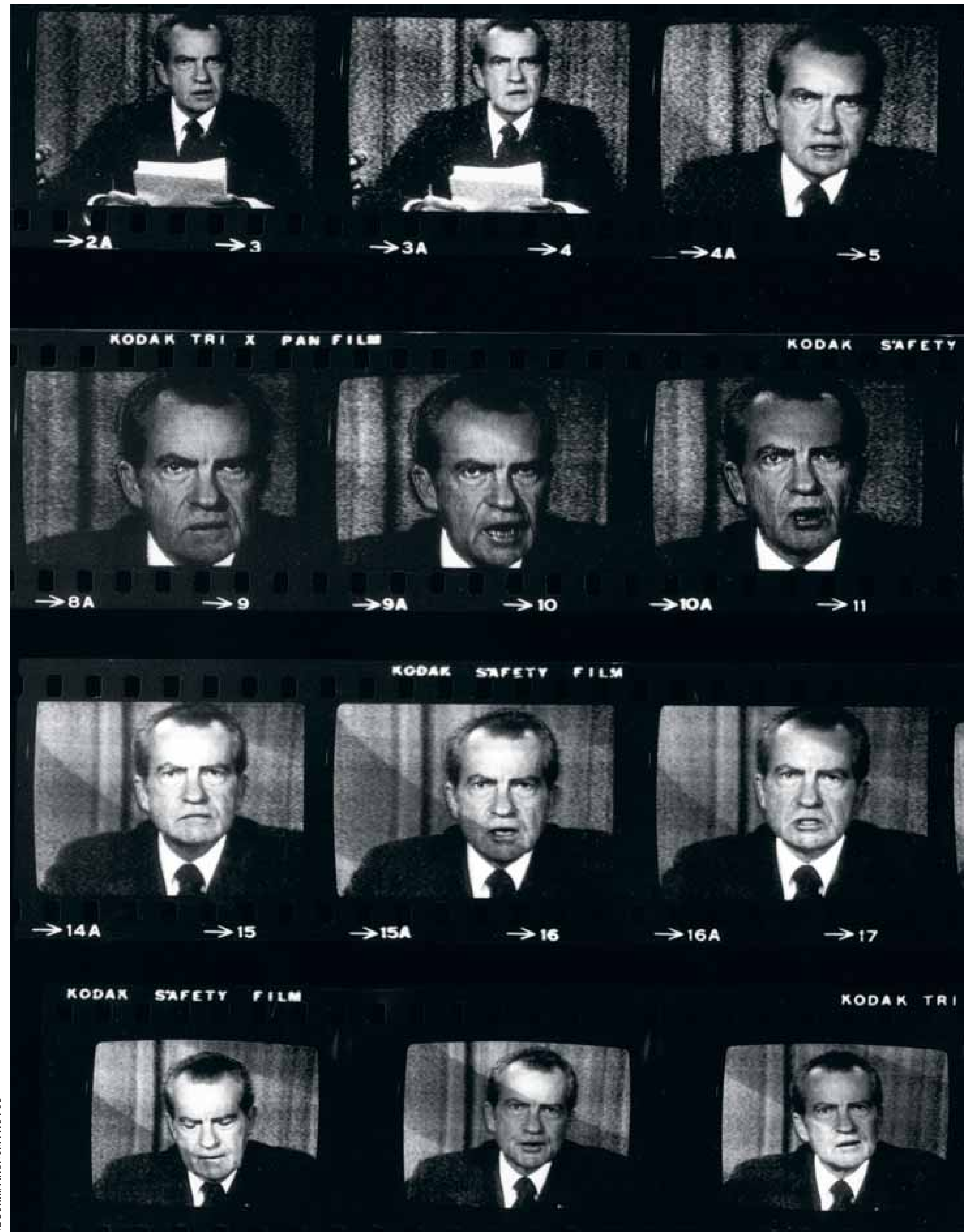
Although the ensuing investigation led immediately to the White House – where one of the organisers of the burglary, Howard Hunt, worked as a consultant – it was possible at first to confine the blame to overzealous underlings. However, investigation of the break-in threatened to shed unwelcome light on a whole range of other White House activities: the wiretapping of journalists, sabotage of Democratic primary campaigns and a burglary at the offices of a Californian psychiatrist. Watergate became in time a collective label that encompassed not only the break-in at the DNC but also a bundle of other crimes, dirty tricks and abuses of power.

Nevertheless, in the six months following the burglary Nixon and his aides orchestrated an effective cover-up: successful in that Nixon – largely unscathed by the scandal – won the 1972 election, trouncing his Democratic opponent George McGovern in 49 out of 50 states. In the early months of 1973, however, the deceit unravelled, and so did Nixon's administration. Still, Nixon might have held on to power had it not been for a further chance discovery by investigators in the summer of 1973, that the president had secretly recorded all the meetings in his various offices, largely as a source for his future memoirs.

Nixon's tapes, it was thought, might provide evidence of the innocence he so nauseatingly proclaimed. Alternatively, they would confirm the revelations of his former aide turned whistle-blower John Dean that the president was involved in the cover-up. The battle for the tapes fought between Nixon and the investigators produced a protracted constitutional crisis, which was resolved by an unambiguous Supreme Court ruling in 1974, disallowing Nixon's invocation of executive privilege. Among the tapes handed over was the "smoking gun" recording of 23 June 1972, in which Nixon can be heard conspiring with his chief of staff to get the CIA to warn the FBI off the latter's Watergate investigation, on the spurious grounds of national security.

With the threat of impeachment, Nixon was forced to resign in 1974 – the only president ever to do so. Several of his top aides went to jail; however they all enjoyed comfortable, sometimes lucrative, post-Watergate careers: authoring bestselling memoirs or thrillers, becoming pundits, businessmen or – in the case of two of them, Charles Colson and Jeb Magruder – slickly repentant born-again Christians. The only person who ended up in abject poverty was the folk-hero who uncovered the burglary in the first place, Frank Wills. He was celebrated in Ron Turner's song "The Ballad of Frank Wills", and played himself in a walk-on part in the film, *All the President's Men*, but Wills was unable to cash in on his celebrity. He died at the age of 52, his post-Watergate afterlife one of sad decline, exacerbated by the difficulties of combining low-paid work with the occasional and unsettling demands of media intrusion.

As the scandal played out, Watergate had seeped into every nook and cranny of political culture – elite and popular. Long before reality TV, this real-life soap opera supplied hours of addictive and enthralling television. More than 80 million Americans – out of a total population of 212 million –watched all or part of Dean's televised testimony to the Senate Watergate Committee. Watergate became the defining political scandal of modern times. The media has tended to bestow the suffix "-gate" on every subsequent political disaster large or small, from full-blown criminality ▸



RENE BURRI/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Rogue gallery: a contact sheet showing the resignation declaration of Richard Nixon as televised from the White House on 8 August 1974

◂ to minor gaffe. In the past decade we have had Hillary Clinton's "servergate" and Donald Trump's "Russiagate".

Yet 50 years after the event, some aspects of Watergate seem strangely defamiliarised. For we now view the scandal through the lens of our own concerns, ranging from Black Lives Matter to anxieties about Donald Trump's quasi-dictatorial aspirations. In retrospect, Watergate – in terms of both Nixon's aides and the teams that investigated them – seems a strikingly all-white affair.

In Nixon's US the civil rights reforms of the previous generation remained a contested issue, one that he discreetly exploited for his own ends. Residential patterns meant that an informal segregation still prevailed in schools, and the court-mandated busing of children across cities was emerging as a major grievance – in the north as much as the south. What passed for liberalism in the 1970s fell egregiously short of today's benchmarks.

Indeed, one of the "liberal heroes" of Watergate, the down-home folksy chair of the Senate Watergate Committee, Sam Ervin, now occupies a more sinister place in popular memory; as an old-style southern Democrat, white supremacist and opponent of black civil rights. Similarly, the lingering threat a re-elected Trump or, more generally, Trumpite Republican populism still pose to constitutional norms means that parallels between Watergate and the present feel both urgent and cautionary.

Nevertheless, Watergate spawned a whole corpus of mythologies, some apparently innocent, others – it now transpires in an era of Trumpite populism and post-truth conspiracies – more pernicious. The most dangerous of these is an ongoing platitude about the robustness of American institutions in the face of a would-be tyrant. Didn't the events of 1972-74 show that the American constitution was resilient; that no president – however great his electoral majority – was above the law?

Until the emergence of Trump, this myth of complacent self-satisfaction prevented the US from drawing the right lessons from Watergate. Consider the role of sheer chance in exposing the scandal. If Wills hadn't spotted the duct-tape or rechecked the basement door, if uniformed rather than plain clothes policemen had responded to the call, if the investigators hadn't discovered the taping system at the White House, if Nixon hadn't kept his recordings, then he might well have prevailed. Equally, despite Trump's manifest abuses of accepted norms, he was only ousted at the ballot box.

Decades-old reverberations from Watergate contributed to the widespread distrust of government and the Washington "swamp" which enabled Trumpite rhetoric. The dominant Hollywood genre of the Seventies was the conspiracy thriller, responding not only to Watergate, but also to growing popular dissatisfaction with established accounts of the assassinations of JFK, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. During the 1972 Democratic Party presidential primaries, the populist-racist, George Wallace, was shot and subsequently confined to a wheelchair. Films such as *The Parallax View*, *The Conversation*, *Three Days of the Condor* and, of course, *All the President's Men* raised the alarm about eavesdropping and surveillance, and questioned whether the ordinary citizen could reliably trust any institutions. They certainly couldn't believe self-serving politicians, the CIA or the FBI.

Yet it wasn't only Hollywood fanning the flames. In the wake of Watergate – and the "smoking gun" tape – a visibly righteous Congress decided to let daylight into the work of the CIA and FBI. In 1975, Frank Church, the Democratic senator from Idaho, was appointed to chair the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities. Huge amounts of dirty linen got aired: evidence of human experiments involving drugs and mind control, domestic surveillance of political and civil rights groups, and CIA involvement in plans for the covert assassination of foreign leaders.

A sub-committee was set up to look at the role of the intelligence agencies in the assassination of JFK. In 1976 the House of Representatives established its Select Committee on Assassinations. No longer confined to the murkiest margins of politics, conspiracy theories proliferated. Today's obsessions about a deep state took their rise in the Seventies amid this climate of anxiety, though at the time such fears were just as pronounced on the liberal left as on the far right.

A further myth concerns the role of the press in bringing down Nixon. To be sure, investigatory work by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* kept the story alive during the election campaign of 1972, when Nixon's cover-up was at its most effective. But it was not so much the *Washington Post* as the district judge, John Sirica, the special prosecutors and the Senate Watergate Committee who did the most to uncover Nixon's wrongdoing. Nevertheless, the myth took hold. The press became pompously precious about its elevated status in a democracy, yet incongruously receptive to muckraking, leaks and tittle-tattle. Trump's obnoxious war on the "mainstream media" and allegations of "fake news" exploited some legitimate fears about journalistic aggrandisement.

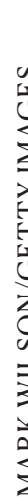
Until Trump's arrival, the US had fixated on the wrong aspects of Watergate, notably Nixon's obstruction of justice. Although it was the cover-up – and then his cover-up of the cover-up – which brought Nixon down, his real sins were meddling with the election process and his abuse of powers.

Ironically, Trump's baseless charges about Joe Biden's stolen election amplifies a serious and enduring concern about the integrity of US elections, which has occasionally resur-

Today's Trumpite Republicanism has inherited Nixon's snarl but none of his liberal aspirations

Sad: conspiracy theories about the Washington

“swamp” and the deep state pushed by Donald Trump had their roots in the Seventies


MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

faced since the Second World War. Incidents range from the disputed result in Florida during the 2000 presidential election, to the rigged Texas Democratic Senate primary of 1948, when the future president Lyndon Johnson's win by 87 votes earned him the derisive nickname “Landslide Lyndon”: a sly acknowledgement that alleged last-minute ballot-stuffing had snatched an unlikely victory.

The Watergate scandal, in fact, involved two stolen elections: the long-festering wound of Nixon's defeat in the presidential election of 1960, which lent specious justification to his determined interference in the Democratic primaries of 1972. In 1960 JFK – with Johnson on his ticket as vice-president – had won a controversial election against Nixon. Notwithstanding allegations of irregularities in Illinois, West Virginia and Texas, Nixon held back from openly contesting the election result. He did not want to appear a sore loser, although that is exactly what he was – as thin-skinned as Trump, albeit with oodles more guile.

Nixon's subsequent narrow victory in the 1968 presidential election depended on a three-way split in the vote, with Alabama's former Democratic governor George Wallace, a southern segregationist, taking votes away from the official Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey. In 1972 Nixon – now with all the advantages of incumbency, not least the opportunity to exploit the machinery of government – was taking no chances. His underlings meddled productively in the Democratic primaries of 1972. In particular a forged letter and other dirty tricks helped push his most feared opponent, Edmund Muskie, out of contention. McGovern, his easily defeated ultra-liberal opponent in the presidential election of 1972, was in some measure Nixon's own pick.

Watergate encompassed a whole series of corrupt activities, including the setting up of a White House investigations unit, known as “the plumbers”, to undertake surreptitious and unlawful activities, and the use of the Internal Revenue Service to harass opponents. However, the most publicly egregious, conveyed as it happened in special news bulletins on primetime television, was the Saturday Night Massacre of 20 October 1973. As Nixon ran out of options to deny the dogged special prosecutor Archibald Cox access to the White House tapes, he decided his best course of action was to fire him. Nixon couldn't directly dismiss the special prosecutor, who answered to the attorney general, Elliot Richardson. When ordered to fire Cox, Richardson resigned instead. Richardson's deputy William Ruckelshaus wouldn't fire Cox either, and resigned. Eventually, the next in line Robert Bork, the solicitor general, did the president's bidding in order to avoid further havoc at the Department of Justice.

The optics were appalling: television pictures of uniformed police sent to cordon off the special prosecutor's offices accompanied news of the forced departures at the Department of Justice. It looked like the closest thing to a *coup d'état* the US had ever experienced – although Nixon's was much closer to the stereotype of the authoritarian putsch than the ramshackle Trumpite insurrection of 6 January 2021. Nixon's move backfired. The public vented its disgust in a flood of telegrams to the White House, and Nixon felt compelled to appoint a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

Fourteen years later when the Supreme Court judge Lewis Powell – a “swing justice” in the ideological centre – retired, Ronald Reagan nominated Bork to replace him. As a jurist, the ultra-conservative Bork challenged notions of an evolving “living constitution” on which so many of the US's liberal innovations were premised, including the legalisation of abortion in *Roe vs Wade*. The Senate's resounding 58-42 rejection of Bork signified ideological revulsion, but also payback for his role in the Saturday Night Massacre.

The Bork nomination marked a turning point in the politicisation of Supreme Court appointments. Previously, the Senate confirmation process tended to be a sedate pavane. From Bork onwards there has been an ever-present danger that Senate hearings might become a battleground in the culture wars – as happened with unseemly bathos in 2018 when Brett Kavanaugh, responding to accusations of sexual assault, launched into a far-from-judicial televised tantrum.

After Watergate, legislators brought in measures designed to prevent a repeat of the Saturday Night Massacre. But the relevant portion of the Ethics in Government Act (1978) guaranteeing the tenure of the independent counsel was allowed to lapse after two seemingly vindictive prosecutions. The first was by Lawrence Walsh of Reagan's Iran-Contra misdeeds, and then by Ken Starr of the Clintons' involvement in the Whitewater land deal which, when it turned up nothing, bizarrely mutated into the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Under new regulations, a “special counsel” enjoyed less job security than the post-Watergate “independent counsel”. This seemingly minor technical provision came to ▸

◂ matter enormously in the Trump era. Robert Mueller, the special counsel examining Russia's involvement in the 2016 election, operated under persistent threat of dismissal. As Trump could not fire Mueller himself, a rerun of the Saturday Night Massacre looked likely. In 2018 Trump eventually sacked his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, who had recused himself from responsibility for the Mueller investigation, much to Trump's fury and incomprehension; but the deputy attorney general, Rod Rosenstein, managed to resist ongoing presidential pressure to fire the special counsel.

The Ethics in Government Act is one among a series of virtuous post-Watergate reforms that haven't worked out as expected. Every so often since politicians have plucked up the courage to take on the lobbyists, only to see their good intentions overwhelmed. By restricting direct donations to parties, the McCain-Feingold Campaign Reform Act of 2002 inadvertently strengthened billionaire donors, "teavangelical" Tea Party activists and single-issue groups. With party organisations weakened, conservatives were soon directing spending towards primaries with the aim of unseating insufficiently zealous Republican incumbents. According to the political scientist Samuel Popkin, we are living through the "unintended consequences of a misguided ritual of purification". The real long-term lesson of Watergate is a depressing one; that there's no effective way to expunge lobbyists and money from a corrupt system.

Worse still, does raw party tribalism mean that the future will bring the US more shameless Trumps, but no more disgraced Nixons? In 1974 Republican politicians were capable of telling the difference between right and wrong, and willing to admit it – albeit, in some cases, very late in the day.

The self-proclaimed conservative extremist Barry Goldwater served in the delegation of party elders that finally informed Nixon the game was up. But today's party polarisation suggests that a president can commit Watergate-style abuses of power without risking his partisan base. Trump's incitement of insurrection on 6 January 2021 seemed, when it was happening on live TV, to be a smoking gun. But his supporters were unmoved; and most Republican politicians – in public at least – have not abandoned him. Nevertheless, recent revelations of Trump's reported attempts to cover up his phone conversations on the day of the insurrection inevitably remind us of Watergate.

Yet so close are the parallels between Trump and Nixon – the vindictiveness, the casual indifference to norms, the authoritarian instincts – that Trumpworld is sometimes mistaken for a return to Nixonland: a United States in which it's as if Watergate never happened. Not quite.

A more-than-two-faced political operator, Nixon successfully courted both the hard right and the progressive centre of the Republican Party. As well as achieving rapprochement with the Soviet Union and an opening to China, Nixon's administration advanced some precocious domestic policy initiatives: the Environmental Protection Agency, and proposals for a national system of health insurance and a negative income tax (neither proposal came to fruition). Today's Trumpite Republicanism has inherited Nixon's snarl, but none of the liberal aspiration which warred with his darker prejudices and Machiavellian cunning.

Trumpworld is Nixonland through the looking glass. Nixon's cynical "southern strategy", an opportunistic wooing of southern Democrats alienated by the insistence of northern Democrats on civil rights for black Americans, ultimately succeeded, but not in the way Nixon intended. Nixon envisaged Republican capture of the Democrats' southern heartland, not a reverse takeover by reactionary southerners of a Republican Party whose roots lay in the more progressive north and west.

The constitutional drama surrounding Watergate was not entirely an all-white affair. On 25 July 1974 at the House Judiciary Committee hearings on impeachment, Barbara Jordan, a black Democrat from Texas, delivered one of the most moving speeches in American political history. The "We the People" invoked in the founding constitutional document of 1787, she wryly remarked, excluded black women like her: "I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton left me out by mistake." But ultimately, by way of constitutional amendment, legislation and decisions of the courts, she argued, the liberal promise implicit in American ideals had become reality.

In a stunning show of magnanimity, Jordan proclaimed: "My faith in the constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the constitution." Watergate – for so long a dispiriting saga of deceit and sordid intrigue – was partly redeemed by this moment of dignified affirmation.

Today the gulf between Democrats and Republicans is wider than during the Watergate crisis. Narrowing it will require empathy and generosity of the kind Jordan displayed in 1974, as well as her audacious alchemy: a fusion of unfeigned respect for traditional institutions with a sober – but unbounded – radicalism. ●

Colin Kidd is professor of history at the University of St Andrews

BETTMANN

Fourth estate: the role of the investigative journalists Bob Woodward (left) and Carl Bernstein in bringing down Richard Nixon has often been overstated

RACHEL CUNLIFFE

Lines of Dissent

I might be in a minority, but I'm proud to be keeping my name after I get married

Around 90 per cent of heterosexual married women in the UK take their husband's last name. I know this because of a BBC article which recently began a Twitter storm, thanks to a viral tweet calling the practice "bonkers". Women who agreed that it's a bit odd for this patriarchal tradition to have survived so long were treated to smug lectures about how being bound together by a surname makes a couple "a family", and that a woman's failing to change hers signifies a lack of commitment. The outraged defence was that in the year 2022 it is "unfeminist" for wives to assume their husbands' names, and anyone who does so must lack agency. It seems that however a woman chooses to identify herself after marriage, someone will stand up to tell her she's wrong.

I'll admit this topic is particularly pertinent to me: shortly after this article is published I will (hopefully) be married. I've spent many months fielding questions about how my name will change after the big day, with no small amount of surprise when the answer is "not at all". The whole debate – and the assumptions that go with it – fascinates me, especially since married women giving up their maiden names is very much a British and American custom. Different countries have other ideas: in Spain, women keep their names and children have the surnames of both parents; Korean women don't tend to take their husbands' names either, and in Quebec they are banned from doing so. In Japan, by contrast, married couples must have the same surname, despite multiple appeals to the Supreme Court to modernise the law (they can theoretically choose either, but it's wives who change theirs in the great majority of cases). Among the Amis people of Taiwan, meanwhile, daughters take their mothers' names and sons their fathers'. In Iceland, children's last names are derived from their fathers' first names – a system that presumably works better in a country with 366,000 people than it would in the UK.

As the daughter of happily married parents who have different surnames, I was always going to be in the keeping-my-name camp. Concerns about it being "confusing" for children are easier to dismiss if you know from experience that kids don't need a shared surname to understand who their parents are or that they are loved. I'm not worried about issues at airports – the extra admin of travelling with birth certificates pales in comparison to the hassle of switching the name on every bank account, credit card and service I've ever signed up to, not to mention coming up with a new signature. And having spent nearly a decade forging a career in media, I'm not about to relinquish the (albeit small) name recognition I've built up.

I like to think I've evolved from my knee-jerk puzzlement at women who see things differently. There are a hundred reasons why a newlywed might relish becoming "Mrs Husband's-Name" – ranging from the sombre (an uneasy relationship with the natal family), to the practical (not everyone shares my blasé attitude to foreign travel), to the joyful desire to enshrine the marriage in one's changed name. Whether they want to avoid arguments with in-laws or simply like the idea of starting marital life as a decisive unit, all choices are valid. Every friend I've known to have made the decision – stick, twist, or double-barrel – has had strong reasons for doing so, and there's nothing "unfeminist" about any of them.

> Women are not merely borrowing their maiden names until they find a husband

Still, to me my identity and my name are one and the same. So I am baffled by the insistence, on that Twitter thread and beyond, that since my existing surname came from my father, I should have no issue swapping it for that of my husband. But Cunliffe isn't just my father's name, although he uses it too – it's mine. It has been mine for 31 years, and the fact that it comes via a patronymic custom doesn't invalidate that. Men are not told that their name isn't really theirs since their father has it as well – yet with women, so often the perception is that we were merely borrowing our maiden names until marriage. That the traditions we were born into aren't really ours. My name, and the story that goes with it, is my heritage too.

I am, I should say, just as proud to share my mother's name: Brandler, an Ashkenazi lineage we can trace back to 18th-century east Poland. It's my middle name, and if I could pass that on to future generations too, I would. But I think my affinity for Cunliffe is particularly strong because there are now only three of us – my father, my sister and me – whose signatures bear the decision of a grandfather I never met to anglicise his identity, letting go of a name his family had carried over the decades from Ukraine, through Germany, then to Britain, where we've been ever since. It's frequently misspelt (including, amusingly, on the first draft of my marriage notice form) and derives from a part of Lancashire I doubt I'll ever visit, but there is so much history there. What message would I be sending to any future children I might have if I casually gave that up for the sake of convention?

According to some vocal Twitter traditionalists, my soon-to-be-husband should have spotted the "red flag" when I said I'd be keeping my name and rejected me there and then. Luckily, he thinks the real red flag would be my pretending to be someone I'm not to make him happy. So while I might be in a minority, even in 2022, I'll be staying Ms Cunliffe. Wish me luck at airports. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

Reporter at Large

How the trial of the Colston Four was won

The acquittal of four protesters in Bristol who brought down the statue of a slave trader sparked an angry response from the government – and raised new questions about justice, racism and history

By Tom Lamont

1. Advocates for the defence

On the eve of the trial of the Colston Four, a 46-year-old barrister called Liam Walker leaned over from his seat in the corner of a Bristol pub to talk to the people at the nearest table. "What do you reckon, then?" Walker asked. "If you were on the jury, would you acquit or convict?"

The trial was all that anybody could talk about. Four local people had been charged with criminal damage for helping to pull down and deface the statue of Edward Colston, a 17th-century civic benefactor known to have traded in African slaves. Until its toppling on 7 June 2020, during a Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest, the 9ft bronze had stood on a plinth in central Bristol for 125 years. Now it was a Sunday in December 2021. The trial at Bristol Crown Court was expected to last ten days.

Perhaps it would run a little longer. The case raised many difficult questions: legal, historical and moral. Where should we draw the line between legitimate protest and criminal disorder, between quick, effective action and piecemeal democratic reform? The trial would be a referendum on arguments that had been unresolved since the summer of 2020. Colston's statue came down during the hot, locked-down days after George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis. A movement for racial accountability was reinvigorated, with a sense that the creeping pace of change might now be hastened. While protests took place in cities around the world, news of a slaver's statue being toppled by a diverse crowd in Bristol spread far. At Floyd's funeral on 9 June, Reverend Al Sharpton made appreciative mention of it in the eulogy.

There were television debates, classroom discussions, questions asked in the Commons. In the US, the rapper Ice Cube tweeted his support; in Bristol, local artist Banksy raised funds for the accused. Soon after the battered statue was fished out of the harbour it had been rolled into, it was put on display in a city museum – the centrepiece of an exhibition that framed the protest as a rejection of racism as much as any rejection of law and order.

Even so, many people viewed the toppling as guerrilla work, not just illegal but selfish and dangerous, a glaring invitation to copycats. Last year, Boris Johnson's government proposed stricter legal protections for British monuments, including ten-year sentences for those who defaced them. It was expected that across-the-board convictions for the ▸

KLAWE RZECZY

◂ Colston Four would amount to a major statement about life under Johnson's leadership and that of his hard-line home secretary, Priti Patel.

In the pub, Liam Walker blew his hair from his eyes and sipped a pint of West Country ale. A gobby Londoner – he grew up talking his way out of fights in Croydon – Walker was one of four advocates for the defendants. He used his final hours before the trial to assess the mood among strangers, testing lines, gauging their effect.

To the layperson, acquittal looked unlikely. There was strong evidence, CCTV footage, disadvantageous material pulled from the defendants' phones. Though two of the Four had stayed mostly silent during police interrogation, the others had briskly confessed. As Walker left the pub for a rented Airbnb, he plotted continuously, trying to work out ways to counter all this. His fellow advocates were in hotel rooms and rentals of their own, polishing arguments and analogies, going over important points like anxious actors.

Tom Wainwright, a Yorkshire-born 41-year-old who wore three-piece suits in court, would be leading many of the defence cross-examinations. Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh, a softly spoken barrister from Northern Ireland, had recently arrived in the city after days spent juggling defence work in London. That evening, she spoke on the phone to Raj Chada, a fellow Northern Irelander with whom Ní Ghrálaigh had collaborated before, to catch up on strategy. Chada, a 49-year-old solicitor-advocate, was a veteran overseer of protest trials.

On Monday 13 December, the advocates got their first look at the men and women who would decide this case. Twelve randomly selected jurors filed in to the high-ceilinged courtroom; though evenly split by gender, only one was a person of colour. To their side sat the pink-cheeked, red-robed judge, Peter Blair QC. Below him, the barristers spread out at tables that were instantly a ruin of ring-binders, cables and laptops. The four defendants sat in a perspex-screened dock at the back, guarded by a uniformed officer who moved about with an ominous clinking of keys.

One of the barristers for the prosecution, William Hughes QC, a 57-year-old with a pleasant biscuit-advert voice that could turn usefully to sharpness, rose to his feet. Televisions were rolled into place around the room, and footage cued. While Hughes narrated, we watched the events of 7 June 2020 unfold.

It was just after 2.30pm when a large crowd gathered under the statue. The defendants were picked out in freeze-frame as they moved towards the plinth. We saw the youngest defendant, a 22-year-old labourer called Sage Willoughby, scale Colston's back with a series of rapid upward scuttles. He clung, monkey-like, to the statue's head. With care he turned a rope round and round Colston's throat, securing it tightly.

2. The defendants

"I remember the back of that statue was slippery, no footholds. It was all adrenalin. If you asked me to climb it now, I'd struggle," Willoughby said. We were walking towards his home after a day in court, his coat flapping open over a navy Moss Bros suit he'd been wearing in the hope of impressing the judge. Pale, conspicuously tall, with dark bushy hair pulled back into a bunch, Willoughby was frequently recognised, and he nodded at any "good lucks". He didn't respond to the glares, of which there were several, too.

An eccentric, agreeable young man who'd had a tough upbringing and never really took to school, Willoughby recalled the day of the toppling. "Tendrils of energy," he said, had seemed to draw the protesters towards the plinth. A banner had been laid on the pavement that read "COLSTON MUST FALL". There was a sense of permission in the air, and of timeliness. Despite numerous campaigns, Bristol City Council (which owned the statue) had failed to address local unease about the continued veneration of a man who had made his fortune from the Atlantic slave trade. The protesters had run out of patience.

After fastening a noose, Willoughby helped toss two ropes to a group that included his friends Rhian Graham, a 30-year-old events worker, and Milo Ponsford, a 26-year-old carpenter. Graham and Ponsford led tug-of-war teams in wrenching the statue free of its moorings and forward off the plinth. It struck the ground with a metallic boom, like a solitary blast from a cannon; a sound quickly drowned out by cheers. Ponsford was among the dozens who rushed forward to stamp and kick. The statue was sprayed with insults in blue and blood-red paint.

Willoughby stood off, stunned. He told me he was reminded of the fall of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad, which he'd seen in archive footage from 2003. That took chains. Tanks! In Bristol they'd done it with a couple of canoeing ropes. After Willoughby, Graham and Ponsford had fled the scene, the statue was rolled to the harbour by a large group that included the fourth defendant, 37-year-old labourer Jake Skuse.

Ponsford was the first to hear from the police, most likely because of his over-revelatory Instagram posts. Before his phone was taken for analysis, he warned Willoughby by text. Willoughby wrote back: "Ah, shit." By the end of the summer they'd both been interviewed under caution, as had Graham and Skuse. While others were let off with warnings, the emerging Colston Four (Skuse had never met the others before) were charged

GILLES BASSIGNAC/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Going down: a statue of Saddam Hussein is toppled in Baghdad, April 2003

with criminal damage. Such was the backlog in the English courts that most people facing similar charges could expect to wait two or three years to appear before a judge. If a clue was needed as to the importance of this case to a Johnson government and a Patel-led Home Office, it came via scheduling: only 18 months passed before the Colston Four were in Judge Blair's courtroom, offering explanations, one after another.

Ponsford was the first to take the stand, and a gift for the prosecution barristers. They tortured him with unflattering evidence taken from his phone, including jaunty messenger-app confessions and a deleted note-to-self entitled "Why did I do it". Over and over, they put it to Ponsford that the toppling of Colston was a gratuitous and violent act. In the context of an otherwise peaceful BLM march, the prosecution suggested it was also tone deaf, an act of appropriation.

Willoughby was anxious about his own cross-examination, he told me, as we walked away from the court. He had a tendency to "overthink and spiral" when under pressure. Was it right that four white defendants should have become the faces of an action that campaigners of colour had worked towards for years? Others had voiced similar concerns, including the GB News presenter Mercy Muroki, who came close to a contempt of court charge after writing an article headlined: "I'm in favour of white people calling out racism – but the Colston saga reeks of white guilt."

Race informed and framed the trial in conflicting ways. Julius Abraham, a film-maker who sat with me in the press box every day, was dismayed to note that for stretches of time he was the only black person in the room. A defence witness, Cleo Lake, went off-script to observe how offensive it was that portraits of bygone Bristol mayors (men also known to be slavers) should hang in the courthouse foyer. Meanwhile, Bristol's current mayor, Marvin Rees – a man of colour – was one of the decision-makers who had left the statue in situ for so long. Though Rees never testified, he was freely criticised in court for his indecision. At such moments, the jurors were presented with the discomforting scenario of four white citizens intervening to correct the racial insensitivities of a black leader.

I walked with Willoughby to his home in St Paul's, a historically black neighbourhood. He grew up next door to a landmark pub, the Star & Garter, and now he pointed out his childhood window, which overlooked the pub's courtyard. "Open till 4am every night," he remembered, "blasting dub reggae, sound systems out. Caribbean culture was such a big part of my childhood." He shrugged. "It's not like I can ever take that out of my brain. To not feel some sort of family and solidarity with

> **The QC asked if removing the statue was a violent act? "It was an act of love," he answered**

these people, to not stand up for them, with them – that would seem bizarre to me."

When his turn came to take the stand, Willoughby surprised everyone by going toe-to-toe with Hughes. Pressed to admit there had been arrogance, even nastiness, in the toppling, Willoughby gave no ground. Hughes, now friendly, now furious, had wrong-footed other witnesses. He put it to Willoughby that the BLM protest in June 2020 wasn't even about removing Colston; it was about black lives mattering. "I believe they stand for the same thing," Willoughby answered.

Riskily, it seemed, he volunteered that notion he'd had – about it being reminiscent of the toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad. Hughes's eyes lit up. So it was a violent act? Willoughby stood straighter. "It was an act of love," he answered.

3. The witnesses

"Act of love!" quoted Liam Walker with satisfaction, as he banged open the door of the two-urinal toilet. Like the stuffy corridor outside the courtroom, with its hissing radiators and benches, this had become one of the neutral spaces where mismatched players in the trial kept colliding. Arresting cop and arrestee. Cross-examiner and the examined. "Act of love," Walker repeated contentedly, as he unzipped. "That brought down the house, didn't it?"

Walker was advocating for Willoughby. Although the defence team was meant to be operating in harmony, each lawyer spoke for an individual client (Ní Ghrálaigh for Graham, Wainwright for Ponsford, Chada for Skuse) and from an early stage there were disagreements. Some of these were trifling – a squabble over desk space – while others were strategic. Almost always, the excitable Walker was pitched against the other three.

They were simply very different lawyers. Ní Ghrálaigh was known for her eloquence and exceptional grasp of the laws that safeguard the right to protest. Wainwright had a rat-a-tat interrogation style and a winning way with Judge Blair. Chada, a subtle manager, had helped bring these two to the team.

Walker, by his own admission, was nobody's idea of a handpicked selection. He had never worked on a protest case like this. Mostly he was a criminal barrister, a successful one who took what defence work came his way. This often meant advocating for those who rated low in terms of public sympathy. "Dodgy dentists," as Walker put it. "Celebrities in a scrape. Blokes who've been found with a million stolen fags in their van. Mrs Hitlers." Years of gruelling uphill battles at jury trials had convinced him of the value of emotion in a courtroom. He was a feels guy, someone markedly good at softening jurors. Walker had been brought on to the case by Willoughby, who contacted him through a friend of a friend of a friend.

Walker strode across a concourse and ducked into his consultation room. Really, it was a glorified broom cupboard, unfurnished save for a desk and two wheeled chairs. Still, it was a quiet spot where Walker and Willoughby could talk tactics. Today they were joined by the historian David Olusoga, who was about to be called as their witness. Olusoga sat with his legs crossed and his head tipped back. "Well, I'm ready to enter the crucible," he said, coolly, when Walker announced it was nearly time. "Can't be any worse than *Newsnight*, can it?"

Olusoga was key to Walker's strategy of bringing more emotion to the case. An expert on the slave trade, Olusoga could put the fall of Colston into its historical context. He was a Bristolian himself, of Nigerian heritage, eloquent and charming – and, not unimportantly to Walker, Olusoga was famous, a presenter of popular BBC history programmes. As he strode confidently into court, a noticeable thrill went around the room. One of the prosecution barristers murmured to the other that his wife was a fan and would be sorry to miss this.

Olusoga's evidence focused on the 17th-century slave trade and Colston's role therein. Yes, he was a benefactor to Bristol and a source of (targeted, not especially democratic) philanthropy. But his wealth came from a cruel trade, the details of which were hard to hear repeated. There were kidnaps, brandings, murders. During an account of the frequency of rape, a reporter in the press box began to shake. Later, Olusoga laid out for the jurors an argument that the veneration of Colston was in fact quite inorganic, the consequence of canny Victorian spin. Decades after Colston's death in the early 1700s, Olusoga explained, a deliberate programme of reputation-laundering was begun by the city's maritime merchants, a group apparently nervous about the legitimacy of ▸

◂ their own wealth and eager to shore up public favour for generations to come.

In Olusoga's telling, erecting the Colston statue (it went up in 1895) had not been a democratic act in the first place. Records from the time strongly suggested it had been put up by a small and highly partisan group. Were the circumstances under which it fell so different? Some jurors took note, others sat poker-faced; none gave a sign as to whether they were persuaded or not.

4. The judge

Judge Blair was losing patience. The trial was running over, and soon Christmas would shut his court for days. The jurors, canvassed about returning between Christmas and New Year, were not eager. Neither, we supposed, was Judge Blair: in a moment of unguarded optimism, he had mentioned that his daughter was getting married over the winter break. Now, with time running short, one of the Colston Four hadn't shown up.

Skuse was unwell, Chada informed the court. Blair raised an eyebrow. Skuse, who once brought a Spider-Man mask to court, posing in it while doing boxer-ish shuffles for the press outside, had established himself as the unruliest defendant. When he failed to appear for a second day, the courtroom turned skittish. There were gloomy predictions that, should this trial continue into January, the jurors were far more likely to catch the Omicron variant of Covid-19. If that happened, there could well be a retrial.

Outside the courtroom, Willoughby, Graham and Ponsford huddled around a mobile phone. Together they called Skuse. Was it time to part ways and fight on in distinct groups: a Colston Three and a Colston One? The conversation was strained. "Can't you just drink a can of Coke and come in?" someone asked, not quite serious, not quite joking. When Skuse swore he would be there the next day, the group were in agreement: "It's all for one and one for all," Graham said.

In court, it was decided the barristers would make use of Skuse's absence by settling outstanding matters. By convention, at the end of a complicated trial, any number of "routes to verdict" might be put before jurors to assist their deliberations. All parties agreed that the Bristol jurors should be given a printed handout – part magazine questionnaire, part crib sheet – to help them fathom the criss-crossing laws that applied. Nobody could say how much the jurors would *use* these handouts, but even so the advocates fought over every sentence, as though a punctuation mark could mean the difference between conviction and acquittal.

After Walker's coup with Olusoga, this was Ní Ghrálaigh, Wainwright and Chada's afternoon to shine. They cited old cases, alternately pandering to and lecturing the judge, trying to get Blair to agree to as many routes to verdict as possible. Might it be put to the jury that Bristol council had abused its position by leaving the statue in place for so long? Judge Blair decided not. Might it be put to the jury that the statue had increased in value since its toppling? Again, no. Already Blair had agreed to let the jury answer for themselves whether the statue was in some sense indecent or abusive. If so, its removal by force could be said to be a crime to prevent a crime.

Eager to add one last legal plank, Ní Ghrálaigh argued for an hour for the consideration of a new piece of law, known as *DPP vs Ziegler* [2021] or "Ziegler", which expands on a citizen's inalienable right to protest. Might the jury be allowed to ask themselves if criminal conviction was even proportionate here? Eventually, overnight, the judge agreed.

Skuse took to the stand the following morning, and it was worth the wait. Pacing like a jungle cat, he began his evidence by saying: "I don't really pay too much attention to politics. Who-owns-what. Y'know, laws." He recalled kicking Colston "till my foot got sore". The prosecution barristers hardly knew where to start. What democratic options had Skuse pursued, before he kicked the statue till his foot was sore? "I did nothing before that day," he answered, "except piss-and-shit complaining about it, shamefully."

Towards the end of his evidence, Skuse was asked about the behaviour of police at the scene. "The police did nothing," he said. He was baffled by this, adding: "The police watched. How can I think it's a crime, if they're stood watching us?" There were snorts of laughter, but it was an important point. Bristol police had decided on a programme of tactical passivity that afternoon, standing back as Colston was rolled almost over their toes to the harbour.

> "This trial is fundamentally about the rule of law, not emotions," the jury was told

Listening to Skuse describe this, a whole new perspective emerged. The trial was only the most recent in a series of hand-offs. Bristol council had dithered over what to do with its divisive statue, passing the problem on to campaigners. In wrenching it down, campaigners had given the problem to the police. From there it was handed to the CPS, which passed it to Judge Blair. Here the hand-offs might have ended; steered along rigid legal lines, the trial would surely have resulted in quick convictions. Instead, to the judge's credit, he allowed more nuanced arguments. He made room for philosophical questions. How to solve a problem like this statue? The riddle was handed off one last time, to 12 ordinary people.

5. The prosecution

Time ran out. On 23 December, Judge Blair announced that the trial would resume in the new year. Liam Walker, a railway station bap and a bottle of Oasis in hand, boarded an evening flyer to the Welsh coast where his wife and children were waiting in a holiday let. The following morning he would be surfing ten-footers. Chada, Wainwright and Ní Ghrálaigh returned home to London. Judge Blair went off to be father of the bride.

The lead prosecution barrister, William Hughes, was supposed to be staying with relatives in Wales, but one of his teenage daughters caught Covid. Hughes, a widower and single parent, decided they should all hunker down at home instead. At least the enforced isolation would give him time to work on his tricky closing speech, which he would have to deliver almost as soon as the trial resumed. Both of Hughes's daughters had been impressed when their father first came home and told them he was working on this case. "Cool!" they said, figuring out only much later that dad was the prosecution. Their sympathies were firmly with the defendants.

Deep down, Hughes had some sympathy for the Colston Four himself. He was impressed in particular by Rhian Graham's steely eloquence. He did not think Colston was a figure much worthy of celebration. As he told me when the trial was over: "The man made money out of slavery. No one in a decent society could condone that." But none of this

Not forgotten: a memorial to George Floyd by the artist Kenny Altidor is unveiled in Brooklyn, New York, July 2020

affected his opinion on the verdicts, which had to be guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty – because on the other side of any acquittals lay anarchy and chaos. Hughes made a note of those two words as he sat down to work on his speech.

Before I left Bristol, I spent an afternoon with Cleo Lake, the defence witness who had highlighted the portraits of slave traders in the courthouse. She had lived in the city all her life, and agreed to show me the parts I hadn't yet visited, including Montpelier, where she was a pupil at what was then the Colston's Girls' School. As we walked around the school's perimeter, Lake spoke of her discomfort, as a young woman of colour, on learning more about her school's founder. As an adult she joined a campaign group called Countering Colston, which urged the school to distance itself. It had resisted, until the statue fell. Now Lake and I stood in front of a new sign: Montpelier High School.

The toppling "heightened everything," Lake explained. "It made institutions that were complacent suddenly wake up, *catch* up. But that's the experience of people of African or Caribbean heritage: we're always waiting for other people to catch up." In her evidence Lake had told a story about petitioning, successfully, to have a portrait of Colston removed from Bristol council headquarters, where she worked at the time. Something about Hughes's alert manner, when Lake talked about this, made me wonder if he had heard something useful to the prosecution case. In his cross-examination, Hughes teased out more. "You seem to have been quite patient, for the time it took? And nonetheless, with the proper democratic persuasion, you achieved it?"

In his study, Hughes fleshed out an argument he felt sure would persuade the jury. Colston was a terrible man, yes. But an elected council had been entrusted with the care of his monument and when pressured to remove it, it had responded, even if agonisingly slowly. By June 2020, there were discussions under way. The Colston Four had jumped democracy's queue, Hughes wrote.

On 4 January everyone returned to the familiar corridor at Bristol Crown Court. There were stiff greetings between Hughes and the defendants. Walker went around giving his trademark wink hello. An usher confirmed that every juror was present; there had been no Omicron dropouts after all. The trial would conclude quickly now.

Hughes began his closing statement. First he read a brief preamble, in almost perversely dull tones. Then he stopped and folded his arms, pouting a moment, before looking up to meet the jurors' gaze. "This trial?" he said. "It's not about emotions. Fundamentally, it is about the rule of law." He lowered his voice to the gravelly near-whisper he'd used to powerful effect before. Everybody leaned in to hear. "We say a conviction is wholly appropriate. Why?" He raised his voice: "Because you can't just go around destroying things you don't like. That way lies chaos. That way lies anarchy… The people of Bristol have a voice. That voice may not be perfect. But it is expressed through democratic representation. And that voice has been usurped."

Hughes sat down. The jury were dismissed and he watched them go, all the way to the door.

6. The jury

"You know that juror who wears the jumpers, down to the left," Liam Walker was saying. We were in the pub again. "She couldn't stop nodding." Like Hughes, Walker had given a stirring final speech. All the defence advocates had. "And you know the grey-haired juror in front? Another nodding dog." Walker sipped contentedly. He was in the same corner where he'd killed time on the eve of the trial. Tomorrow it would be over. "There's a magic hour when the jury go out to deliberate," Walker told me. "And if they come back with a verdict in that first hour? It's almost certainly a unanimous acquittal. But after that hour…" He trailed off.

Early the next morning the jurors were sent away, clutching their routes-to-verdict handouts, ready to turn all the trial's subtle questions into a blunt verdict of innocent or guilty. I took a walk around the court building with Julius Abraham. He had a newborn, and on trial days would race home during breaks to snatch an hour with his daughter. There wasn't time today; the verdicts might come in at any moment. As we circled the building, coming in and out of sight of the empty stone plinth in the centre of town, Abraham told me he wasn't much of a crier. But that plinth! Whenever he looked at it these days, it made him tearful. It was something to do with his daughter. She wouldn't have to wonder about that statue; what its looming presence meant about her importance, as a girl of colour, in the order of things.

Back in the courthouse, the magic hour had passed. Walker, checking his watch, looked paler. There wouldn't be a unanimous acquittal. People walked nervous laps, distracting themselves with the price of barristers' wigs, the fortunes of Crystal Palace FC, how many cigarettes they'd smoked, how much they missed cigarettes on days like these.

The defence advocates were preparing to say goodbye to clients they'd become close to. "It's not a normal relationship: it doesn't run a normal course," Walker explained. "There's a verdict, and you might never see them again." When Willoughby handed ▸

◂ him a thank-you card ("Hope we're able to stay in touch") Walker was moved. He'd received thank-yous before: a lyrical inscription in a poetry book, from a man charged with rape; a thoughtful prison email, from a man jailed for assault. What a relief it had been, Walker said, to spend these past few months advocating for people who'd made the world a less depressing place.

A tannoy blurted for our attention. The defendants jumped to their feet and said: "Oh-god-oh-god-oh-god." In the courtroom, Judge Blair explained he'd received a note from the jury. After three hours, they could not reach a unanimous decision. Blair dispatched an usher to fetch them. "Thank you for the note," he told the jurors, as they took their seats. "If you can't reach a 12-0 verdict, then the court can accept a majority verdict of 11-1 or 10-2." The foreman began to answer and Blair interrupted, insisting that no, it was protocol for the jury to leave for another discussion before anything was announced.

But something had shifted; there was a new electricity in the room. The barristers closest to the jury, who had spent weeks trying to second-guess them, had finally heard something concrete. Walker spun around and gave Willoughby a wink. Ní Ghrálaigh turned to Graham and nodded rapidly. Judge Blair warned the public gallery not to make "a hullabaloo". But when the jury returned and the foreman announced four verdicts – "not guilty" – there were roars and stomps that were loud enough to be heard through thick sound-proofed glass.

Willoughby exhaled. He looked as though he hadn't taken a proper breath since December. Skuse put his head back and shouted, "Oi-oi!" Ponsford's knees buckled. Graham slumped, a hand on her forehead, swallowing sobs. The corridor was for 20 minutes the scene of a party. Weaving between embraces, the four defence advocates removed their wigs and starched collars. Chada said: "It's always so good to take *off* this godforsaken stuff." Hughes beat a path through the crowd. At least his daughters would be pleased. Somebody shouted after him, "Happy New Year!" and he bowed his head: sure, why not? He had a murder in Cardiff next.

Outside, photographers and journalists gathered. Three of the defendants paused in the lobby to pull on T-shirts designed for them by Banksy. Willoughby chose to remain in his Moss Bros suit, and stood to one side while Graham gave a speech. A journalist put it to the Colston Four that, whatever the verdict, this had surely been an attempt to erase British history. Willoughby interrupted. He didn't think erasure was correct. Later he would receive a text from David Olusoga: "You've made history." Again, Willoughby wasn't so sure. Theirs had been a small historical correction, he thought, amid a big historical mistake.

Long before the press conference was over, Willoughby wandered off with his mum. Banksy had put money behind the bar at the Star & Garter and, within an hour of the verdict, Willoughby was ordering a tequila. Make that a double. Within three hours of the verdict, his co-defendants, their supporters, the four defence lawyers, even a few key witnesses, were gathered there, too. Reggae blasted from the pub's speakers. Cleo Lake was among those who'd told reporters that the verdict marked "a major moment in a struggle that has been going on for generations". Mayor Marvin Rees was more circumspect, framing the trial as a distraction from his efforts to tackle racism in the city.

The government was not in a celebratory mood either. Ministers began voicing their concerns about the legitimacy of the verdict on Twitter and on breakfast television shortly after it had been delivered. In doing so, Robert Jenrick, Grant Shapps and others were questioning the legitimacy of our justice system – a more anarchic act, you'd think, than any number of toppled statues. But on such cheerful contradictions the modern Tories govern. Within 72 hours of the verdict, Johnson's attorney general, Suella Braverman, suggested she might seek to appeal against aspects of the trial due to the "confusing" jury decision.

Jurors' decisions are not meant to be confusing or unconfusing. These decisions are for themselves: sacrosanct. The jury decided to let the Colston Four walk free, and whether this was an emotional gut-call, an apology, in recognition of the otherworldly summer of George Floyd's murder, or born of closer legal considerations, they were not obliged or even allowed to say.

"I scooted lonely as a cloud..."

On the afternoon of the verdict, in the scrum outside the court building, I noticed a few jurors on the fringes of the crowd. One of them moved through the press of people and approached a defendant, Rhian Graham, to squeeze her arm. Later that same afternoon, the juror and the defendant crossed paths again, quite by accident, down by the empty Colston plinth. Graham was heading for the pub. They blinked at each other, and talked about their lives away from the courtroom. There were so many questions that could not be asked or answered.

But one thing was certain: whatever the government did next, and wherever the Colston Four would end up fitting into the bigger story of racial injustice, one aspect of this trial could not be undone. They were not criminals.

7. The aftermath

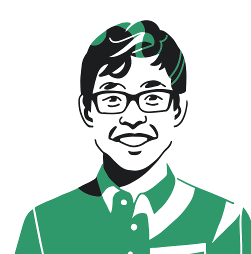
There was no especially neat ending for the Colston Four. A week or so after the acquittal, they were back in the Star & Garter pub, for an off-the-books reckoning with Mayor Rees and to try to mend some bridges. The meeting did not go well. Voices were raised. Sage Willoughby told me he felt that such behaviour was not appropriate, that the Colston Four ought to take their favourable verdict and fade away, making room for other voices in the city. He had heard that there were now certain pubs in Bristol he was not welcome to enter. When a Bristol road was informally renamed in honour of the Colston Four, local newspapers quoted residents who objected. It was one thing for vandals to be forgiven, they suggested; quite another for them to be rewarded.

There was no neat ending for their lawyers, either, who celebrated separately on the night of the verdict. When a legal symposium was arranged for the spring of 2022, a panel event at which the defenders of the Colston Four would discuss their strategy with the public, Liam Walker was not invited. He tried to be sanguine about the snub; after all he had just been promoted, made a QC. One of the first people he invited to celebrate was Willoughby.

As for the statue of Edward Colston, it remains in storage in the bowels of a Bristol museum, where touring groups can visit by appointment. Colston lies on his back, and the blood-red paint has not been cleaned away. ●

GEORGE LEIGH

JONATHAN LIEW



Left Field

Women's sport is growing fast – but so is the dominance of a few elite teams

There were fleeting and illusory moments when it felt like we might just have a contest. As England toiled and chipped away at their mammoth target of 357 in the women's cricket World Cup final on 3 April, Australia's fielders started to share nervous glances. For most of their innings England were ahead of where Australia had been at the same stage of theirs. Nat Sciver, England's brilliant all-rounder, was playing the knock of her life. Yet even during these brief passages, the idea of Australia losing still seemed so remote as to be essentially theoretical. Ultimately, we knew how this was going to end. So did the crowd at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch. So did the Australians. And so, fatally, did the English.

The final wicket of Anya Shrubsole sealed victory for Australia by 71 runs: their 12th World Cup triumph in all formats of the game, their 38th win in their last 39 matches and a fitting monument to probably the greatest team ever assembled in women's cricket. In terms of talent, athleticism, professionalism, preparation and squad depth, Australia have raised the standard to the point where few other teams can glimpse it, let alone approach it. In so doing they have revolutionised a sport that is rapidly escaping the shadow of the men's game and establishing its own identity and aesthetic, its own stars and idols, its own distinct and organic appeal.

All of which raises a number of interesting questions that pertain not simply to cricket but to women's sport as a whole. Will dominant teams like Australia's ever be seriously challenged? Is that a problem? How do you balance the requirement for exemplary excellence, for memes and heroes and fire emojis, with the need for meaningful competition? In short: what is the best way to grow a sport?

MARTA SIGNORI

Four days earlier, and 12,000 miles away, the same questions were presenting themselves. Over the past couple of years Barcelona Femení have taken a dramatic and seemingly unbreakable stranglehold on women's club football. Last season they demolished Chelsea, the lavishly funded English champions, 4-0 in the Champions League final. So far this season their record reads: played 38, won 38, scoring an average of five goals per game. In March they won the Spanish league title with six games to spare.

Far from turning viewers off, Barcelona's dominance has achieved the opposite. On 30 March, at the famous Camp Nou stadium where the men's team play their home games, Barcelona hosted their bitter rivals Real Madrid in the quarter-finals of the Champions League. Naturally, they won: 5-2 on the night, 8-3 on aggregate. And so, in the absence of any genuine sporting jeopardy, the biggest cheer of the evening came when the official attendance was announced: 91,553, a world-record crowd for a game of women's football. "This is just too crazy," winger Caroline Graham Hansen said afterwards. "It's something I never dreamed of happening."

> **The biggest cheer of the night came when the attendance figure was announced**

For now, Barcelona's supremacy still has a stirring novelty to it: a predominantly home-grown team playing scintillating attacking football. But their success offers a portent of the direction in which the women's game is heading: a shift of power towards the biggest clubs (in effect, the biggest men's clubs) and a spiralling financial arms race. Already, the traditional giants of women's football – early movers such as Lyon, Wolfsburg, Turbine Potsdam and Umeå – have either fallen by the wayside or are just about clinging to the elite. In a few years' time, it is highly likely that the main players in European men's football – Barcelona, Juventus, Bayern Munich, Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester City – will be largely mirrored on the women's side.

None of which is necessarily a bad thing. Virtually all women's sport is engaged in an eternal battle for attention, engagement and revenue. And as with Australia's cricketers, who drew their own record crowd of 86,174 at the Twenty20 World Cup final in Melbourne in 2020, most of the available evidence suggests that dynastic dominance sells tickets. The women's Six Nations is enjoying bumper audiences and growing media coverage despite its frequent mismatches. Women's tennis was never more popular than when Venus and Serena Williams were swatting aside all comers. The current landscape, in which there are perhaps three or four dozen women capable of winning a Grand Slam tournament, provides more exciting, unpredictable tennis. But it can be hard for casual viewers to grasp the narrative.

Perhaps what is happening is a kind of tonal divergence. In men's sport, the emergence of a near-invincible team like Barcelona or Australia would precipitate all sorts of angsty existential questions about fairness and competitive balance. Champion sides in men's sport are often loathed as much as admired. By contrast women's sport feels less tribal, with historical enmities somehow less relevant, and excellence broadly celebrated.

Perhaps one day audiences will tire of watching Australia crush every opponent in their path, or Barcelona winning every game 5-0, and start demanding fairer contests, proper rivalries, a more equitable financial model. But for now you suspect that none of this is of great interest to the teams themselves, whose sole concern is with winning more, winning better, winning more beautifully – not worrying about a future they are still trying to craft. ●

Jonathan Liew is a sports writer at the Guardian

Personal Story

My grandmother, the quiet radical

When I discovered my grandmother had written a witty pregnancy book under a pseudonym, it cast a new light on my own experiences of motherhood

By Sophie McBain

I can't remember how I learned my grandmother had published several books under a pseudonym. Audrey, my father's mother, never volunteered this information, but it was mentioned occasionally in her absence. I knew she had written a play, *Cast Off Five*, about shipwrecked bridge players, which was performed in London and elsewhere, and there were rumours – improbable but delicious – that she had written a romance novel.

A few months ago, I did what any self-respecting journalist (or indeed, granddaughter) would do and asked her about her writing. She laughed in surprise. "It might amuse you that I once wrote a humorous – actually, I hate that world – light-hearted guide to pregnancy that sold rather well," she said. I couldn't find sales figures for the slim hardback she gave me soon after, but Gran has never overstated anything.

A few weeks earlier, I had told her I was pregnant. The book, published in 1970 when Gran was 42, is titled *Nine, Ten... A Big Fat Hen: A Light Hearted Guide to Pregnancy*, with a cover that shows a smug-looking chicken knitting booties. She wrote it when she was pregnant with my youngest aunt, Sarah, frustrated by what she saw as insufferable 1960s Earth-mother stuff.

In person, Gran is modest and soft-spoken, with a sly, subtle wit. She is white-haired and tiny, with old-fashioned good manners and an immaculate dress sense. But on the page, Gran rebels. She writes that she is pleased pregnancy is no longer regarded as a condition so indelicate it can only be mentioned euphemistically, if at all, but that she fears the pendulum has swung too far the other way. "To be sure, it's nice to know you are still regarded as a human being, even though you are pregnant. On the other hand, it can be distinctly irritating to be looked upon as though you were in a state of continual blessedness," she writes. "For the majority, in fact, pregnancy remains basically the same: nine months' penal service terminated by a short period of hard labour."

I am expecting my third child, her ninth great-grandchild. To have three is unusual among my peers, and it was an emotional rather than a practical decision: three is an awkward number – soon we'll have too many small children to fit into a normal-sized car. "Beyond two, the merits of producing another baby take a sharp decline," Gran (who has four children) writes in the book. "You are obliged to introduce yourself to such ideas as: Big Families are Fun, the Nicest Children come from Big Families – and so on."

Gran jokes about pompous doctors, internal examinations, indigestion and unflattering maternity wear. She has a section titled "Ante-Natal Rebellion", which covers the sense of panic that grips many expectant mothers as they confront the reality of another seven or eight months of pregnancy that will be rewarded with a wailing newborn and buckets of soiled nappies. "Even in these days of pills and enlightenment, pregnancy, like chicken pox, is inclined to turn up at the most inconvenient moment," she observes.

When Gran started writing she hadn't come across anything similar – pregnancy was rarely something women wrote about, much less joked about. (Gran told me her publisher had tried to sell the book in French, but was informed that French women did not wish to poke fun at such things.) The bestselling childbirth and parenting guides of her era were by male obstetricians; the work of Sheila Kitzinger, Penelope Leach and others was not published until the 1970s.

But it was a time of great change. In *Mother Is a Verb: An Unconventional History*, the historian Sarah Knott identifies the 1970s as the decade when, thanks to the women's liberation movement, there was an explosion of women's writing about pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. In 1970 the feminists of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective published a pamphlet, *Women and Their Bodies*, and followed it up with the bestselling book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. An effort to educate women about their own health, it aimed to help them reclaim their sexuality and redress the patriarchal healthcare system.

These women also discuss what Gran calls "Ante-Natal Rebellion", although in more political terms. "Women grow up in a society that subtly leads us to believe that we will find our ultimate fulfilment in living out our reproductive function and at the same time discourages us from trying to express ourselves in the world of work," they write. They

Height of diplomacy: Audrey and Malcolm McBain in Bangkok, circa 1970, around the time Audrey's book was published

COURTESY OF SOPHIE MCBAIN

note that women expect that on becoming pregnant they will finally feel secure in their maternal role, but often instead struggle to come to terms with their new identity and feel guilty for their "unmotherly, unnatural" feelings. What's important, the pamphlet continues, is that women understand they are not alone in feeling this way.

When my first daughter was born and I was wracked with anxiety, loneliness and a terrible sense of guilt that I was finding motherhood hard, I craved the reassurance of other women: friends who had similar feelings, or who could at least laugh with me about the night-sweats and leaking milk and tiredness – as well as writers such as Rachel Cusk, Jacqueline Rose and Anne Enright. Much modern writing about motherhood grapples with a fundamental problem: the need to express maternal ambivalence safely, in a culture where no figure is more despised than the bad mother, and where no fantasy is harder to resist than the achievement of maternal perfection.

Gran wrote to provide a correction to the "bright-eyed and rosy" mothers she found in the "colour supplements". Today, confessional writing about motherhood confronts the huge, moneyed and expertly curated world of online "momfluencers" – the women with stylish homes and handsome children in coordinated outfits, who share parenting tips and recipes. In her podcast, *Under the Influence*, the journalist Jo Piazza observes that the influencer industry as a whole – which in 2021 was estimated to be worth $13.8bn worldwide – has produced more self-made female millionaires than any other, with the exception, perhaps, of Hollywood. On the one hand, it's impressive that these women have managed to make motherhood pay. On the other, it has turbo-charged mothers' insecurity.

If a scientist wanted to measure how white, middle-class motherhood has evolved over the past six decades, Gran and I could make a good case study. Our lives have overlapped in uncanny ways. In 1951, at the age of 24, Gran married my granddad, Malcolm, a British diplomat, and joined him on his first posting, in Tripoli, Libya. I didn't know this when, at 22, I moved to Tripoli for a UN internship, where I began dating a junior British diplomat. We married five years later.

When Gran moved to Libya, most of the former Italian colony was under temporary British administration – it was granted independence only at the end of 1951. Italian was still widely spoken, and my grandparents ▸

◂ remember eating pasta and drinking local wine in Tripoli harbour, overlooking the Mediterranean. The city had a large European population and a Western-oriented elite that had all but disappeared by the time I arrived in 2008, only a few years after the lifting of international sanctions and after four decades of brutal totalitarian rule by Muammar Gaddafi. My grandparents and I remember the same landmarks, though we know them by different names. Tripoli's main square, where the Ottoman old city brushes up against the Italianate downtown, was Piazza Italia to them. I knew it as Green Square, a reference to the colour of Gaddafi's al-Fateh Revolution. Today it is Martyrs' Square.

I had always taken for granted that life gets better, that once won freedoms are hard to lose, that the world I grew up in would be more progressive and more prosperous than that of my grandparents, who came of age during the Second World War. My Libyan friends were not so naive. Those from wealthy families knew that their grandparents had enjoyed personal and political freedoms almost unimaginable to them.

Gran wrote her books under pen names because the Foreign Office would not have approved of her pursuing an independent writing career. It was expected that a diplomat's wife would do all in her power to support her husband's work: she should be a skilled and tactful hostess, well-dressed and politically astute, knowing exactly who to butter up at the dinner table. Gran worked as a secretary until my father, her eldest, was born – and then devoted any spare time to passion projects wherever the family moved, learning new languages and developing deep expertise in the local culture or wildlife.

When I was midway through writing this piece, my grandfather died. He had been ill for months and though it wasn't a shock, his death still feels too big to fully comprehend. Gran dug up an album I hadn't seen before, with photos from the 1970s, when they were posted in Thailand. Granddad wears crisp button-ups and groovy sunglasses; Gran, thin and tanned, in a paisley floor-length gown, a cigarette dangling from her slim fingers, resembles Joan Didion.

In the back of the album there was a yellowed newspaper clipping, about an exhibition of Gran's batik paintings. "Of the 30 works available, 22 were sold before the cocktail party was over. A success unheard of in Chiang Mai," the reporter gushes. More surprising than the exhibition itself (I didn't know about her batik painting) was the description of her as a "regular contributor to *Punch* and the *Daily Telegraph*", who also wrote a weekly column on current affairs from Nairobi for an East African daily. "Oh, it was only a few pieces," Gran said when I asked.

Mercifully, the Foreign Office no longer judges its diplomats in terms of their spouse's hosting skills – and does its best to support partners who want to pursue their own careers, despite the frequent international moves. It would struggle to retain staff if it didn't. Nonetheless, it's a challenge to keep two careers afloat when one person moves countries every three or four years.

In her studies of the successful, highly educated career women who drop out of the workforce after having children, Shani Orgad, the author of *Heading Home* (2019), observed that motherhood has ousted wifehood as a social ideal, but that both reinforce the same traditional gender norms. No woman I know aspires to be a good "wife" – but many beat themselves up trying to be a good mother. In many ways, the bar for good motherhood is higher now than it was 50 years ago. Today even women with full-time jobs devote more time to childcare each week than the mothers of the 1960s. The new ideal of intensive, hands-on mothering ascended in tandem with the decline of the traditional housewife, but both involve many of the same jobs. The "good" mother – the Instagram ideal – isn't only loving, supportive and patient with her children, she also keeps a clean and tidy home, cooks fresh, nutritious meals and takes pride in her own appearance.

I haven't given up my job, and my husband and I have managed a relatively even split of domestic work. But our attitudes differ. He is unburdened by guilt: it matters to him that our children are happy and healthy, and he accepts that we cannot do everything perfectly. Sometimes (almost always) our house is a mess. Sometimes (almost always) the girls are rushed out the door with grubby shoes or chalky toothpaste smears down their jumpers. He has accepted this reality. I, though I know it is irrational, cannot help but feel a deep sense of failure whenever we fall short.

> Gran wrote under a pen name – her husband's employer would not have approved

I was four months pregnant when I read Gran's book, finishing it in a single evening. It felt like time travel, her words offering a more vivid portrait than any fading photograph of what she was like as a much younger woman. Even so, it is hard to reconcile the various women in my mind – the new wife in a nipped-waist tea dress, out for dinner in Tripoli; the young mother of four, scribbling away at her secret book between school runs and mealtimes and diplomatic engagements; the glamorous ambassador's wife. It is difficult to see her as anyone other than Gran, as though she has always been old.

And maybe there's a certain personal erasure that is an inevitable part of motherhood. My children will find it hard to imagine the person I once was, before they were born, before I could be defined in relation to them. They are young enough still to find it hard to conceive of the person I am now, still uncertain and insecure in my role.

Gran closes *Nine, Ten... A Big Fat Hen* with a brief account of childbirth. She describes the moment the midwife hands over your new baby, red-faced and wrapped up in a blanket. "Obviously – from the look on the nurse's face – some significant gesture is expected of you. But what? In a more eloquent age, you might have composed an ode of welcome to it. Merely to say 'Hello', scarcely seems adequate. But it looks too wet to kiss, too fragile to cuddle. The most appropriate gesture you can make is to raise yourself to a sitting position and bow from the waist. For this small scrap of humanity, which the nurse is holding out to you, is your new master. You might just as well acknowledge the fact from the start."

How true this feels, and yet how disorienting it is to read these words, more than 50 years after they were written, knowing something of how this story continues, knowing that the writer now has four middle-aged children, 12 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. We are a close family, and we are bound together by her.

My son is due in July, and I have a vague, blurry image of what it might be like to see him for the first time. To picture more than that, to imagine my young children growing old, and maybe having children or grandchildren themselves, is close to impossible – and yet I realise, on reflection, that there's nothing I want to see more.

As for the rumoured romance novel, it does exist – somewhere, under a different name. Gran described the book as a "potboiler". She hasn't lent me a copy. Yet. ●

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Books

What the Nazis did next

How Hitler's former security operatives sold their services to the West – and turned up the heat of the Cold War

By William Boyd

A couple of years ago I was writing a six-part, Cold War spy-thriller for television that was set in Berlin in 1961, during the summer months before the Berlin Wall suddenly divided the city on Sunday 13 August. In one scene the protagonist, a British spy, visits an old-soldiers' club while trying to track down an ex-Wehrmacht officer. Unthinkingly, I wrote something like: "CUT TO – a group of elderly men in their 60s." Then, I thought, no – that's far too old. In 1961 the Second World War had only been over for 16 years. These "old soldiers" would barely be middle-aged. It was an intriguing thought-experiment and it made me reconsider the whole immediate postwar demographic of Germany.

In the 1960s, let alone the 1950s, any German male in his thirties or forties could easily be assumed to have participated in the German war effort to one degree or another – whether as honest citizens, soldiers or more sordid, evil apparatchiks. What happened to all those survivors of the defeated and demobilised German armed forces? What happened to the former members of the SD, the SS and the Gestapo? Very few were captured, tried and punished. Most – it stands to reason – quietly blended back in to postwar German society. It is estimated that at the end of the conflict in 1945 the Nazi party had around 8.5 million members. Only a tiny percentage were hunted down and prosecuted. What happened to the millions of others?

BETTMANN

Intelligence for hire: Reinhard Gehlen (centre), pictured with Wehrmacht officers, set up an espionage unit in West Germany after the war

This question is particularly germane to Danny Orbach's highly intriguing book *Fugitives*, about the role former Nazis played in the nascent and shambolic Cold War espionage world. There were three basic choices available to these defeated and demoralised Nazis – join the West (their enemies), or the communists, represented by the Soviet Union (also their enemies), or sell their expertise to the highest bidder.

Orbach concentrates on a key player who made the first choice, General Reinhard Gehlen, an espionage officer who had been responsible for intelligence analysis on the Eastern Front. At the war's end, Gehlen realised he had a potent asset in the mass of information he had gathered on the Soviet Union and the Red Army. He had all his files microfilmed and then offered them to the Allies. He was recruited and effectively allowed to set up his own espionage operation – known as the Gehlen Org – which later morphed into the Bundesnachrichtendienst, the BND, West Germany's federal espionage agency.

There was only one problem. Most of Gehlen's spooks were former Nazis and one of them, Heinz Felfe, was a Soviet double-agent, one of the most successful "moles" in espionage history. From the outset the Gehlen Org and then the BND was hopelessly compromised. When queried about the number of Nazis he recruited, Gehlen argued that the former members of Hitler's security organisations had indispensable experience and knowledge in fighting communism – that, as Orbach writes, "they simply had to be employed".

Gehlen was proudly exhibiting to his American spymasters what he termed "the German way" or *Auftragstaktik* (literally "mission tactics"). In this model, a superior officer issues instructions to his subordinates and then does not interfere with how that mission is carried out. The end – the accomplishment of the mission – justifies any means, in other words. One can easily see how in the world of espionage such laxity could have disastrous consequences. Heinz Felfe's systematic betrayals were a consequence of the *Auftragstaktik* mentality.

But for those Nazis who could not bear to join their former enemies, either the Eastern or Western versions, there were other countries that would welcome their dubious proficiency. A large part of Orbach's book is devoted to the role played by expatriate Nazis in Syria and in Egypt and other North African countries, where they "peddled intelligence", ran guns to Arab freedom fighters (particularly the FLN in Algeria), and helped Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime in Egypt attempt to build ballistic missiles. Giving covert aid to Arab countries was also a way of sustaining Nazi anti-Semitism and it was not long before Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency, began to pursue the German scientists and former spies through kidnap, letter-bombs and straightforward assassination.

This section of Orbach's book sometimes reads like a caper movie – tales of dead-drop blunders, networks collapsing, botched assassinations, incompetent spies and lucky escapes – but because the key players were Nazis the darker undertones keep returning.

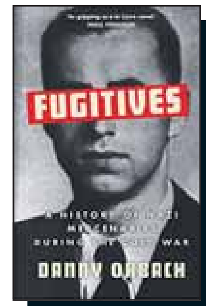
President Nasser's missile-building programme was almost an eastern Mediterranean version of the Cuban missile crisis. In 1962, at the Revolution Day parade, Nasser proudly displayed Egypt's new long-range rockets to his cheering populace. The Israeli government panicked, fearing a "second Holocaust" and rightly assuming Nasser was developing intercontinental ballistic missiles with only one target in mind. Moreover, these long-range rockets were being developed by German scientists with expertise gathered during Germany's wartime rocket programme. David Ben-Gurion, the Israeli prime minister, ordered Mossad to initiate a campaign of terror and intimidation against the German scientists and their families, in Egypt and Germany, codenamed Operation Damocles. Mossad's key weapon was a letter-bomb that could withstand any amount of rough handling. It only detonated when the letter was actually drawn out of the envelope. The technology was impressive but, of course, very often the person opening the envelope was not the target. Collateral damage was inevitable.

In fact, the Egyptian missile programme was beset with production difficulties and operational failures, while Operation Damocles caused a series of international scandals and made the relationship between West Germany and Israel parlous. As the threat of the missiles receded so Israeli-West German relationships improved. German scientists resigned or were lured back to Germany and victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 re-established the Middle East power balance in Israel's favour. By then, Israel had its own nuclear deterrent.

In his epilogue, Orbach states that his book is "first and foremost about losers, the detritus of history". Yet these "losers" generated a huge amount of alarm and crisis in Europe and North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. He argues that reactions to the, in truth, not very effective threat posed by these men were exacerbated by the repeated use of the word "Nazi". They were "Nazi" spies and gun-runners, "Nazi" rocket scientists, "Nazi" double-agents. It was the word itself that made governments and espionage agencies paranoid and fearful. "As the 1960s progressed," Orbach writes, "all sides came to understand that the German fugitives and mercenaries were not as important as once believed." However, even eight decades after the end of the Second World War, the word still has the potential to inflame and motivate, as we can see with Vladimir Putin's crazed justification for invading Ukraine.

Orbach writes in a fluent and readable style, though perhaps somewhat over-seasoned with clichés (questions burn, poverty is grinding, attempts are last-ditch, nooses tighten, and so on). Nevertheless, *Fugitives* is genuinely revelatory and Orbach's research is impressive and scholarly. More to the point, the many fascinating narratives he relates here could easily provide the raw material for a dozen espionage novels. I have a feeling a lot of writers will be inspired. ●

William Boyd's Cold War thriller "Spy City" is streaming on BritBox. His latest novel is "Trio" (Penguin)



Fugitives: A History of Nazi Mercenaries During the Cold War
Danny Orbach
Hurst & Co, 340pp, £18.99

Mossad began to neutralise German scientists and former spies through kidnap, letter-bombs and assassination

Follow the whale

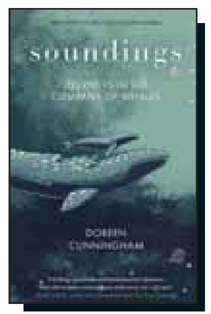
One woman and her toddler's journey along the grey whale's 10,000-mile migration route, from Mexico to Alaska

By India Bourke

As a child, I was enthralled by the idea that whales could sing. A cassette tape of their strange reverberations bewitched me. But it also led me to wonder: what was it they were trying to say?

A few decades later and a new book from Doreen Cunningham offers a beautiful exploration of that mystery. Structured around an impulsive decision to follow the 10,000-mile migration route of the grey whale from the breeding lagoons of Mexico to the Arctic ocean, *Soundings: Journeys in the Company of Whales* charts Cunningham's attempt to pass on her awe for the non-human world to her two-year-old son. This boat-filled odyssey requires all the bank loans and self-belief that she can muster. In its unfolding, it is a reminder that whales have more to tell us than the human ear alone can detect.

The author's own connection to the sea began on the island of Jersey, where she and her siblings would regularly swim as if they were "sea mammals", holding their "fingers welded together like fins". One night-time excursion was so immersive that Cunningham recalls: "When I hauled myself out in the moonlight, I wasn't sure I had fully retrieved me, that part of me wasn't left there among the sparks in the water." Unlike her often emotionally distant mother, the ocean "embraced" her, "fulfilling an unmet need".



Soundings: Journeys in the Company of Whales
Doreen Cunningham
Virago, 320pp, £18.99

Alongside this primordial affinity, Cunningham was growing aware of humanity's often fraught relationship with nature. She describes how whales populated her illustrated Bible in the story of Jonah, trapped inside one until he was sufficiently repentant. She saw whales resurface in television reports about the destruction wreaked by commercial fishing fleets. Each Sunday, she would pray to God to fend off the threats of nuclear war, acid rain and extinctions – and to "please stop people killing the whales and dolphins and seals".

Her early awareness of both nature's power and its vulnerability led to Cunningham making a professional commitment to addressing humanity's ever-growing environmental crisis: first as a scientific researcher, then as a journalist battling against the BBC's previous perverse insistence on giving airtime to climate change deniers. But her understanding of humanity's destructive tendencies also left her aching to find community and belonging.

By the time Cunningham had survived a terrible custody battle for her son, her life had begun to "twist and snap". So to prove to her son (and herself) that "it is possible to do anything, to overcome anything", she set out in search of her whales.

"We share the same survival instinct, feelings that tell us to go towards things, or get away," she writes of the empathy that connects all species. "I want to tell the whales thank you, just for being here."

Through such delicate merging of environmental and individual trauma, *Soundings* births a raw, intimate narrative about nature's capacity to mend – and justifies its place alongside modern nature writing classics, such as Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*. Furthermore, it adds to this well-trodden terrain by engaging with a less familiar realm of experience: that of the Inuit people of Utqiagvik.

Six years before her odyssey across the North American continent, Cunningham spent time researching for a work assignment in Alaska's northernmost town. Here, living closely alongside its people, she learned to whittle whale bones, to hunt, and to fall in love – leaving with a deeper understanding of both the community's nature-close way of life and its persecuted past. Returning with her son becomes a chance to celebrate all that the Inuit still have to teach, even as a warming ocean threatens the roots of their whaling culture.

Listening to a tourist guide's simplified account of the region's recent history, she laments: "It's not seeing the Earth as home, treating it with love and respect as the Tlingit did. It's categorising it, owning it, abusing it, wrecking it. The glaciers don't seem quite so friendly to me now. It's like they're pissed off, throwing things."

At a time when global crisis follows global crisis, Cunningham's book is an urgent reminder of our capacity to both hurt and heal the natural world – along with ourselves. ●

India Bourke is the New Statesman's environment correspondent

WILDESTANIMAL / ALAMY

Reviewed in short

Young Mungo
by Douglas Stuart
Picador, 400pp, £16.99

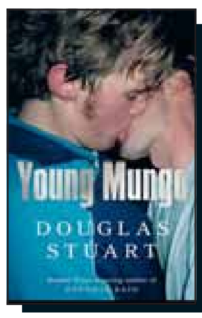
The protagonist of Douglas Stuart's new novel has a lot in common with that of his Booker Prize-winning debut. Mungo, like Shuggie Bain, is a teenage boy who tends to see the good in everyone, despite the painful realities of his upbringing. This book too is set in 1980s working-class Glasgow, and Mungo, like Shuggie, has an alcoholic mother who is often in need of saving from the brink of despair. When the 15-year-old has a reluctant sip of beer I found myself taking a sharp inward breath: "He had seen the awful sadness it contained, just beneath the happy foam."

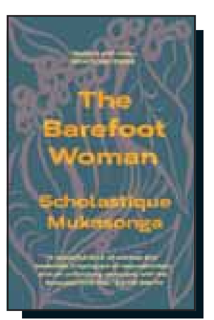
This is a grim, graphic book: within just a handful of pages there are two instances of rape and an attempt at miscarriage via a punch to the stomach. But Stuart keeps the possibility of a happy ending close. Here hope comes in the form of James, with whom Mungo falls in love, though of course their estate won't take kindly to a gay relationship. Stuart's dialogue is brilliantly thick with Glaswegian slang, his descriptions vivid and his characters convincing. But the story feels too familiar. I want to read a Douglas Stuart novel that breaks out of the mould the author has forged for himself.
By Ellen Peirson-Hagger

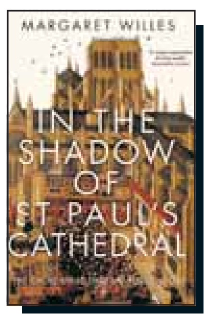
Made in China: A Memoir of Love and Labour
by Anna Qu
Scribe, 224pp, £14.99

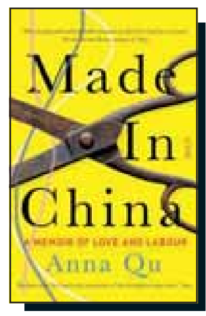
The essayist Anna Qu was seven and living with her loving grandparents in Wenzhou, China, when her mother suddenly reappeared in her life to take her to New York City. Even as a child Qu knew that the five years her mother had spent working in the US without her was a sacrifice, made for the benefit of both of their futures. When they arrived in Queens, however, their familial bond was not strengthened but entirely shattered as Qu was confronted with her mother's cruelty. She was instantly put to work, first as a maid in their home and then as a factory worker in her stepfather's sweatshop; that is, until Qu confided in a school counsellor.

With quick, vibrant prose, Qu's memoir is absorbing and disturbing in equal measure. The narrative is laced with grief for her lost childhood, but also gratitude for her mother's strength to have not only immigrated to the US alone, but then to have returned for her. Their relationship is troubled, but never entirely without love. As Qu movingly reflects: "Sacrifice is in every generation of our family. I am no exception from the hardship, and we are all her children."
By Christiana Bishop









The Barefoot Woman
by Scholastique Mukasonga, trs Jordan Stump
Daunt Books, 153pp, £9.99

Scholastique Mukasonga's mother Stefania told her that should she die, her daughters must cover her body in a *pagne*. "A mother's dead body is not to be seen," she warned. The Rwandan novelist and memoirist was living in France when Stefania and 36 other relatives were murdered during the 1994 genocide. Mukasonga could not fulfil her mother's wishes; she does not even know what happened to her body. *The Barefoot Woman* is a different act of filial devotion: a rich retelling of the author's village childhood that takes up the wild imagery of the stories Stefania told to her children each night.

The reader is transported: I could see the fields of sorghum, smell the woodfire, feel my own bare toes stub against stones in the dark. There is a terrible poignancy to each scene: we know how this world ends, though Mukasonga mentions only briefly the cataclysmic violence that will follow. At the centre of everything is Stefania, village matchmaker and herbal healer. Stefania identified hiding places for her children, mapped out routes for them to flee and buried provisions for them along the way. She did all she could to protect them. It was not enough.
By Sophie McBain

In the Shadow of St Paul's Cathedral:
The Churchyard That Shaped London
by Margaret Willes
Yale University Press, 320pp, £25

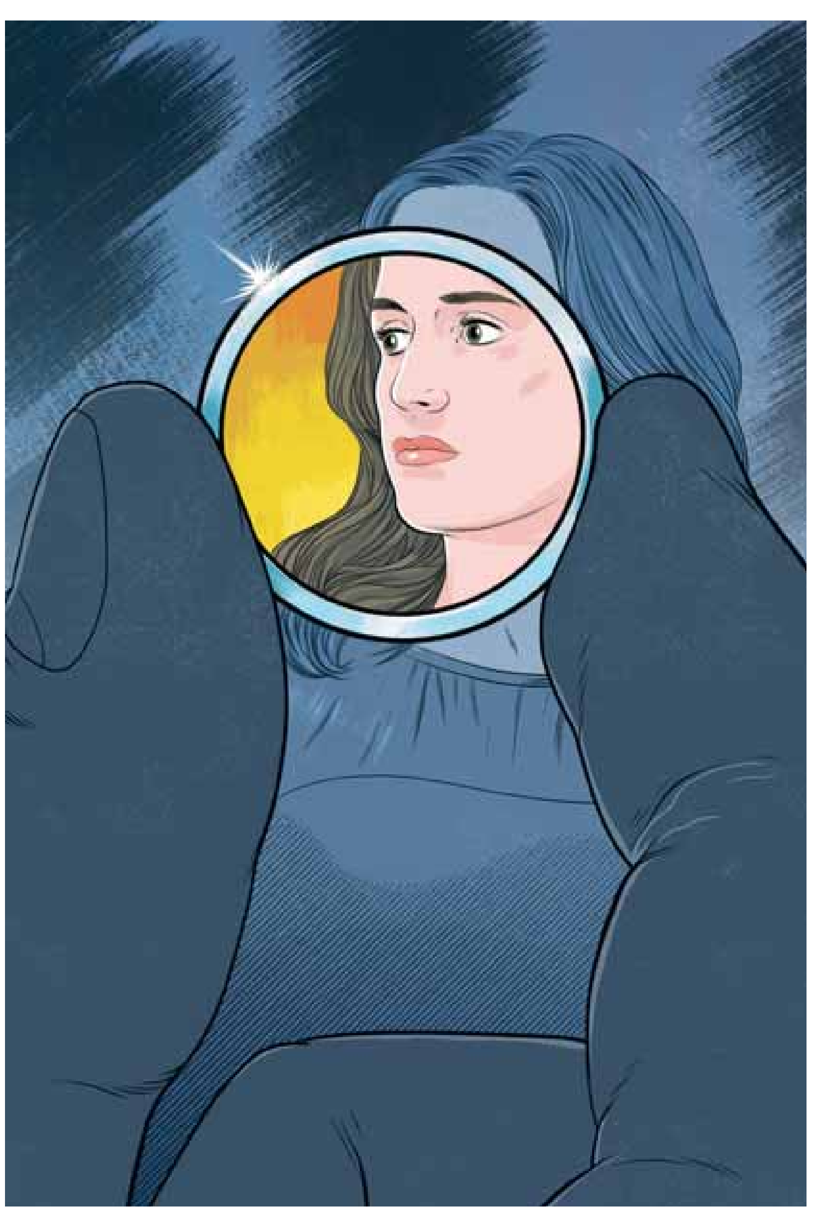
When standing in front of St Paul's Cathedral, the temptation is to look up at Christopher Wren's dome. But, as the former National Trust publisher Margaret Willes writes in her fascinating account of the building's environs, it was at ground level rather than in the spiritual heights that history played out.

For centuries the churchyard was a public thoroughfare and place of ceremonial processions; at Paul's Cross, in what is now Paternoster Square, radical preachers voiced religious controversies; and it was in the buildings surrounding old St Paul's that the publishing and bookselling trades were founded, plays performed and coffee-house culture established. Shakespeare and Samuel Pepys spent time there, as did a "notorious baggage" named Moll Cutpurse who did penance there, while in 1601 a horse called Morocco was spirited to the top of the cathedral steeple where his owner rode him round and round. Willes handles her anecdotes and characters with skill and discrimination to show how the silence of prayer long rubbed shoulders with the brouhaha of dispute and commerce.
By Michael Prodger

The marriage delusion

A new memoir describes it as "a slowly unfolding apocalypse". Why are we so reluctant to reimagine matrimony?

By Johanna Thomas-Corr



DOMINIC BUGATTO

I'm dreaming of a book. It has the lightly worn wit of a Nora Ephron column combined with the empathy of Esther Perel. It combines the savage contrarianism of Rachel Cusk's *Aftermath* with the virtuoso noticing of Joan Didion, the force of numbers that powered Caroline Criado Perez's *Invisible Women* and the historical sweep of a Thomas Piketty treatise.

It examines the institution of marriage from the inside and out and answers, at last, why we continue to do this thing. Why – no one is forcing us any more! – do so many of us lash ourselves to another imperfect human being forever more and act surprised when this person fails to make us elated all the time? Why are people so outraged when presented with alternatives to a system rooted in the most regressive patriarchal property law? Why do we minimise freedom and maximise submission? Who would do that to the person they claim to love most? Besides half of the British adult population?

It is, of course, unfair to review a book in the light of its platonic ideal and – spoiler alert – *Foreverland* is not this book. But then again, this is how most romantic unions are judged, against an impossible fantasy. The American writer Heather Havrilesky aims to puncture our overblown expectations of marriage, which she likens to a "a slowly unfolding apocalypse". "Your marriage will die or you will die. Which ending seems happier?" she asks, using her own 16-year-old marriage to Bill, the father of her two daughters, to illustrate how suffocating (heterosexual) coupledom can be:

> Surviving a marriage requires turning down the volume on your spouse so you can barely hear what they're saying. You must do this not only so you don't overdose on the same stultifying words and phrases within the first year, but also so your spouse's various grunts and sneezes and snorts and throat clearings don't serve as a magic flute that causes you to wander out the front door and into the wilderness, never to return.

Havrilesky is not a social scientist, nor a psychologist, but a former advice columnist for *New York Magazine* with a memoir and an essay collection behind her. Her schtick boils down to: we need to accept our flawed lives, suffering, mess, humiliation, "disappointing" husband and all. Marriage is designed to break you, she declares. If you decide to sign up to it, you should be aware that you will wake up some mornings wondering why you have promised "to drag this wretched, snoring heap of meat with you everywhere you go until the day you die".

Poor Bill. Elsewhere, he is "this loud heap of nightmares", "this cursed ghost", "a haunted ice cream man", "a phlegmy motherf***er", "a charmless mountain of wincing leather", "a pointy Lego brick underfoot", "a chapter of Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*". And Bill, she stresses, is one of the good guys. He is "handsome" and "patient" and even "visionary" in his professional life as an academic working in education. However, in the context of their home, she experiences him "as a heap of laundry: smelly, inert, useless, almost sentient but not quite".

The pair met soon after Bill had separated from his first wife, with whom he had an eight-year-old child. When he read in Havrilesky's column that she was newly single, it made him "swoon" and he emailed to praise her writing. She recounts their first cringeworthy exchanges as they sent photos of themselves back and forth. "Hubba hubba!" she said. "Wow!" he said. "Hoo doggie," she ventured.

At the time, Havrilesky writes, she was 34 years old, a "giant baby" who lived alone in Los Angeles with her dog. She longed for a husband to "banish the loneliness and darkness forever", hoping – and this is a very modern hope – that Bill would play listener, daddy, best friend, housekeeper, life coach, boss, masseuse, drinking buddy and "flexible sidekick". She fell deeply in love with this hope, even though she was acutely aware of Bill's nerdiness, defensiveness, bad judgement, lack of financial acumen and "zero depth perception". His marriage proposal left her horrified: "I hated Bill's dumb face," she thought in the moment, but she said yes, knowing he was the kindest, most handsome man she had ever met as well as the "most hideous" and "most exasperating".

After an elaborate but sticky wedding in Palm Desert, she discovered how fast her heteronormative fantasies could curdle. The stress of parenting and full-time work led to neurotic outbursts (her) and defensiveness (him). The answer, they decided, was to move with their two girls and two dogs to the suburbs. She wanted to escape the "urban elitism" of LA's hipster parents who drank home brew and read Zadie Smith. "Our kids deserved the comfort of mediocrity."

But despite purchasing a huge house, she was soon ground down: "The irony of living among people who place peace and quiet at the top of their priority list is that they're often very angry... you don't know anger until you witness suburban anger up close."

On a wretched family holiday in Australia, Havrilesky finally screamed to her husband and daughters: "I am f***ing broken! YOU BROKE ME. ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?" She fantasised about disappearing through the escape hatch of infidelity and by her late 40s she felt "ravenous" for adventure, with "the sex drive of a teenage boy". She developed a crush on another writer after mistakenly thinking he touched her under the table, all of which she confided to poor Bill. Familiarity might have blunted passion but their marriage is – by contrast – honest, based on what she calls "radically open communication".

Foreverland is sporadically very funny and at times, genuinely insightful on the ebb and flow of marital vexations, the agonies of in-laws, and the antipathy one apparently feels towards one's life partner. "Do I hate my husband? For sure, yes, definitely. I don't know anyone who's been married more than seven years who flinches at this concept."

However, Havrilesky is also prone to triteness ("Love and hate are intertwined") and there are too many familiar moans about male hypochondria and thwarted holidays. These passages never deepen into anything more than one of those WhatsApp exchanges you have with friends that ends: "Grrr. Sorry to rant."

The book is a bit of a Bill, ie not quite what I hoped it would be. But I found myself wondering: could any memoir do much better? To be truly honest involves being particular, but the more particular you are about your partner, the less universal and the more voyeuristic a book like this becomes. For any writer on the inside of a marriage, the sample size is going to be pretty small. One, perhaps two or three at most, unless you're Joan Collins. Fiction – see the novels of Rachel Cusk, Jenny Offill and Karl Ove Knausgaard – has the freedom to better capture the universal truths of marriage. In the end, it's just hard to care that much about Bill's golf shirts.

Heterosexual marriage rates in the UK are at an all-time low. There are innumerable other ways for men and women to seek security, raise children and find companionship, alone or together. But now (Western, non-religious) society no longer places a strong emphasis on the respectability of marriage, there is an ever greater – almost impossible – emphasis on the romantic/consumerist side of relations. Thanks to dating apps, there's more choice of potential partners than ever before. The pressure is immense, the disappointments harder to endure, not least because we expect a spouse to excel in multiple roles. Our grandparents' generation took a slightly more realistic view and perhaps had less buyers' remorse as a result.

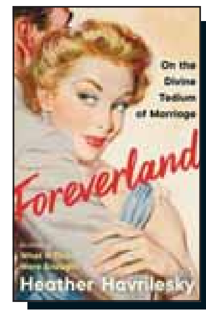
The benefits of coupledom are still many: split living costs and childcare, reassuring stability, plus, when it comes down to it, more sex. But most of all, companionship. To be known, to know someone else. Life can otherwise be lonely. Marriage is also, crudely, egalitarian. One person for every person. Imagine if the rich could hoard partners as they do money.

Perhaps this is why we have a hard time reimagining the sacred institution itself. Far from being radical, it is socially acceptable to the point of being banal for people to grumble about their spouses. But criticising marriage itself is a bit like criticising capitalism. It makes you an agitator, practically an anarchist.

A friend who recently celebrated a divorce and is now "solo polyamorous" says she was naive to allow "a big, bloody, binding-as-f*** legal document" to constrain her emotional life. The law will become a little less archaic and restrictive when "no-fault divorce" is introduced in England and Wales this month.

However, isn't there something a bit alarming about our uniformity of opinion of love itself? As the cultural critic Laura Kipnis pointed out in her book *Against Love: A Polemic* (2003), even the most powerful organised religions produce the occasional heretic and every ideology has its apostates. But, to paraphrase Frank Sinatra, you can't disparage love and marriage.

Kipnis made the case for adultery as an act of cultural rebellion, which to some will sound invigorating and to others like a shagger's excuse from a David Lodge novel. But could we not keep the companionship and be a little more fluid within it, a little less judgemental, a little more forgiving? Or are we loath to admit that's just more freedom than most of us can bear? ●



Foreverland: On the Divine Tedium of Marriage
Heather Havrilesky
Ecco, 304pp, £20

Far from being radical, it is socially acceptable to the point of being banal for people to grumble about their spouses

Art

The painter of perfection

Raphael showed succeeding generations not just how art should be made but how an artist should live

By Michael Prodger

Raphael
National Gallery,
London WC2,
9 April – 31 July

In 1768, with the personal blessing of George III, the Royal Academy of Arts was founded as "a school or academy of design for the use of students in the arts". The British nation was late in possessing such an institution – the French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture had been established more than a century earlier, in 1648 – but the new academicians were determined to slough off any residual cultural cringe and catch up with their continental peers. So, in 1769, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the RA's inaugural president, delivered the first of 15 *Discourses*.

The *Discourses*, for the edification of the RA's 77 students, laid out Reynolds' vision of art, one based on the emulation of the Renaissance masters and the antique. In *Discourse Five*, delivered in 1772, he grappled with the problem of exactly which great name the students should best look to for inspiration and example. The choice, he was clear, lay between Michelangelo and Raphael (neither Leonardo nor Titian was even considered). "These two extraordinary men," he said, "carried some of the higher excellencies of art to a higher degree of perfection than probably they ever achieved before. They have certainly not been excelled or equalled ever since."

Although, he conceded, Michelangelo would win the duel if "the sublime" – in the sense of a moody and rumbling intensity – were the measure, it was Raphael (1483-1520) who was Reynolds' clear choice because he alone exemplified "the *great style*". (In 1787, prompted by a visit to the Vatican, Goethe plumped, almost reluctantly, for Michelangelo instead. "It is so difficult to comprehend one great talent, let alone two at the same time," he concluded, adding that, "To make things easier for us, we take sides." It would always be this way, he thought, until the unlikely event that mankind "acquires the capacity to recognise and appreciate equally, different kinds of greatness".)

For Reynolds though, "the excellence" of Raphael was surpassing. It "lay in the propriety, beauty and majesty of his characters, the judicious contrivance of his composition, his correctness of drawing, purity of taste, and skilful accommodation of other men's conceptions to his purposes". This last trait was of particular importance to art students and nobody excelled Raphael "in that judgement, with which he united to his own observations of Nature, the energy of Michael Angelo [sic], and the beauty and simplicity of the antique".

For more than a century those who sided with Goethe were heavily outnumbered. Raphael – talented, multifarious, *soigné*, socially adroit, and dead at just 37 – fully merited Vasari's sobriquet the "prince of painters", since he showed not only how to paint but also how to be the ideal artist. Raphael's pre-eminence was not to survive, however. Post romanticism, artists and aficionados began to desire less "purity of taste" and more grit in their oyster, and they found it in Michelangelo's *terribilità*, Leonardo's universality and Titian's emotive colour.

Even Ruskin failed to be swayed by Raphael's merits, later writing waspishly of his first encounter with the painter in Rome in 1840: "Of Raphael, however, I found I could make nothing whatever. The only thing clearly manifest to me in his compositions was that everybody seemed to be pointing at everybody else, and that nobody, to my notion, was worth pointing at."

Raphael's reputation as one of the greatest of the Renaissance's Renaissance men has survived but he is perhaps more often admired than loved. The quincentenary of his death fell in 2020 and was due to be marked by an assortment of celebrations, including a much anticipated exhibition of his work at the National Gallery. That show twice fell victim to the Covid pandemic but is now, belatedly, taking place and offers the opportunity to see why Reynolds and so many others held him in such esteem.

One reason was that Raphael seemed preordained for greatness – he was the golden child who went on to fulfil his destiny. Vasari called him "Nature's gift to the world" and ascribed his sweetness of temperament to being breastfed by his mother, rather than by a wet nurse. Raphael's mother, Màgia, died when he was only eight, which may account for the centrality of Madonna and Child paintings throughout his career. The boy's early training was with his father, Giovanni Santi, official painter (and sometime poet) at the highly cultured court of the Duke of Urbino. By the time of Giovanni's death in 1494, his 11-year-old son was precocious enough to work as his assistant.

Some time around 1500 Raphael joined the Perugia workshop of Pietro Perugino, one of the leading painters of the day, and also received his first recorded commission, for an altarpiece: in the contract, although just 17, he was recorded as *magister*, "master". ▸

PINACOTECA OF THE VATICAN MUSEUMS

Final act: Raphael's last painting, *The Transfiguration* (1516-20), was carried during his funeral procession

◂ Raphael's ability to absorb the influence of other artists, remarked on by Reynolds, was evident in his adoption of Perugino's softly harmonious and jewel-like manner and it was further demonstrated from around 1504 when he first started to visit Florence to learn from the art there. Both Fra Bartolommeo and Leonardo were synthesised in his work, and a drawing of a young woman of 1505-06 shows that he had clearly seen the *Mona Lisa* in Leonardo's studio, while another depicts Michelangelo's recently unveiled sculpture of David.

The example of these artists resulted in Raphael imbuing his forms with greater weight and clarity and, through the expressive use of pose and gesture, endowing his pictures with resonant emotion (Leonardo's notion of the "*moti dell'anima*" – motions of the soul) and a sense of storytelling. This step change is clear in his painting of *The Deposition* (1507) in which the heft of the dead Christ's body and the pain of grief that runs throughout the cortège combine in a narrative that Vasari said would "move the hardest heart in pity".

In the autumn of 1508, at the summons of the Della Rovere Pope Julius II, Raphael moved to Rome and was to remain there for the rest of his life. He initially worked on Julius's private library in the Vatican and so impressed the pontiff that he was tasked with frescoing the suite of four ceremonial rooms known as the *Stanze*. At the same time, Michelangelo was at work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling a mere hundred yards or so away. It was Raphael's frescoes, completed either by himself or to his detailed designs by members of the workshop that quickly formed around him, that made his reputation.

In paintings such as *The School of Athens*, *Parnassus* and *The Deliverance of St Peter*, Raphael found new ways of handling large numbers of figures in lucid and rhythmic compositions (it has been claimed that he never repeated a pose in his work); of using a telling variety of expressive gesture, foreshortening and colour; of inventing innovatory light effects (*The Deliverance* has moonlight, dawn sunlight, torchlight, reflected light, and divine light), all in the service of a sophisticated melding of Christian and pagan theology. The 19th-century critic Walter Pater described the frescoes, in effect a summation of Renaissance humanist thought, as "large theoretic conceptions" that are "addressed, so to speak, to the intelligence of the eye", and Kenneth Clark had this harmony of conceit and expression in mind when he called Raphael "one of the civilising forces of the Western imagination".

Some of the figures also show a debt to Michelangelo. At some point before the first part of the Sistine ceiling was unveiled in 1511, Raphael managed to sneak into the chapel to see Michelangelo's work in progress and, as a result, a new monumentality emerged in some of his figures. The proprietorial older artist was outraged by the trespass, by the appropriation and by the fact that Raphael gave this assimilated style a public airing in the figure of *The Prophet Isaiah* painted for the church of Sant'Agostino in Rome. Raphael's popularity with the Pope, with whom Michelangelo himself had fractious relations, only further soured his mood and it rankled: as late as 1542 he claimed sourly that, "What he [Raphael] had of art, he had from me."

Raphael sneaked into the Sistine Chapel to see his rival's work in progress. Michelangelo was outraged

As with all his designs, Raphael first refined his figures and harmonised groupings in drawings of exquisite beauty. These were worked up to full-scale cartoons by his assistants (who were frequently also his models) and transferred to the walls for frescoing. Drawings were the basis for his oil paintings too, as well as being used as gifts (he exchanged drawings with Dürer, for example), as models for engravings, tapestries, sculptures and medallions, and as the basis for paintings by other artists. Reynolds thought Raphael's greatest genius lay in his frescoes, but others might argue that it was with pen or chalk in hand that he was truly peerless.

Raphael's closeness to the seat of spiritual power also gave him added lustre in the eyes of Rome's patron class. Among those to employ him was Agostino Chigi, the Pope's banker and a man so rich he would have gold plates made bearing the arms of his dinner guests, which he would then encourage them to throw into the Tiber at the end of the meal. While they went away staggered by his liberality, he ordered the goldware hauled out again in nets he had hidden in the river. Raphael would design two chapels for the Chigi family – ensembles of architecture, statuary and metalwork – as well as decorations for Agostino's villa then on the edge of Rome, now the Villa Farnesina, which included his celebrated fresco of *The Triumph of Galatea* (1512).

In the figure of the water nymph, derived from his own gently ecstatic painting of *St Catherine* (1508), he not only showed his mastery of mythological subjects and the female nude but his conception of ideal beauty. In a letter traditionally thought to be from the painter to his friend Baldassare Castiglione, author of *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Raphael wrote that, "To paint one beautiful woman, I would have to see several beauties... but, since both good judgement and beautiful women are scarce, I make use of a certain idea that comes to mind." Just as he transmuted the work of other artists so he sought to depict not simply nature but nature improved.

Within two years of painting *Galatea*, Raphael was appointed chief architect of St Peter's by Pope Leo X, and a year later, in 1515, supervisor of Roman antiquities and excavations. The leap from artist to architect was not as great as might be imagined (Michelangelo had held the same role): the great architect Donato Bramante was a distant kinsman, mentor and fellow Urbinite and Raphael included imagined architecture in many of his paintings, as well as inventing more practical iterations for his stage and chapel designs. As "Prefect of stones and marbles" Raphael was a proto-conservationist, reluctant to take material from Rome's ancient buildings for reuse in its new ones, notably St Peter's. In his "Letter to Leo X", written in 1519 with Castiglione, he hymned antique Roman architecture, while he also embarked on a survey of ancient Rome that was incomplete at his death.

Raphael's rise led to an unrealisable demand for his work. At one point he sustained a workshop, or perhaps more accurately an artistic enterprise, of up to 50 artists,

Mother and child: Raphael's *The Madonna of the Pinks* (*La Madonna dei Garofani)*, 1506-07

many of the first rank. Giulio Romano, who would become one of the leading painters of the next generation, was his most notable assistant; Marcantonio Raimondi was the foremost engraver in Italy; Giovanni da Udine was its leading decorative still life painter; and the Flemish weaver Pieter van Aelst, who brought Raphael's tapestry designs – including the ten monumental hangings he designed for the Sistine Chapel – to fruition, was the most accomplished tapestry weaver of the age. What impressed Vasari most, however, was not how hard Raphael had to work – for all his preternatural talent – but his ability in keeping harmony between normally fractious artists. Meanwhile his literary friendships encompassed not just Castiglione but Pietro Aretino and Pietro Bembo too.

This sense of sympathy, a gift for human relations, emerges clearly in his portraits. His depiction of *Julius II* (1511-12), for example, is not an image of religious authority but of extraordinary, indeed daring, intimacy in which the Pope is shown not as St Peter's heir but as an elderly man weighed down, almost broken, by the responsibility of his office. However, Raphael could paint power too: his 1518 portrait of Julius's successor, *Leo X flanked by Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi* (Leo's family cardinals), is above all a summation of dynastic potency.

Although Raphael left many patrons frustrated by his unwillingness to take on commissions or by his tardiness in completing them, he seems always to have found time to paint portraits of his friends. In contrast to his papal portraits he made a series of informal works for private rather than public view that show the trust and ease between painter and sitter. In paintings such as his *Double portrait of Andrea Navagero and Agostino Beazzano* (1516), *Bindo Altoviti* (1516-18), *Baldassare Castiglione* (1519), *Self-portrait with Giulio Romano* (1519-20), and *La Fornarina* (1519-20), a calm amiability is tangible: these are records of relationships that are as comfortable with silence as with conversation.

Just occasionally, Raphael's equability could crack. He was once teased by two cardinals who complained that in one of his paintings, St Peter and St Paul were too red in the face. Raphael snapped back that the Church fathers "must be as red in heaven as you see them here, out of shame that their Church is being ruled by such men as you". There are, however, only two existing letters from his hand, so his true personality remains elusive and shaped by the anecdotes of others.

That he was widely loved as well as revered is nevertheless clear from his death. Vasari records that the unmarried Raphael had an eye for the ladies and that "pursuing his amours in secret, Raffaello continued to divert himself beyond measure with the pleasures of love; whence it happened that, having on one occasion indulged in more than his usual excess, he returned to his house in a violent fever". The doctors bled him but that only made his condition worse, and Leo X was so concerned that he sent emissaries to offer what aid he could at least six times. Neither medicine or prayer worked and when Raphael realised the end was coming he dismissed his mistress from his house (courteously "leaving her the means to live honourably"), made his will and confessed his sins.

He died on 6 April 1520, "on the same day that he was born, which was Good Friday", and a story quickly circulated that a crack appeared in the Vatican Palace foundations at the moment of his death. In fact it was due to a construction error and had appeared days earlier but it served nevertheless to reinforce the links between the painter and Christ. Raphael had bought a burial plot in the Pantheon, the former Roman temple turned church, and his funeral procession, with four cardinals carrying his body (there were rumours too that the Pope had been about to offer the painter a cardinal's hat) was lit by 100 torchbearers and accompanied by a huge crowd. Leo X wept and kissed the dead painter's hand and the bier was surmounted by Raphael's last work, the huge altarpiece showing *The Transfiguration*.

Some 300 years later, in 1833, Pope Gregory XVI ordered Raphael's tomb to be opened so that his body could be studied. While the public bought tickets to view his remains, scientists examined his skeleton to see if it would yield clues as to his genius. The most interesting finding was that he had a large larynx, which suggested the gentle artist, contrary to the image of his hagiographers, had an unusually loud voice. Hans Christian Andersen was among those present when Raphael was reinterred and recalled the solemnity of the moment being broken when the coffin was tipped while being reinserted into the tomb and the bones rattled noisily to one end.

Perhaps Raphael was due a moment of posthumous bathos after a life – and body of work – of such conspicuous grace. ●

NATIONAL GALLERY

Fiction

Birds II

A new story from the award-winning novelist

By Jon McGregor

When the birds started dying there were certain women who took it upon themselves to go about the place and gather them up.

The deaths came in great seasonal waves, the birds falling from the skies like autumn leaves, and although by then their numbers were too small to form anything like a drift or a clutter there was still a general sense of inconvenience.

Or distaste. It would be distaste.

The cause of the deaths was something atmospheric; something not properly understood until it was too late. By this point there were too many other demands for attention.

There were women who began pointedly gathering the bodies, announcing publicly their intention to do so, as if this would be a solution to the problem rather than a way of simply tidying it away.

The cause of the deaths having a strangely preservative effect, the bodies of the birds stiffening slowly, the feathers taking on a brittle gloss and the eyes a glassine glaze.

Glassine. No. Come on.

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When he meets Maggie the first time she has one of these birds stuffed downwards into the breast pocket of her shirt, and although he hadn't intended on looking he can't help that it caught his eye. The eyes drift downward of their own accord. They're not intended to. Some control is called for. A man like Mickey would be inclined to leave them there, but Harvey has always prided himself on some measure of self-control. It simply isn't appropriate to go about the place staring at a woman's chest. No matter if that chest is drawing the eye downwards with the pure unexpectedness of a dead magpie's glossy tail feathers.

Maggie, the woman says, tipping her head to one side as though she recognises him.

The women arrange the birds into artful displays: in shop windows, on garden walls, in the very trees from which they fall

Harvey. He holds out his hand, although you weren't supposed to do that any more. Or perhaps you were again, was it?

Yes, she says.

He was assuming the bird was dead. But possibly it was only stunned, and she was taking it to a vet. She had no time to stand here talking, in that case, although she was showing no signs of wanting to get away. Were there still vets, now? She had mentioned the weather, and the time of year, and now she's telling him how good the coffee is here. It is, he agrees. Giorgio knows what he's doing.

He has his own coffee right there on the table in front of him, with the newspaper. It's his daily habit. She's clutching hers in a takeaway cup. It's good to have a daily routine. Takeaway. So she's on her way somewhere. To the vets. There was some reason she'd stopped to introduce herself, was there? She's showing no sign of explaining the dead bird, or even acknowledging it, from which he gathers that it's not for him to address either. It's just there. At eye level. At the level his eyes are not intended to be.

He asks if she's local. She seems put out by the question. She works in the same studio as Giorgio's friend, she says, the young woman who made the cups. Harvey nods thoughtfully, as though he knows what she's talking about. Giorgio tells him things sometimes, and they don't always stick. He nods and says of course, and she asks what he's doing himself?

Retired, he says. Semi-retired. Because Mickey keeps dragging him back into things, he doesn't add. But retired, essentially. He would have preferred her to look more surprised. She says, well OK, Harvey, it was good to see you. She says she has to get on.

Once she's gone he's left looking around him, like: excuse me, did anyone else notice the dead bird in that woman's pocket there? Just me? Giorgio is too busy with the coffee machine. The other customers are hunched over their phones. Mickey the Hat is outside, talking to his dog.

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The women coordinate their activities and intentions across a range of public forums, take the birds away and arrange them into artful displays: in shop windows, on garden walls, in the very trees from which they fall. Fine garden wire is required, and upholstery tacks, and glue. Great labour is expended on their creation. Tips are shared. It's unclear whether the displays are intended as memorial, or warning, or a new form of superstition. Unclear in some cases whether there's too much intention at all. The displays are quickly removed, on grounds of public health, but not before the pictures have been transmitted, and circulated widely. Transmitted. Downloaded. Uploaded. Posted.

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Mickey, he says, later, as they're walking across the park with that dog tripping in and out of their feet. Mickey, did you see that woman? With the bird, I mean. In her pocket? Mickey squints when he smokes, ▸

ELEANOR TAYLOR

◂ always has done, must be 40 years now and he's still not got the hang of it, blowing the smoke into his own eyes and blinking the sting away, squinting through the bluey plume. You what now, he says; what's that?

What was that. The feathers in the pocket. Where were they, now? Mickey calling the dog to come back, this dog, it'll be the end of me, it's all Linda's doing, I knew she was never going to walk it, it's all just a ruse to get me out of the house.

A ruse, is it, Mickey?

Yes, H. Is there an echo out here? A fucking ruse. Anyway, what. What were you saying? That weren't a bird in her pocket, she was just pleased to see you. Pleased to see you. Wheezing his way into that laugh of his, like he'll just go over and die right there.

That dog running in and out of the bushes, barking up at the trees. The dog remembers the birds that should still be here, even if everyone else has moved on. Some instinct in the genes, or the scent still lingering like a feather sliding down through the air. The dog going nuts over it, running stitches between Mick and the trees. Where did they go? Where did they go? They were here just now, just a minute before, what did you do with the birds, what did you do? Mick barely noticing the frenzy, still bent double and wheezing his way through that laugh.

***

The coffee shop was not their usual type of haunt, historically. He and Mickey. Mickey the Hat. Harvey the Goods. Nobody called him Harvey the Goods any more, despite Mick's best efforts. Not that Harvey had ever encouraged it. It hardly rang of discretion. Times have changed. When younger they went for darkened places; pubs and bars, lowered blinds, etched glass, smoky corners with exit routes and clear sight of the doors. Pints and something stronger. The coffee shop is something else, is Harvey wanting to step away from all that: I'm retired now, I'm off out of here. Step blinking into the fucking light.

There's a lot of light. It's a small space, a single-storey timber-framed room bodged on to the front of a row of terraces, large windows on three sides, juts out into the street. The light comes in at various angles throughout the day and moves across the room. He can sit in the window and look out across the park. The light moving through the trees. The birds in the branches, the birds on the ground. The women moving about their business, gathering the birds. The walls are painted white. The window frames are painted white. The counter is painted white, and Giorgio serves the coffee in these very thin white cups that are so delicate he flinches whenever you pick one up. When the steam shoots up from the coffee machine it hangs in high luminous clouds overhead, shot through with sunlight. Ethereal would be a word for it. Mickey remarked on this the first time he came in.

Jesus, H. It's like God's fucking waiting room in here.

It's well lit.

It's not fucking natural. Jesus. Look at it. Angel Gabriel over there, writing down the names in his big fucking book.

Little piece of heaven.

Not that Harvey says the words *little piece of heaven* out loud. Not until he gets back to his place that evening, when the phrase occurs to him as a way of both riffing off the point that Mick was making while also countering its implicit criticism with the point that he likes the little coffee shop, he likes it a lot, he finds it peaceful and quiet and calming at a time in his life when those things have become important to him. Familiar. Familiar is important. Little piece of heaven, he says to the counter top as he chops the vegetables. Little piece of heaven, he mutters again, savouring the sound of it, sweating the onions and reaching up for the extractor fan switch. Cooking his own dinner now these days. No more interruptions and questions. Taking his time. Slide open the doors to the little roof terrace and let the city noises pile softly in from a distance. The roof terrace being what had convinced him to take the apartment some time back, from a letting agent who ignored his questions about why no one any longer called them flats. That secure outdoor space, the height of it above the street, the volume of light those French doors brought in. The other apartments being empty most of the time, meaning nobody else knocking about the place. He doesn't have visitors. Nobody knows where he lives. He has a well-equipped kitchen, a good stereo, a comfortable bed. He likes to come home and cook decent food and listen to jazz and have no one make sarcastic remarks about those choices. He likes to sit in the evening and write things down. Set the ideas in their rightful order before they drift out of place.

Familiar is important. Little piece of heaven, he mutters, sweating the onions and reaching up for the extractor fan switch

Times change. People adapt. Familiarity takes hold as soon as contempt. There is little alarm when the birds start falling from the sky. Those soft sudden thumps as a magpie or a starling hits the deck. There is some initial discussion on the news. A little conversation in the street. But soon people start to take offence when it's mentioned. We've been over this already, this has been discussed. It's not like there's anything we can do. There's no need to ram it down my throat. Why do they have go around making all this fuss. *They* in this case being the women insisting on the displays. The preserving of the birds and the display of the birds. The wearing of the birds about the person.

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He's heading out for his morning coffee when he sees the woman again. He almost doesn't recognise her. She's rolled her sleeves up and tied her hair back and is leaning at an unlikely angle across a crowded shop-window display. There is nothing protruding from her breast pocket this time. There is a glossy black bird being fixed to a pile of books beside an antique globe. Hanging overhead is a brass birdcage with an open door. The bird is being fixed to stand erect, poised, ready for flight. A crow, perhaps.

A raven. The woman with a coil of fine wire dangling from one finger, a row of dressmaker's pins pinched between her lips.

From somewhere he remembers great flocks of these birds, settling on the beaches at dusk. Beech trees. Beech woods. Settling in the beech woods at dusk. That clattering racket they made. Someone explaining the word *roost*. And now only silence. Shop window displays. So quick to get used to the way things became.

Maggie's having trouble with the bird standing up. It keeps leaning over to one side. He's not sure where he knows her name from. She looks up but she doesn't quite see him. He wonders if he could offer to help. It wasn't always appreciated, these days. You could hold the door but you couldn't carry the bags. Or it was perhaps the other way around. Mickey wouldn't stop to consider. Mickey would just go straight ahead.

Once he's inside the shop he has to peer over all the items in the window to talk, and Maggie is too preoccupied to really look his way.

I thought if you might I could help if you are, with the wire, with the bird. She stops moving. He can see her putting his words in the right order. They came out in a tangle. She turns but she doesn't quite see him. She says they're not actually open yet and she's still getting ready. She says it with a question in her voice but he doesn't know what she's asking. He waits. She's still leaning at a precarious angle, and the bird isn't yet fixed into place. He thinks she must surely need some kind of assistance.

He asks if she's collected many of these now, if the project is ongoing. If there's been any problem with the authorities. She turns to him now, and steps out of the window. The expression on her face makes him think he's got her name wrong. She tells him they're not open yet.

At the park he wonders where he put down his newspaper. He was carrying it just now, he was sure. He checks his pockets and he looks round behind him. He was on his way somewhere and now he's not sure.

There's a newsagent around here somewhere. Near the park. Or was that gone now? A coffee shop. He could do with a coffee. He hasn't had one this morning. A sit down would be nice. There was a coffee shop around here somewhere. It wasn't too far from the park.

In the third wave, some of the women took to wearing a bird about their person: stitched discreetly into the lining of a coat, or stuffed defiantly into the breast pocket of a shirt, tail-feathers erupting forth like a glossy corsage. The trend developed quickly, and the fine garden wire from the first and second waves was put to use mounting birds on shoulders and headpieces, and soon enough it was no surprise at all to come face to nonchalant face with a mounted starling or magpie while waiting in line.

There were prohibitions that soon came into effect. Laws were passed, arrests were made.

The atmospheric causes that afflicted the birds turned out to have a transmissible quality. The women with the birds begin to disappear from the streets.

And now there is no mention of it at all. Only the absence of birds in the sky, in the trees. Only the quiet at dusk. The rattle of a coffee cup placed down on its saucer. An outburst of steam in the room. The barking of a dog as it's tied to a lamp post. The creak of the entering door. A woman steps forwards to greet him. The shock of tail-feathers catches his eye. ●

Jon McGregor's most recent novel, "Lean Fall Stand", is published by Fourth Estate

The NS Poem

A reply to Wallace Stevens, with a line from John Donne

John Burnside

Cold in the shade, and yet, by afternoon
the snow is burning off along
the fence-line, where it lay in drifts for weeks,
a chill white, warming slowly to a blur
of slush and haze.
I don't have a mind

of winter. Only the timeworn saltlick of a heart
which can by no way be express'd
but negatives;
yet nothing is more erotic than the way
the snowmelt spills and spends into the ditch,
still cold as ice, but mesmerised with green,

and though there's nothing here that I could
name,
I feel it, mesozoic, intimate,
one moment on the cusp of something else,
not one thing or the other: something else.

John Burnside is a Scottish author and poet, and the New Statesman's nature columnist. His most recent poetry collection is "Learning to Sleep" (Jonathan Cape)

The life of a lesbian nun

Paul Verhoeven's latest sinful rampage follows two women in an Italian convent in the early 17th century

By Ryan Gilbey

"We must not be seen nude," whispers the title character of *Benedetta* to one of her fellow nuns in a northern Italian convent in the early 17th century. Oh dear. Are you going to tell her that she's in a movie by Paul Verhoeven, the Dutch provocateur who made *Showgirls*, or should I?

Then again, his previous film was *Elle*, in which Isabelle Huppert starred as a video-game executive who responds coolly, even playfully, to the trauma of being raped – an infinitely complex character worthy of Buñuel. In an outrageous scene at the end of that movie, she is thanked by her attacker's devoutly Catholic wife for having provided him with an outlet for his extreme sadistic impulses.

This small, almost unplayable role might have confounded another actor, but Virginie Efira carried it off with devastating sincerity. Now Efira takes spiritual conviction to another level as Benedetta, whose religious visions and taboo desires bring her into conflict with the Church. The title of Verhoeven's factual source material – Judith Brown's 1985 book *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* – gives it to us straight. To this, the director adds his trademark special sauce: excess, in all its forms.

Benedetta's visions start off benignly. An image of Christ calling her from a sun-blanched hilltop to be his wife comes while she is performing in a play at the

No holding back: *Benedetta* offers religious visions, taboo desires and director Paul Verhoeven's trademark excess and iconoclasm

convent, causing her toes to wiggle delightedly when she's meant to be dead.

An escalation in the intensity of the visions coincides with the arrival of Bartolomea, a woebegone sort taken in by the convent to save her from parental abuse. The endearingly pop-eyed Daphne Patakia plays Bartolomea with an earthy, punky naivety. Her first question is, "Where do we shit?" Enchanted, Benedetta accompanies her to the relevant hole, then hands her a fistful of hay with which to clean herself. It's love.

In no time at all, Benedetta is imagining herself besieged by giant, writhing serpents. After being beckoned by Christ to the cross and asked to disrobe, she develops stigmata. The sceptical abbess Felicita (Charlotte Rampling) points out that the nun had been asleep when the wounds appeared, rather than at prayer. "No miracle occurs in bed, believe me," she sneers. Rampling brings a lifetime's sourness to the part. Lemons would turn sweet in her presence.

Having staged Benedetta's initial visions in all their lurid B-movie ripeness, Verhoeven abruptly starts withholding them. We can see the stigmata, and hear the bestial voice that roars from her lips during these episodes, but we are no longer privy to the internal catalyst. The effect is to introduce ambiguity just at the point when the stakes are at their highest – to demand from us our own leap of faith. This is made more complicated when Benedetta profits from her newly privileged position. She is made abbess herself, and begins bossing her sisters around based on orders from the man upstairs. She passes on the Lord's instructions to Felicita, then turns to another nun and says: "Jesus didn't mention *you*." Burn!

As abbess, Benedetta is moved into her own private quarters. This, in the words of *MTV Cribs*, is where the magic happens. But how do two nuns in love pass the time away from prying eyes? Don't think that Verhoeven, of all people, hasn't considered that. A scandalous scene not found in Brown's learned study shows Bartolomea working away with a knife at one end of a handheld wooden replica of the Virgin Mary, producing in the process an artisanal sex toy. As Lauren Bacall very nearly put it in *To Have and Have Not*: "You know how to whittle, don't you...?"

Anyone who is familiar with *The Devils* or *The Name of the Rose* will realise that this hysterical hothouse environment can't survive the intrusion of hostile external forces. The downside of Verhoeven's fever-pitch film-making is that by the time the papal nuncio (Lambert Wilson) turns up with his torture instruments, closely followed by the plague, an audience is likely to have exhausted its reserves of outrage and horror. Whatever reactions Verhoeven hopes to elicit during the film's final half-hour, numbness surely couldn't be among them. Let us be grateful, though, that at 83 years old he remains as iconoclastic, and as unable to rein himself in, as ever. ●

"Benedetta" is in cinemas from 15 April

Television

The spectre of Robert Maxwell

A new documentary series on the media mogul is powerfully strange and revealing

By Rachel Cooke

House of Maxwell
BBC Two,
aired 4 April,
9pm; now
on catch-up

One day some time in the late 1980s, the media mogul Robert Maxwell took a call from his daughter Ghislaine. "Miaow!" said Ghislaine, to which her father unhesitatingly replied: "Miaow! Miaow!" According to Maxwell's then secretary Carol Bragoli, who could hear them via a speakerphone, this familial cat-play went on for some time: ten increasingly elaborate "miaows" were exchanged before daddy cut to the chase. "What are you doing?" he finally asked his darling youngest. Her response struck Bragoli as uncannily accurate: an existential summation of what it meant to be Ghislaine Maxwell. "Nothing," the boss's daughter told her father, in her crisp, Princess Diana-like voice.

In Colin Barr's *House of Maxwell*, there are many moments like this: not only powerfully strange, but so perfectly revealing as to seem as if they've been lifted from the kind of sprawling novels Tom Wolfe used to write. In his films, Barr has deployed some hot new material: a series of secret recordings of Maxwell's panicked senior executives, made when it was clear his business was on the brink of collapse (after his death at sea in 1991 it was, of course, revealed that he had stolen £460m from the pension assets of the Mirror Group). But these conversations are, in truth, not half so fascinating nor so monstrous as some of the other stuff Barr has unearthed. Here is Maxwell on TV with the magician Paul Daniels, who performs a trick in which £1m is spirited from one spot to another. And here he is at the Holocaust remembrance centre, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, weeping at the stone marking the shtetl in Carpathian Ruthenia where he was born (most of his family was murdered in Auschwitz). We even catch – how? – a glimpse of him on the deck of ▸

We even catch a glimpse of Maxwell on the deck of his yacht, hours before he went overboard

◂ his yacht hours before he went overboard.

He looks preposterously solid and fleshy; a human cliff of a man with outlandish eyebrows and a temper that ticks like an alarm clock. But he's ghostly, too: a friendless spectre who inhabits the stage set of his life without any real conviction. His grand home in Oxford was leased from the council; his tie, towards the end, was spattered with stains. Fear and paranoia are all around. The widow of one executive describes how her husband was told, following his discovery that funds were missing, to vary his route home from work; it was him or Maxwell, she felt, and on hearing that the monster had drowned, she experienced a relief that even now brings her to tears. An antique dealer cheerily lifts the shade from a lamp bought at a sale of Maxwell's things, to reveal – ta-dah! – two listening devices. The man didn't only spy on his employees and biographers, but his wife and children, too.

It's on his children and their grim legacy (not that I'm making any excuses for anyone) that Barr's eye ultimately falls: on white-faced Kevin and Ian, charged with fraud – and later acquitted – after his death; on Ghislaine, then constructed almost entirely of Trifari earrings and shoulder pads, who departs for New York hoping to "start again". Three weeks after Maxwell's funeral, she was photographed with the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, her eyes fixed on his face as those of the driver of a fast car might be fixed on the horizon.

A friend of hers appears: Christopher Mason, an Englishman then in Manhattan. When Epstein was 40, Ghislaine asked Mason to write a song for his birthday; performed before six men in black tie, it contained a line about his 24-hour erections. And so we return to the series' horrible beginning, when an excitable true-crime podcaster, Scott Sharp, is seen filming himself outside the prison where Ghislaine Maxwell is held (she was convicted of child sex trafficking and other offences in 2021, crimes that connect directly to her relationship with the late Epstein). "Listen to it," says Sharp, gleefully. "You can hear people screaming." I strained my ears, but I could only pick up the rumble of traffic, the mournful sound of litter blowing across a car park. A key turns in a door, and the world with it. The really big questions always go unanswered. ●

Succession: Robert Maxwell with daughter Ghislaine and wife Elisabeth, 1990

MIRRORPIX/GETTY IMAGES

Radio

Desert island kicks

By Jason Cowley

Life Goals
Apple Podcasts/ Spotify

I was a recent guest on the *Life Goals* podcast, on which football fans are invited to choose eight goals that mean something special to them or define moments of transition in their lives. You are also asked to select accompanying pieces of music for each goal. It's a kind of sporting *Desert Island Discs*, presented by an ardent Spurs fan named Theo Delaney whose enthusiasm and generosity of character elevate the podcast into something special.

I'd never previously listened to *Life Goals*, but I understand it has a dedicated niche audience and I've since been delving into its archive to listen to fascinating conversations with notable sportswriters such as Paul Hayward and Simon Kuper, political journalists such as Danny Finkelstein and Steve Richards, and celebrities such as Noel Gallagher and the TV presenter Kelly Cates.

Delaney takes his guests on a journey through their lives, and along the way he tries to discover how we first became interested in football and why we support the teams we do.

In his essay "Dear England", published on the *Players' Tribune* website in the run-up to last summer's Euros, delayed by a year because of the pandemic, Gareth Southgate captured the essence – and indeed mystery – of fandom, perhaps as well as anyone I've read, when recalling his earliest experiences of watching the England national team. "You remember where you were watching England games. And who you were watching with. And who *you* were at the time."

Delaney, like Southgate, understands that being a fan is about much more than sharing those moments of joy and disappointment that can unite not just friends and family but sometimes tens of thousands of strangers in a kind of collective rapture. Fandom is also about identity and belonging, about finding somewhere to belong. And it can help you understand better the person you are – or, at least, used to be. That is the trick and magic of the podcast. Never such innocence again, as Larkin wrote. ●

THE BACK PAGES

Gardening

Alice Vincent

Spinning the wingnuts on my flower press, I put petals into hibernation

JILL FERRY / TREVILLION IMAGES

He came downstairs wielding the table plan and we both stared at it a bit. I'd drawn the line at paying £75 to order one through the internet so we ended up drawing lines, instead, and writing the names of our favourite people in a pencilled grid. It was, we admitted, a little austere, in spite of my enlarged scrawl yelling: "Wedding Feast!"

I opened the sideboard and had a rummage, unearthing a plywood flower press. My sister and I were children of the Nineties and we had similar ones: two small squares of wood held together by long bolts and wingnuts big enough for little fingers to spin. The outlines of flowers – poppies and petunias – were ▸

◂ lacquered on the top in green paint. A couple of years ago, she'd found the press on a neighbour's wall, put out for someone else to enjoy, and it found its way to me.

When the fritillaries started to flower late last March, I opened up the press and laid their heads against a torn-off piece of paper marked with the date. Theirs was a bed of two faded octagons of sugar paper, sandwiched between corrugated cardboard of the same shape, layered up like a cake beneath the gentle pressure of the wingnuts. As March turned to April, and April to May, I continued to cut flowers for the press. Dark violet crocuses, their soft stems threaded like 10-denier tights; pansies in Cadbury Caramel tones of purple and yellow. A single "Totally Tangerine" *geum*, the unabashed orange of its prime faded to a buttery yellow. The first sweet pea, cut on 13 June, three short days after it bloomed, petals like petticoats.

Pressing flowers is like taking photographs on film, or, I suppose, like gardening. You take a punt on something that involves a little sacrifice – your time, an exposure, the prime of a flower that could be admired while alive – and you delay your gratification with no guarantee of the results. One hopes they will be beautiful, but to judge them as worthwhile misses the point; it's as much about the means as the ends. There is a ritual to it: choosing the flower, waiting for the right moment to cut it – a rainy day spells mould in the press – and then submitting it to a kind of hibernation.

When I was a child, the weeks I'd have to wait before seeing what my flower press had created felt like an eternity. Now, I tuck things away with no understanding of when I might see them again, or whether I'll even remember what was in there. When I pressed these and scribbled down the date, I held a future version of myself in mind: someone who would trace the course of a gardening year through these remnants. I suppose I thought they might be useful. I certainly didn't imagine I'd be lifting up the cardboard and the paper and forcing those timeslips out of place in a last-minute scramble to tart up a wedding table plan.

I wasn't unveiling these specimens for an exacting return to last year's garden, but to find ones pretty enough to meet my partner's surprisingly particular tastes (the cornflowers were deemed "too scraggly", the fuzz of a poppy seed casing "a bit manky"). They piled up in a strange mini-meadow on top of our friends' names: violas, nasturtiums and silken poppy petals mingling in a way they never did when they were alive. We shuffled them around the table plan – I wanted an illogical smattering of random flowers, he recreated impossible little posies in neat corners.

This process – far less romantic than it sounds – showed me something else. Freed from the press and away from the dates that tied them to the past, the flowers became objects rather than artefacts: something to fill white space on a day that would define our future. It's an unexpected ending that has carved out new space. Now the press had been emptied, I could start again. After I'd glued down the chosen petals, I went out into the late March sunshine and cut the head of an *iris reticulata* "Pauline", laid it between the sugar paper next to the date, and spun down those wingnuts once more. ●

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.

Better late than never
An "antique" Latin book has been returned to a university library nearly 50 years after it was due back. The book, an 1875 edition of *Querolus*, was due to be returned to UCL Libraries in the summer of 1974.

The librarian said her "jaw dropped" when she received the book, which was returned anonymously. At a rate of 10p per day, the library fine for the book's late return would have been £1,254.
Evening Standard (Steve Morley)

Burning bush
A usually quiet neighbourhood was alarmed to see a hedge set alight. The hedge belongs to Lakenham retiree Glen Boden. He said: "I had just got out of the bath and was drying off when I noticed how bright it was outside – which was strange given the time."
Norwich Evening News (David Walsh)

The bare necessities
A man escaped from a prison van – wearing only his socks and pants. Kyle Eglington, 32, ran off after assaulting security officers in Poole, Dorset.

He had been charged with robbery. Superintendent Heather Dixey said: "Anyone who has seen a man in the area in just his underwear and socks, please report it."
Sunday Mirror (Daragh Brady)

Dog-ray vision
A dog suffering from the rare eye disease Pannus is now wearing £100 sunglasses to keep the rays at bay. Megan Novak, 32, of Worthing, West Sussex, bought Rex Specs for her pooch Cocoa, whose corneas had UV damage.
Sunday Mirror (Amanda Welles)

ALEX BRENCHLEY

Health Matters

Dr Phil Whitaker

In a new global survey of mental health, the UK is slumped in last place

In March, Sapien Labs published the second annual "Mental State of the World" report. Its survey of 223,000 adults from selected countries confirms what many intuitively feel: the UK is currently a nation very ill at ease. We are slumped at the bottom of the league, joint lowest with South Africa, and well adrift of the 32 other countries featuring in the report.

Sapien Labs uses a tool called the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ), administered through a 15-minute online questionnaire, to gauge respondents' psychological health across a range of measures: mood and outlook, drive and motivation, social relationships, cognition and mind-body connection. Interestingly, while wealthy Spain and Switzerland demonstrate high levels of mental well-being among their populations, they share the top five slots with three much poorer nations – Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Puerto Rico.

In order to take part in the survey, respondents have to be online. In poorer countries, with low internet penetration, participants will come disproportionately from privileged elites, which might skew the results. Nevertheless, the survey strongly suggests that money alone doesn't buy mental well-being. Affluent Anglophone nations such as the US, Canada, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand are all clustered in the lower third of the table. This is not because speaking English is psychologically injurious; rather it probably reflects common cultural factors. Across the 34 countries surveyed, being employed and being well-educated – as most of the Anglophone and European populations studied are – were both associated with higher levels of mental well-being, but these beneficial effects are degraded the more strongly a society bases reward and recognition on an individual's work performance, and the more individualistic the culture is. The fruits of economic prosperity are good, then, but only in countries that continue to cherish a thing called society.

The report's authors are alarmed by the generational differences they found. In every participant country, it is young adults (18-24) who have the highest levels of mental distress, while the over-65s are the most stable. The authors acknowledge that this could simply reflect a benign trend towards greater mental well-being with increasing maturity. However, they are concerned that they've uncovered an epidemic of mental ill-health among the young. They cite pre-2010 studies that showed young adults to have been the most carefree and content age group. What, they wonder, could have led to this dramatic reversal in little more than a decade?

The MHQ is a new instrument, so the Sapien Labs results may not be directly comparable to those of earlier studies, but there could be something real going on. The younger generation has been affected by Covid in a very particular way: compelled to sacrifice education, socialising and relationship formation because of a disease that is typically trivial at their age. The more stringent a country's Covid restrictions, the lower the MHQ scores.

Beyond Covid, the report's authors speculate whether they might be detecting a worrying effect of the digital revolution: the mental health consequences of lives lived predominantly online as opposed to interpersonally. But there are other equally plausible explanations for an epidemic of mental distress among the young that don't get a mention: the threat from climate change on those with longest to live, as well as the economic and employment insecurities still being felt following the 2008 crash.

As Sapien Labs continues to gather data it will become clear whether these high levels of youth mental distress persist or dissipate as individuals move through the life course. In the meantime, urgent political action is needed to resuscitate UK society. There is a sickness at the heart of our culture, the remedy for which can be discerned by looking to our European neighbours, whose economic circumstances are similar to our own but whose values and culture are far more conducive to mental well-being. ●

Economic prosperity is good, but only in countries that continue to cherish a thing called society

CHARLOTTE TROUNCE

Down and Out

Nicholas Lezard

I lack most things in life, but have somehow acquired a third Swiss Army Knife

When I mislay something valuable and then find it again I put it to my lips and kiss it, like a child

Right now, I wonder whether I am going mad, or have gone mad, and it is all because of a penknife. A nice red Swiss Army Knife. You know what they're like, I don't have to describe it. It's got a decent number of blades and tools on it, it's not one of the cheap or tiny ones. The problem is, it's not mine. And I have no idea how I came by it. And it's not as if I need one. I already have two.

The first is an item of great sentimental value. It was my children's present to me on the first Christmas I spent having been ejected from the family home. I used to be slightly worse than average at losing items such as keys or penknives or Zippo lighters but ever since that exile, and my understanding that I shall be travelling light in the world for the rest of my life, I don't lose things like that now. When one has very little one clings to it fiercely. When I mislay something valuable and then find it again I put it to my lips and kiss it, like a child.

Then, about three years ago, when I was living in Scotland, in the MacHovel, I lost the knife. I didn't drop it down a Munro or anything, it just wasn't there any more. As it happened, my daughter was staying with me at the time and she said not to worry, it's only a penknife, let's go into town and buy another one.

So I dried my tears and we went off to Blairgowrie, where they have two hunting, shooting and fishing shops right next to each other, one owned by the ex-husband of the other (I gather their rivalry is bitter). So I bought the exact same model of knife, only this time in black, for mourning, and when we got back I made us a cup of tea and plumped up the sofa cushions and of course the original knife was under one of them.

"So now you have two," said my daughter.

But now I have three. How the hell does one acquire a knife without one's knowledge? Especially a Swiss Army Knife? It's not as if they grow on trees or something. I asked my children if they had lost a knife around Christmas, which is the last time I've been in anyone else's home apart from my own, and my friend B—'s, since May of last year. Maybe one of them had a Swiss Army Knife, and I had pocketed it, assuming it was mine? No, they said.

I must say, that of all the things that the universe could have chosen to materialise on my bedside table one spring day, a Swiss Army Knife when I already have two of them does not feature on the list of ultra-desirables. (It's actually a slightly better knife, in that it has a sort of saw/file thing the others do not, but as it is not an attachment I have ever felt a deep gaping need for, I do not feel enriched thereby.) I can't give it away because not only would that be weird ("Hey, fancy a Swiss Army Knife? It's red and has tweezers, and a saw/file thingy that I suppose you can also use for scaling fish"), but it also must belong to someone. I just haven't found out who yet.

Other things I have more than enough of: spectacles. I now have four pairs of them. One pair is utterly inaccessible, eaten by the mound of papers and books between the bed and the wardrobe, but it's there, I know. I have always had a mild fear of losing my glasses but this is ridiculous.

Also: nutmegs. This is surely a problem everyone has. You buy a jar of nutmegs because you have moved somewhere new since fleeing devastation. And then that's it, they're with you forever, or until the next calamity. You know that fable about the little bird that sharpens its beak against a mountain once every thousand years, and when the mountain is worn down, a day of eternity will have gone by? Same deal with nutmegs. You scrape a few molecules of nutmeg into your spinach whenever you make spinach. Say, once a month. When you have finished one nutmeg, a day of eternity will etc.

And that's it as far as abundance goes. If I was describing pretty much anything else I would have to use the abessive case, used in Uralic languages to describe the absence or lack of something. It suddenly occurs to me that today marks exactly 18 months of living somewhere without a teaspoon. And yet I drink a fair amount of tea. Explain that, so-called experts. I have also managed to live that long without a washing-up rack, a functioning vacuum cleaner, a dedicated tea strainer, a jumper, any art on the walls, a sofa of any description, a comfy chair unless you count a deckchair, lampshades, or even fitted sheets (they were all out of them in Debenhams and, well, you know what happened to Debenhams). Or a love life. Oh, wait, I did have one of those for a bit but I mislaid it.

As for my bank balance, that in itself is a whole exercise in the abessive case. I have, in the words of the Fugs, a whole lot of nothing. Apart from nutmegs, spectacles, and Swiss bloody Army Knives. ●

Off the Record

Tracey Thorn

After eight happy years of column writing, I think I'll take that sabbatical

A friend once made me laugh by telling me that when his father used to embark on one of his oft-repeated stories his mother would quietly mutter in the background, "This is a recording, this is a recording." The phrase always comes to mind when I fear I might be repeating myself, either in company or in print, and I have to admit that I have had that fear more and more in recent months.

I start to write one of these columns and then pull myself up short, thinking, "Have I said all this already? In these exact same words?" I open up the folder where I keep completed pieces and trawl through them, hoping not to find an entire paragraph recurring. It has made me consider the situation, and it is with some surprise that I realise I have now been appearing in the *New Statesman* for a full eight years.

I never expected to last so long, imagining I would run out of steam, or be replaced by someone, I don't know, younger? Better? More qualified? Instead I have found myself becoming increasingly at home, happy to be part of such a great team, honoured and still slightly astonished when I see myself tucked in the back pages of a magazine so full of big ideas and big stories.

And yet. The fear of running dry has now become ever-present, and I am relieved to be able to say that instead of quitting entirely I have been allowed to take a long sabbatical. It's a word that gets used a lot nowadays, and I google it, realising I'm not entirely sure what it means. There I learn of its biblical origin (of course, from the Hebrew word for the sabbath) and how it referred to taking a year-long break from working in the fields every seven years. Well I've been working these fields for eight years now, so I'm overdue my break thank you.

And I do want to say thank you – to anyone who has read any of these columns, and to the editors who have allowed me so much freedom. Not once have I been pressured into a hot take, and in fact I've shied away from those moments when music has hit the news, my feelings often being too mixed for me to easily package into anything like an opinion piece.

Instead I've roamed in a fairly random manner, telling stories about having lunch at the House of Lords with Brian Rix, visiting New York, attending the Brit Awards, gardening, guest-editing the *Today* programme, bringing up twins, going on holiday, listening to audiobooks, joining protest marches, DJ-ing at Duckie, mourning the death of my father, grieving over my kids leaving home, and flying to Australia to write a book.

I've been allowed to write about artists I love – from Chrissie Hynde, Sade, David Bowie, Mavis Staples and Björk, through to George Michael, Jens Lekman, Stephen Sondheim, Sylvester, Poly Styrene and Tyler, the Creator, taking in Nick Cave, the Raincoats, Madonna, Taylor Swift, Bette Davis and the Rolling Stones along the way.

When I started writing here my kids were 13 and 16; my life still revolved around the school day, the school week and the school term. Now they have all left home – with occasional returns due to lockdowns and flat leases. I have more of my time back, and more time to wonder what to do with it. But with less of it ahead of me, I feel certain that I don't want to waste any of it.

Lockdown left me creatively stunted – unable to write a book, or any songs, struggling just to put together a few bleak thoughts about how stuck we all were. My mood sank. I took refuge in this column, and was grateful. Now, coming out the other end, I am trying to gently nurture the creative flame, without beating myself up about the inevitable setbacks.

I've been sitting in the garden these last few days in the unexpected warm sunshine, thinking about spring, and new beginnings. March is like that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when we go from black and white to technicolour, and as I look around at crocuses the colour of egg yolks, and the neon flare of new green leaves on red dogwood stems, I think, "Come on then. Something new. Time for something new." ●

I never expected to last so long, imagining I would be replaced by someone, I don't know, younger? Better? More qualified?

CHARLOTTE TROUNCE

Advertorial

How we can democratise medicine and create fair access

Living in the shadow of Covid-19, we're all too aware of the impact that viruses can have on our daily lives, and how critical our response is

In partnership with

Covid-19 highlights disparities in access to effective healthcare

Seven years ago, in the wake of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Bill Gates spoke about how we need to approach disease outbreaks differently. In an eerily accurate prediction, he explained that the next epidemic could be dramatically more devastating than Ebola due to our lack of preparedness. But with our advanced technologies and modern medicine it would be possible to mitigate a negative outcome.

Despite warnings from experts, the Covid-19 outbreak caught the world by surprise and many countries struggled to contain and treat the virus. The world saw it spread exponentially, leading to millions of deaths and tens of millions of people living with the long-lasting effects of the disease. The virus also highlighted the stark difference between developed and developing nations and how, when faced with a global threat, the world is still not ready to pull together and work for the good of the whole.

Changing the global approach to disease control

We need to approach mass disease outbreaks differently. To effectively prevent and treat Covid-19 and any future pandemics, we must ensure there is fair and equitable access to medicines, as well as robust supply chains to deliver treatment to places most in need. To address these issues, industry and academia – along with charities and philanthropic organisations – are looking at new and cheaper routes for manufacturing drugs and vaccines to fight future diseases. For Covid-19, one such drug has been in the spotlight in recent months – the antiviral therapy Molnupiravir.

Molnupiravir was originally developed to treat influenza but has since been shown to be effective in treating Covid-19. Studies show that it offers approximately a 30 per cent reduction in both hospitalisations and death from Covid-19 (for mild to moderate disease) in unvaccinated patients with at least one co-morbidity. Alongside its efficacy in treating the disease it is also relatively simple to produce, making it a useful tool in our arsenal. Now approved in the UK, India and the US, Molnupiravir could offer a lifeline to patients in developing countries where vaccination rates are low, while relieving pressure on already overstretched healthcare systems.

The need is clear: we must find efficient, sustainable and cost-effective

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER / PETE CARR

Industry and academia – along with charities – are looking at new and cheaper routes for manufacturing drugs and vaccines

ways to produce Molnupiravir and strip the drug's manufacturing process from its "patent bonds" so these new methods can be employed by pharmaceutical companies around the world. We are now one step closer to achieving this goal thanks to a joint venture between The University of Manchester, Prozomix and Sterling Pharma Solutions, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Scientists have developed an efficient and low-cost biocatalytic process to manufacture Molnupiravir.

Discovering sustainable and cost-effective ways to production

Through directed evolution – a powerful enzyme-engineering technology – researchers have developed a new enzyme that produces N-hydroxy-cytidine (a key intermediate in the production of Molnupiravir) at high yield and as part of a time- and resource-efficient method. N-hydroxy-cytidine is then converted to Molnupiravir using a second enzymatic process.

This new technique offers scalability, efficiency and sustainability for industry, all of which are essential for securing fair access to drugs. When faced with a global pandemic, drug production methods should ideally be open-source and available for use by pharmaceutical manufacturing companies.

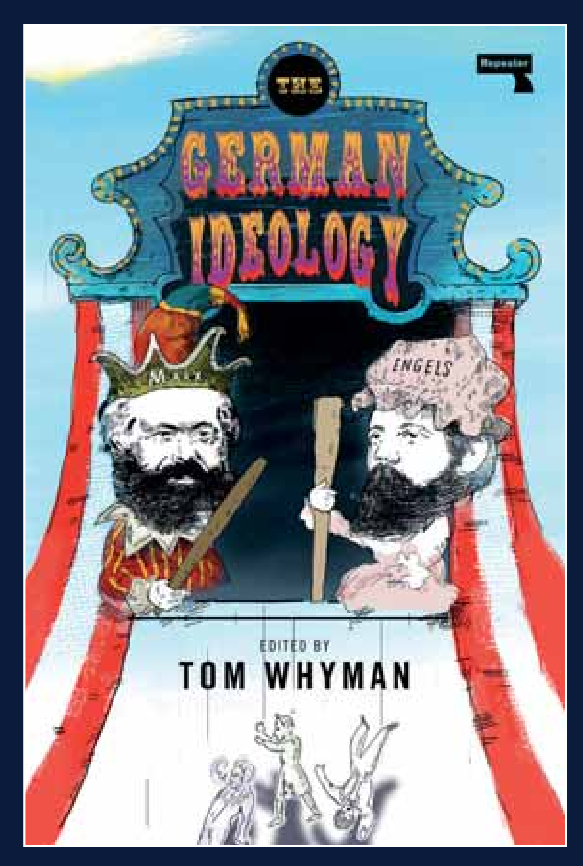
The research demonstrates the impact of collaborative work when faced with a global threat and is opening doors to more scalable and productive approaches to drug manufacturing. It is an important step towards democratising healthcare and affording everyone the same access to potentially life-saving treatments.

Making Molnupiravir accessible for all

The details of this new manufacturing route are freely available for companies to use. Any company interested in producing Molnupiravir via this new process can contact Prozomix to request free samples of the enzyme.

Biotechnology is one of The University of Manchester's research beacons – exemplars of interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-sector partnerships that lead to pioneering discoveries and improve the lives of people around the world. For more information go to *http://uom.link/biotechnology-research.* ●

Prof Nicholas Turner, Prof Anthony Green, Dr Sarah Lovelock, and Enna Bartlett are from the Manchester Institute of Biotechnology at The University of Manchester



At a time when people are increasingly looking for an alternative to our failing political system – this new abridgement introduces readers to Marx's revolutionary vision of worker and world.

"A fantastic creative abridgement of one of the most important and intriguing texts by Marx and Engels... Read this if you want to understand their explosive philosophy."
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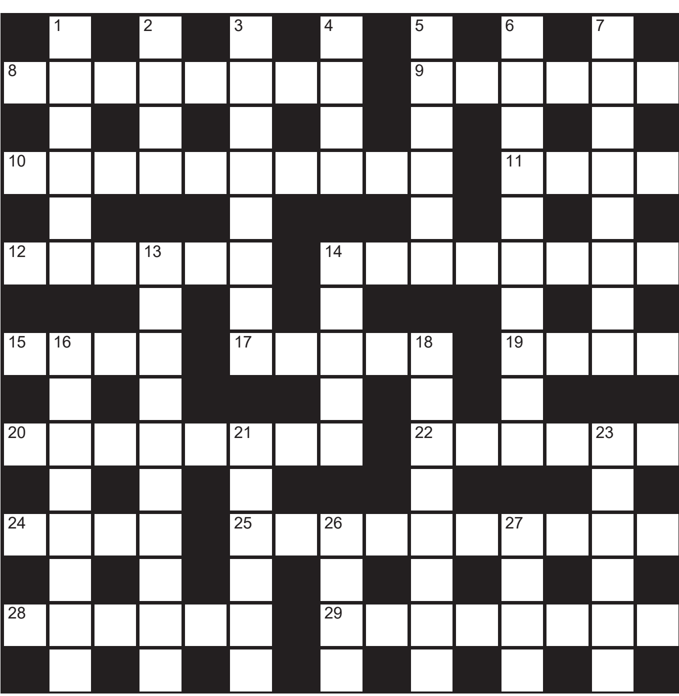
The NS Cryptic Crossword 579: "... for the 13th" by Anorak



The title completes the sentiment reading clockwise around the perimeter squares from square 1.

Across

8 Like half, of course! (4-4)
9 Catch spoiled notepaper Poe's thrown away (6)
10 Distant settlement, away from Victoria, say (10)
11 Do without piano, being creative (4)
12 Rodent, second seen in store (6)
14 Girl shouts about 6's partner (8)
15 The cheapest promotion, apparently, for tablet (4)
17 "I will eat shellfish? Just the opposite!" says lawsuit (5)
19 Otherwise – 2 otherwise expressed (4)
20 Balmy, just like love object (8)
22 Rode at front, backing aid to driver (3-3)
24 Beseeching chum for gem (4)
25 Adjust a clock – test item he repaired (3,3,4)
28 Mouth-organ! (6)
29 City's Lincoln Road is even shorter (8)

Down

1 "Boy meets girl" stuff (6)
2 Swimmers sleep over endlessly (4)
3 Idealist from Co Antrim (8)
4 Openers from Yorkshire entertain the Indians' mountain dweller? (4)
5 Ambassador upset Iran, causing rupture (6)
6 Feat of chaps in disgrace (10)
7 The girl's in trousers – and they're spotted! (8)
13 Mixed malted oats of robust quality (4,2,4)
14 Strictly judge will rock with Ailsa (5)
16 Eeyore's friend twice expresses his disgust (4,4)
18 Naughty girl, we hear, the main source of trouble (8)
21 Novel is left alone by this (6)
23 Band member cancelled service (6)
26 Asian draw announced (4)
27 Orderly in mufti – dynamic (4)

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

Answers to crossword 578 of 1 April 2022

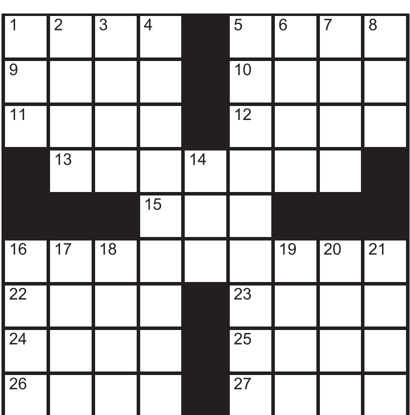
Across 1) Creep 4) Mandrills 9) Devilment 10) China 11) Try-out 12) Platypus 14) Represent 16) Aspen 17) Idler 19) Telomeres 21) Airiness 22) Repair 25) Iceni 26) Mousetrap 27) Naturally 28) Tress *Down* 1) Co-determination 2) Envoy 3) Pollute 4) Meek 5) Not a little 6) Ricotta 7) Laid paper 8) Stars and Stripes 13) Centesimal 15) Paltriest 18) Rentier 20) Mae West 23) Agree 24) Puny

Subscriber of the Week: Charlotte Wood

What do you do?
I am a trainee occupational therapist on an acute ward.
Where do you live?
Leicester.
Do you vote?
Always.
How long have you been a subscriber?
Three months.
What made you start?
I wanted a weekly publication that aligned with my moral compass.
Is the NS bug in the family?
I get two copies so my father-in-law has my spare, and my husband loves it too.
What pages do you flick to first?
Cryptic crossword, then cover to cover.
What would you like to see more of in the NS?
Gender issues and healthcare issues.
Who are your favourite NS writers?
So far, Jonn Elledge and Andrew Marr.
Who would you put on the cover of the NS?
Andy Burnham.
With which political figure would you least like to be stuck in a lift?
Using "political figure" very loosely indeed: Laurence Fox.
All-time favourite NS article?
I appreciated the much needed report on the Uyghur genocide.
The New Statesman is...
keeping my eyes open.

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

The NS Crossword in Brief 28: by Ali Gascoigne



Answers to crossword 27 of 1 April 2022

Across 1) Bash 5) Salt 9) Alto 10) Chew 11) Beau 12) Iago 13) Arisen 15) Street art 19) Blimey 20) Dojo 23) Loop 24) Idea 25) Lure 26) Gent 27) *Argo* *Down* 1) Babas 2) Alert 3) Stair 4) Houseboat 5) Scintilla 6) Aha 7) Leg 8) Two 14) Eel 16) Amour 17) Reorg 18) Type O 20) Dig 21) Ode 22) Jen

Across

1 Kiss
5 1-1, for example
9 Jewish wedding dance
10 Ill-considered
11 Variety of avocado
12 Repeat
13 Controversial opinion
15 PC storage acronym
16 Covid-friendly greeting
22 Don't throw out
23 US Representative Ilhan
24 Hairy biblical twin
25 Actress Taylor-Joy
26 Cigarette remnant
27 Blow a horn

Down

1 "Be quiet!"
2 Comedian Trevor
3 Thereabouts
4 Spot for booze and food
5 Very attractive person
6 Dishwasher component
7 Tennis ace Arthur
8 One of the five Ws
14 Pull, as a car
16 Manages, with "out"
17 In case
18 ___ Brummell
19 "Er, I'd rather not"
20 Kermode & ___
21 Idiot

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OBSERVER BOOK OF THE WEEK

A revelation ... I can't tell you how refreshing it is in these polarised times to read a book on politics that doesn't have an axe to grind ... Magisterial dive into English politics ... It is wonderfully written, the pages littered with poetic and literary references, as you might expect from an outstanding journalist ... an essential read

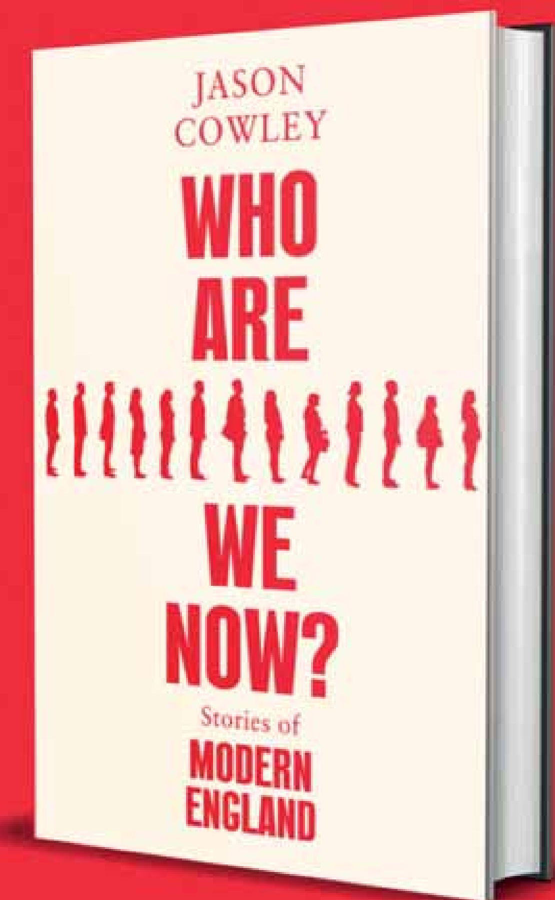
THE SUNDAY TIMES

A pleasure to read. Cowley has an eye and an ear for the small details that add emotional depth to his reports

FINANCIAL TIMES

Compassionate ... Full of thoughtful analysis and salient asides

THE INDEPENDENT



There is a certain Orwellian (in the best sense) curiosity and insightfulness

DAILY TELEGRAPH

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CHRIS MASON, BBC RADIO 4

A haunting 'condition of England' masterpiece

HELEN THOMPSON, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Available from Waterstones

State of the Nation

Highlights from the NS's new online data hub

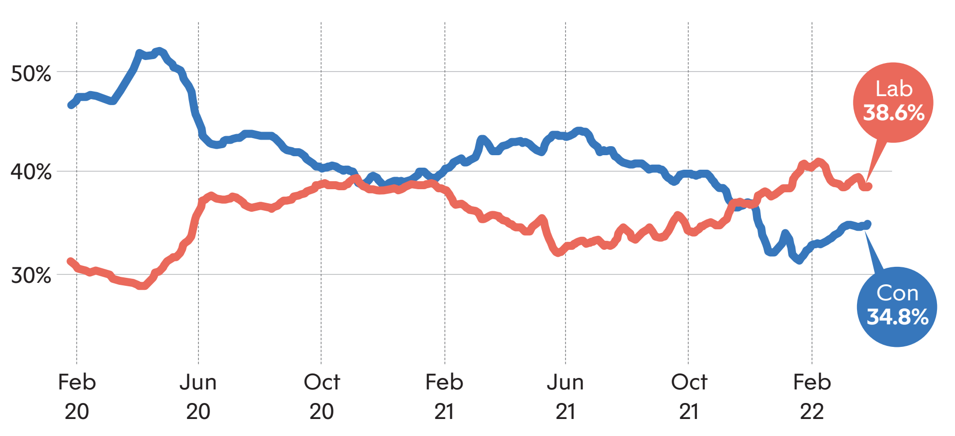
How does the UK compare to the rest of the world?

	GDP forecast for 2022 (%)	Unemployment rate (%)	Age 26-64 completed tertiary education (%)	Education spending* per student (USD)	Average hospital stay for acute care (days)	Inflation (CPI, %)
Great Britain	**2.5**	**3.9**	**50.2**	**29,911**	**6.2**	**5.5**
Brazil	1.5	11.2	-	-	-	10.5
Canada	3.2	5.5	57.0	24,495	7.7	5.7
China	4.8	5.5	-	-	-	0.9
France	3.0	7.0	39.7	9,164	5.4	3.6
Germany	2.1	3.1	31.3	19,323	7.5	5.1
Italy	2.5	8.8	20.1	10,110	7.5	5.7
Japan	2.4	2.8	52.3	7,840	16.0	0.9
Russia	-10.0	4.4	56.7	9,024	9.1	9.2
Spain	4.2	12.7	39.7	13,800	6.0	7.6
US	3.1	3.8	50.1	34,035	5.5	7.9

*BASED ON TERTIARY/EARLY-CHILDHOOD SPENDING. SOURCES: KIEL INSTITUTE; JPMORGAN; BANK OF FINLAND; OECD

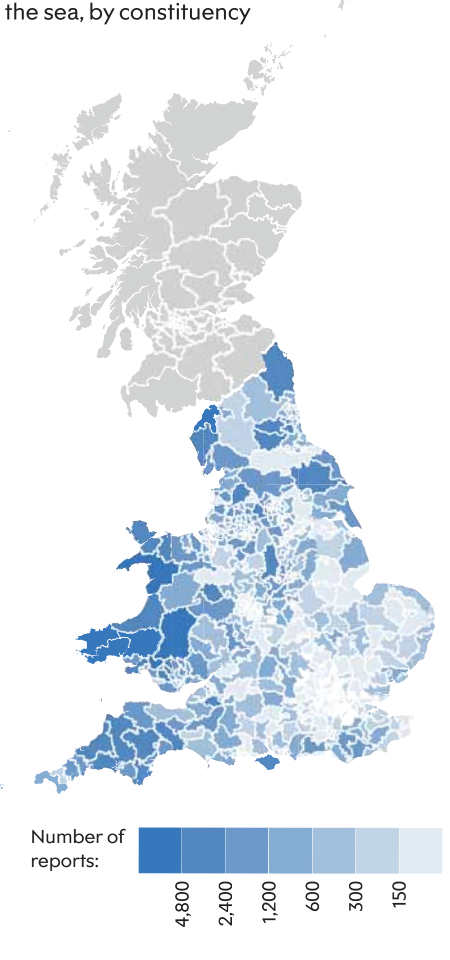
Britain Elects: Westminster voting intentions

How would UK citizens vote if a general election was held tomorrow?



Data dump

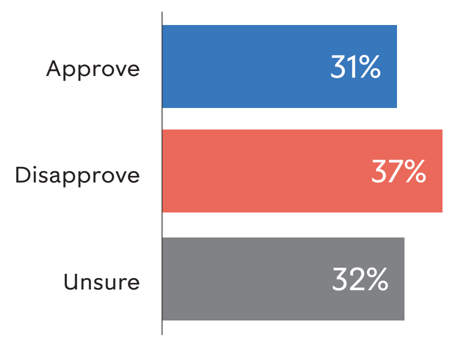
Reports of untreated sewage released into waterways and the sea, by constituency



INCIDENTS REPORTED IN 2020 IN ENGLAND AND WALES
SOURCE: UK ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Two years of Keir

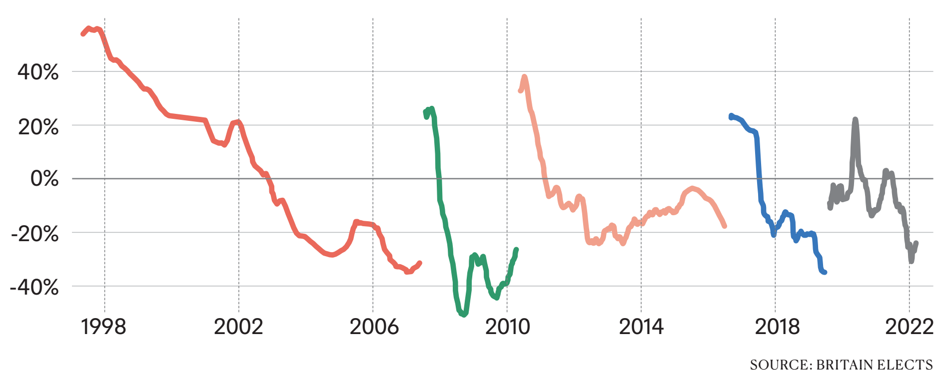
Public opinion of the Labour leader



SOURCE: BRITAIN ELECTS

How does Boris Johnson's popularity compare with his predecessors'?

Net favourability figures for Tony Blair (■), Gordon Brown (■), David Cameron (■), Theresa May (■) and Boris Johnson (■) during each of their tenures as prime minister



SOURCE: BRITAIN ELECTS

The NS Q&A

"My *Mastermind* specialist subject? Serial killers"

Lynda La Plante, crime writer

Lynda La Plante was born in Liverpool in 1943 and began her career as an actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company. She is the creator of TV shows including *Widows* and *Prime Suspect*, and the author of more than 30 crime novels.

What's your earliest memory?
Being dressed in a pale blue wool coat, velvet collar, leggings that fitted over my shoes, and a blue bonnet. My nanny was taking me to feed the ducks. As we waited to cross the road to the pond, a bus was drawing up to its stop, and a man with a bowler hat and a small sausage dog stepped straight in front of it. The dog was hit by the near front wheel. The man stepped forwards, picking up his dog. He then draped it over his arm and in a loud voice said: "It was entirely my fault."

Who are your heroes?
My childhood hero was Geronimo. My uncle collected Native American art and had an incredible feathered headdress that belonged to Geronimo. I was told many stories about this great warrior. Now my hero is Hugh Montgomery, a professor of intensive care medicine at University College London. He has a brilliant mind and has helped hundreds of people recover from serious illnesses.

What book last changed your thinking?
I recently read *The Romanov Royal Martyrs* and found it to be an insight into the Russian Revolution. It is an extraordinarily detailed and compassionate history of the family, their immense inherited wealth and their tragic murders.

Which political figure do you look up to?
Eleanor Roosevelt. My grandmother used to read her autobiography and letters to me; she was a remarkable woman.

What would be your "Mastermind" specialist subject?
Serial killers, focusing on Ted Bundy. He was an absolute monster. I'm interested in what turned a highly educated, sometimes charming man into a serial killer.

In which time and place, other than your own, would you like to live?
In a massive ocean villa in East Hampton, New York, during the 1930s.

What TV show could you not live without?
BBC Breakfast. I like to be up to date with current events, and their human interest features are excellent.

Who would paint your portrait?
I would trust my sister Gilly Titchmarsh to paint my portrait. I would be smiling.

What's your theme tune?
"If It Be Your Will" written by Leonard Cohen and sung by Antony and the Johnsons.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?
Rejection does not mean "no". I still abide by it.

What's currently bugging you?
People who drop litter. There's no excuse.

What single thing would make your life better?
Right now it would be my incredible dog, a borzoi named Hugo, recovering his health.

When were you happiest?
I'm generally a happy person. It's not just a state of mind. It's good fortune to be born with a sense of humour that even makes oneself laugh.

In another life, what job might you have chosen?
A vet. Hugo inhaled long grass into his lung, twice! To witness the care he received was wonderful. I love *The Supervet*, which often has me in tears.

Are we all doomed?
No, but we all need to pray for the survival of the brave people of Ukraine. ●

"Vanished", the third novel in the Detective Jack Warr series by Lynda La Plante, is published by Zaffre

KRISTIAN HAMMERSTAD

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New Times
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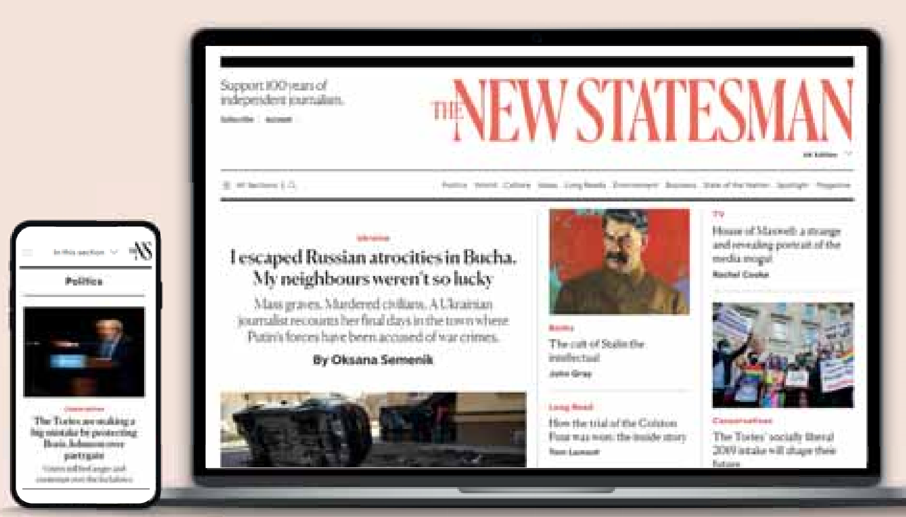

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