

The

Salisbury Review

The quarterly magazine of conservative thought



“And if we do leave Europe, I expect the French will think of a reason to send us ex-pats back to England.”

Was Socrates a Muslim?

Ricardo Duchesne

Hanged by the Neck

Christie Davies

NHS: Foreigners go Free

Myles Harris

Australia's ISIS

Daryl McCann

The Devil's Photo Album

Jane Kelly

Bachar Assad

T F Josephus

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The
Salisbury Review

Editor: Myles Harris
Managing Editor: Merrie Cave
Consulting Editors: Roger Scruton
Lord Charles Cecil, Jane Kelly,
Christie Davies, Ian Crowther

5 Turnpike Court, Woburn Sands, MK17 8UA
Tel: 01908 281601
E-mail: info@salisburyreview.co.uk

Web site: <http://www.salisburyreview.com>

Conservatives are fond of harking back to the good old days when ‘medicine was an art not a science,’ it was also nasty. Save for sawing off limbs, curing piles with a red-hot poker or a knife in the groin to relieve bladder stones, there were few cures. The bewigged physician rode up to the house, the relatives assembled around the bed, the dying patient’s stool was sniffed, a vein was lanced and a useless prognosis offered. Medicine was a play reminding us that we were mortal, nothing more.

The play finally closed in 1928 when Alexander Fleming accidentally left a Petri dish by an open window, which grew a mould called penicillin. When the Americans manufactured it in large quantities in 1943 the medical industrial age was born. Penicillin was followed by a multiplicity of drugs, new vaccines, organ transplantation, genetic engineering, heart surgery and cancer cures. Death rates fell spectacularly. In 1964 people expected to live five years after retirement. Fifty years on we expect twenty.

The price is a rising tide of dementia. The Irish call it ‘outliving your brains’. Rich and poor suffer alike. Dements can be found immobile in urine-soaked armchairs in state nursing homes, or staring blankly through the windows of expensive flats. The badly neglected can be found rooting in rubbish bins behind supermarkets. Dements often die alone. Lose your mind and you lose your friends. Ambulance men will tell you stories of finding grandma’s body days after she has died in her basement flat, curtains drawn, a row of full milk bottles on the step, neighbours walking past too busy on their mobile phones to notice. Ask a city priest how often he conducts a funeral where the only mourners are the undertakers.

There are 850,000 dements in Britain, by 2025 there will be a million. At present 650,000 people care for them. It is naturally a matter of great concern. Which is why if you are over seventy, and you smoke, drink, are fat, or had a serious neurological illness, your GP may ask you to remember three objects and later tell

her what they were, subtract a sequence of sevens from ninety-seven, then copy one shape inside another. Called the mini mental exam, it separates demented sheep from normal goats. If she thinks you are losing it she may order an MRI scan and blood tests. Fail and you might say farewell to your driving licence and control of your affairs. Such tests should be done selectively and with great sensitivity. This is because those who their GP suspects may be in the early stages of the illness are often devastated, their lives consumed with anxiety for the future. A similar plan is for the middle-aged to be told the ‘real’ age of their dwindling brains, often shrunk by feasting and alcohol, compared with its chronological age. The difference can be huge.

Enter the government with a plan to pay GPs £55 for every mini mental test thus greatly increasing the number of ‘dements’ and in turn creating a vast service industry to care for them.

It caused a furious reaction. Who wants to be told they have a disease nobody can treat which will rob them of their faculties? Very few except officialdom. As we go to print the £55 per test has been dropped due to pressure from GP leaders, who for once got off their backsides to resist state directed medicine.

Despite this rebuff officialdom will be back. We are now in the age of industrial medicine and the ‘total state’ in which all considerations of privacy and autonomy are set-aside in the interests of ‘the community’ – and its officials. Like overpopulation, dementia is a side effect of medical progress and like all technology it sweeps aside democracy. If we choose to extend our lives by technology we must accept its total rule, however arbitrary, wrong or intrusive.

A cure, restoring the family, persuading people to take their elderly parents or the old and lonely into their homes and offer them love is impossible in a society driven further and further apart by technology. The alternative, state departure clinics, cannot be far off. As I began this editorial the House of Lords was debating ‘assisted dying’. Are we about to call time on the aged?

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The Devil's Photo-Album

Jane Kelly

After a day spent praying for dry weather, last night we all gathered in the vicarage to celebrate Guy Fawkes' Night. 'A traditional bonfire night in a vicarage garden,' said the vicar several times. He was right to be pleased; the weather was fine, he had built a good fire with a very striking guy made of boxes and old clothes. There were baked potatoes, hot-dogs and pumpkin soup.

Then he had the idea of getting everyone together in the dining room for a group photo, we all gathered around, children to the front, one tiny girl cuddled up on the sofa next to the Guy who hadn't yet been led out to execution. She looked very sweet next to him and I suggested taking a photo of her. Everything stopped. This was not a 'traditional' event; we were in England in 2014 where everything is slightly different and strange.

'You cannot take photos of the children,' said a fat woman at the back, and began to spout on about rules and regulation. The vicar looked doubtful. Someone else pointed out that there had 'been trouble with the Diocese of London after photos of children, showing their smiling faces, appeared gracing the front of the parish on-line magazine'.

There would be no photos, or if there were, they could only show adults. All the children had to hide behind the sofa, out of sight. I suggested that hiding behind a sofa surely made them more vulnerable. 'They might get groped.' People looked shocked. My words touched on one of the few taboos and areas of shame left in our culture.

The British have always been strange about children. In the middle ages we were noted by other Europeans for our cruelty to them, sending young boys to other houses for their upbringing. Among the upper classes girls and boys were sent to foreign courts, perhaps most famously Anne Boleyn, who grew up in France, well away from her upwardly mobile, bourgeois parents. Later came general boarding school exile, and even when I was growing up in the early 1960s when the

only fibre we heard about was the moral sort, there was still a flavour of children being seen and not heard. Showing affection to children was a sign of weakness and was considered bad for the character.

Now it seems that little ones are openly adored, almost worshipped, their every iron whim their parent's command. This goes along with a dark vein of terror that something might happen to the little darlings who seem to be much more fragile and vulnerable these days; they might fall off a swing, get a nut allergy, or worst of all some vile interloper from the forest beyond will snatch one of them away.

There have been acres of newsprint from women journalists lately about a new TV drama called *The Missing*. In this one unpleasant child – I think the producers tried to make him appear cute – is abducted in a crowded public place, the worst possible terror for a parent. His father takes to drink and becomes a social outcast in his quest to find his missing son. One critic said he could not bear to watch it as he has recently become a father; he mentioned this

three times, and it was too painful to consider. On average five small children a year go missing, which is terrible but not an epidemic. Many more unruly, unwanted teenagers from care-homes disappear, but that is largely ignored.

Kiddie fiddling is now perceived by the public and the press as an ever-present danger, remembering too from recent court cases that if an adult fondles a child these days her life is considered ruined. Long gone are the days when Lewis Carroll got his young friends to pose nude for his camera.

This culture of anxiety about children has swept away the fairly normal relations which used to exist between most adults and children in public places. No one will go and sit in a children's playground to watch them play now, just because they like children. In the summer, on the Bayswater side of the Regent's park, I attempted to use a public convenience adjoining a children's play area. I was told that I could not use



"Our new teacher has introduced us to feminism."

it, unless I was accompanied by a child. It brought to mind that strange ruling that ‘dogs must be carried on the underground’.

How different from when I was a child of five, when an old man who we called ‘the colonel,’ would arrive with his collie dog, to see our class when we made a weekly trip to the church. He would stand near the steps as we came out, smile at us, chat a bit, and we would pet the dog. The teachers told us that he came along because he ‘really loved children’.

That was totally acceptable then, but now there are strict rules about who can love what and when. These days ‘the colonel’ would have to leave the dog at home, in case some children present found it unclean for religious reasons or had allergies to animals, and he would have to have a CRB check, just to turn up at all.

Looking at the document below, you can see how fear and cold bureaucracy have taken over from the culture of our parents, when common sense still existed and no

one suspected their neighbour of anything unless they really had to. A time when we had neighbours rather than just forms and spreadsheets.

The document below this article is a fragment of advice about setting up a CRB from the Diocese of London. It is twenty-five pages long. This slice of malignant bureaucracy will be seized upon, as it was last night at Bonfire Night, by the most pompous and puritanical in the group, to assert their vanity and self-styled authority. As no one will be clear about what is the right procedure, or courageous enough to just go ahead as normal, no photos will be taken. A small opportunity for innocent joy is lost.

Jane Kelly worked for the Daily Mail as a celebrity interviewer.

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Begin a Parish Information Log sheet

Issue individual with:

- Cover letter
- • Application and self declaration form (ASD)
- Appendix E of Diocese Child protection Policy
- Relevant Diocese guidelines
- Stamped envelope addressed to you at church offices

On receipt of completed forms:

- Check ASD form for completion and full referee details
- Send off reference questionnaires to named people with stamped self-addressed envelopes
- Update Parish Information Log sheet and file with ASD form in pending file
- Update Excel spreadsheet

On receipt of completed references:

- Check through for any obvious concerns. If there are any highlight these to the relevant group lead
- Send completed ASD form and references to group lead to check and sign
- Upon their return, send completed ASD form and references to one of the clergy to check and sign

When all checks complete and forms returned:

- Sign off Parish Information Log sheet and update Excel spreadsheet
- File in relevant Parish Log files
- Inform group lead

The Nation that dare not speak its name

Alistair Miller

There can be few among the English who were unmoved by Gordon Brown's impassioned pro-union speech on the eve of the Scottish referendum. The passage about the Scots, English, Welsh and Irish lying side-by-side across the war cemeteries of Europe, all in a common cause, was particularly powerful. It needed to be said but in the circumstances it needed a Scotsman to say it. North and south of the border, there will be many who are grateful to Gordon Brown for his role in saving the union. Yet the line that stood out for me was this: 'The vote tomorrow is not about whether Scotland is a nation – we are, yesterday, today and tomorrow'. The Scots – like the Welsh and the Irish – are, of course, proud nations. The anomaly is that anyone from south of the border who dared to speak of *the English* as a nation would be immediately branded a racist – not by the Scots or Welsh or Irish, but by his own countrymen.

The problem is that until quite recently, it was taken for granted that the terms 'British' and 'English' could be used interchangeably, as they are in almost every volume of English (British) history written up until the 1960s. Britain was the preferred term in foreign affairs from the eighteenth-century on, and the creation of a compound British identity allowed the Scots, Welsh and Irish to be incorporated and to contribute to the common cause. But, essentially, 'Great Britain' was England projected across the seas. Perhaps the last example of an *English* history was A J P Taylor's *English History 1914-1945*, which concluded with the poignant lines 'Few now sang "Land of Hope and Glory". Few even sang "England Arise". England had risen all the same.' Writing in 1965, Taylor by now felt it necessary to justify his terminology. He recognised that 'England' had traditionally been used indiscriminately as a proxy for England and Wales, Great Britain, the United Kingdom and even the British Empire; that the English and the British dimensions of our history could not always be separated. But he nevertheless thought it 'reasonable, I think, to talk

about English feelings or English patterns of life' and hence to describe 'thirty years in the history of the English people'. Like Trevelyan, Rowse and Bryant, he believed that the English were a distinct people with distinct characteristics – characteristics that shaped their institutions, their culture and traditions, and their history.

Clearly much has changed. The rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, uncontrolled immigration, the dogma of multiculturalism and a culture of repudiation have combined to make it unacceptable – in fact, downright offensive and racist – to use the term 'English' when referring to the people of these islands and their history. The only permissible term is 'British'

The rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, uncontrolled immigration, the dogma of multiculturalism and a culture of repudiation have combined to make it unacceptable – in fact, downright offensive and racist – to use the term 'English' when referring to the people of these islands and their history.

because that is deemed all-inclusive. Some exceptions are allowed. The slightly eccentric are permitted to write about the English and their history so long as it is in elegiac vein – for example, Roger Scruton in *England: An Elegy* and Peter Vansittart in *In Memory of England* (the titles speak

for themselves); or write about the English people in a light-hearted spirit of self-denigration – as Jeremy Paxman has done in *The English*. But one searches in vain in modern history texts for any reference to the English or their history.

The convention is upheld by politicians and members of the liberal establishment who, having subscribed for decades to the dogma of multiculturalism, have suddenly realised that this is not a recipe for an integrated society; and are now engaged in a frenzied search for 'British values'. According to the Department of Education, these are 'democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'. But the shortcomings of the establishment position were brilliantly exposed by James St George (*sic*) on the BBC website. 'The big trouble with these imposed values', commented St George, 'is that they are selecting the upper class "gentleman" twits values'. Real British values of ordinary people are not silly tolerance, we can't afford it. The storming

and aftermath of the siege of Badajoz are our ways'. Leaving aside the limited public appetite nowadays for closing up siege walls with English dead, St George reminds us that tolerance of newcomers is a virtue that a liberal-minded élite can afford to parade because they do not have to grub for low-paid jobs, housing and public services; nor is it the character of their leafy neighbourhoods that is being transformed.

In fact, for most of their history, the English (for it is the English to whom St George is referring) have been renowned not for their tolerance and respect for others but for their hatred of foreigners and general incivility. This xenophobia may have transmuted later into a mere sense of latent superiority, but a succession of visitors to England from the fifteenth century onwards have remarked on it. In the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke went so far as to note that the reputation of the English was that of 'a sullen, unsocial, cold, unpleasant race of men'. The screaming headlines of the much-maligned *Sun* newspaper therefore stand in a long tradition of intolerance. The English (*contra* George Orwell's wartime account of their 'extreme gentleness') have also been known for much of their history for their violence, cruelty and barbarity. Paul Langford reminds us in *Englishness Identified* that up until the nineteenth century, our reputation on the Continent was for our ruthless warriors and brutish mobs, for corporal punishment (especially flogging) and casual cruelty to animals. As the Victorian Lord John Manners remarked, fighting was 'the natural occupation of Englishmen'. Our football hooligans therefore also stand in a long tradition.

Of course, liberty and democracy founded on the rule of law are noble values to which the English have made an unparalleled contribution, but they are self-evidently no longer peculiar to the English. If we wish to identify the characteristic beliefs, qualities and attitudes that define a people, and confer on them a *shared* sense of identity and community, then something more substantial is needed than a commitment to liberal individualism. We must inquire not into some putative set of 'British values' but into the nature and characteristics of the English people.

What are the essential characteristics of the English – apart, that is, from violence and xenophobia? Much has been written on the subject, but a strong case can be made that the core characteristic is domesticity, buttressed by the sense of security of home, property and person afforded by the Common Law – the law of the land we owe to the Anglo-Saxons. The idea of home is central to the Englishman's consciousness. Out of this domesticity and sense of security come so many of the characteristics of the English that visitors to these islands have observed across the centuries:

our pride and reserve, our lack of sociability or civility in the company of strangers, our plain-speaking and bluff good nature, our pragmatism and sense of humour, our independence, our essential decency and lack of malice, and our preference for associating 'at one remove' with strangers with whom we share an interest by forming clubs, societies and institutions. Some of these characteristics were later refined into a gentlemanly ideal of sportsmanship and fair play; into the outdoor empire-building qualities of the man of action; and into the stoic stiff-upper-lipped endurance that became the hallmark of the English during two world wars. But though these particular ideals have largely faded into memory, the essential ingredients of Englishness remain.

Roger Scruton has written eloquently of the English genius for enchanting their homeland and the tragedy of its loss through the destruction of rural communities, the vandalism of town planners and the dismantling of traditional institutions. But the spirit lives on in the hearts of the majority of the English people, even if they live in what is fast coming to resemble one giant suburb. English characteristics and attitudes are not racial. Newcomers can be assimilated so that they too come to share the English experience of home. The tragedy is that no such invitation has been offered in recent decades. Instead, newcomers have been deposited *en masse* into a diverse inclusive multicultural society from which the English themselves have been banished. The middle classes who can afford to send their children to public schools have managed to preserve some private sense of identity and continuity. The old working class have been reduced to a culture of football anthems and emblems of resentment – shaven heads, crosses of St George and ferocious dogs.

For some three hundred years, the political identity of the English has been joined with that of Britain, a project – argues Linda Colley in *Britons* – founded on imperial and commercial superiority, war with Continental Europe, and shared Protestantism. But this project is now all but dead. Can the English then rediscover who they are? Now that the union is saved, but only at the cost of full fiscal autonomy for Scotland, the pressing need for an English settlement will at least focus people's minds. Our departure from the European Union, once inconceivable but now ever more likely, would focus them even more. But we might begin by simply seeing to it that the transmission of *English* history, *English* literature and our *English* cultural inheritance forms, once more, the cornerstone of our children's education.

England may yet rise again.

Alistair Miller is a teacher.

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Was Socrates a Muslim?

Ricardo Duchesne

In the United States today only two percent of colleges offer Western Civilization as a course requirement. As one of the very rare few in Canada who teaches Western Civ, I have detected in new texts, and in newer editions of older texts, a growing emphasis on Islam.

A well-established older text is *The Western Heritage*, by Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, and Frank Turner. This is a relatively conservative text by the standards of today. I have the tenth edition at hand, published in 2010. (A new 11th edition has just come out). I can't say when this text began to include sections on 'the Western debt to Islam,' cute captions on topics such as 'European Embrace of a Black Saint' or an alleged 'Multicultural Book Cover' from Carolingian times. But it is clear that the 2010 edition, in comparison to the first editions, with the first going back to 1979, has felt the impact of political correctness. The Wikipedia entry on the first edition(s) of this text observes:

Considered conservative and old-fashioned when it was published, reviewers chided it for ignoring the Byzantines and Ottomans as well as giving short shrift to Russia and Poland. Others indicated lack of attention to the role of the Islamic states and ignorance of Islamic sources.

Now in stark contrast it is clearly stated in the Preface that a new feature of the 10th edition is a greater emphasis on the West's connections to the rest of the world, with a series of comparative essays added at various points in the text under the general heading of 'The West & the World'. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*. Students should learn about the West's connections with the world. But something else is going on. Without getting into details, older editions did not neglect these connections; the difference now is that academics who still teach the West feel a need to frame its history as an inclusive affair in which all the peoples of the world participated. Most of the Preface reads like an effort to placate those who think that the West should no longer be taught:

Students reading this book come from a variety of cultures and experiences. They live in a world of highly interconnected economies and instant communication between cultures. In this emerging multicultural society it seems both appropriate and necessary to recognize how Western civilization has throughout its history interacted with other cultures,

both influencing and being influenced by them. For this reason, we have introduced in this edition a new chapter on the nineteenth-century European age of imperialism. Further examples of Western interaction with other parts of the world, such as with Islam, appear throughout the text.

Nevertheless, *The Western Heritage* is still a very good text. In contrast textbooks being published in current times show the full impact of multicultural correctness. A recent text is Clifford Backman's *The Cultures of the West: A History*, first published in 2013. This two-volume text calls for the inclusion of the Islamic world inside the West:

This book overtly...insists on including the region of the Middle East in the general narrative, as a permanent constitutive element of the Greater West. For all its current appeal, Islam is essentially a Western religion, after all...To treat the Muslim world as an occasional sideshow on the long march to western European and American world leadership is to falsify the record and to get the history wrong.

What justification does Backman offer for the 'Greater West'? To students already accustomed to diversity, he says that the European world and the entire Muslim world in the Near East, Africa, and Asia 'have been in continuous relationship for millennia,' and that 'nearly every one of the fundamental turning points in European history...have been experienced jointly' by Christians and Muslims.

This is a falsification of the historical record. Nowhere in Backman's textbook do we find a substantive argument supporting this claim. For one, there is no way round the fact that the classical Greek invention of deductive reasoning, disciplined infantry warfare, prose writing, analytic historical writing, deductive geometry, the literary forms of tragedy and comedy, and citizenship politics were achieved quite separately from Islam. The latter was not in existence at the time. The same inventive spirit was true of the Hellenistic revolution in scientific knowledge or the many novelties of Roman law, engineering and republican forms of government. The Muslims did however play a role in retaining, commenting on, and advancing some of the works of the classical Greeks from about the 8th century until 1200, but thereafter every single turning point in European history was accomplished by Europeans.

Backman never cares to pose the question: if Europe was connected to the Muslim world, and the Muslim world was connected to Europe, why did all the turning points happen inside Europe? Even the Twelfth Century Renaissance was a uniquely European phenomenon, and so was, in fact, the Papal Revolution of the eleventh century, and numerous technological inventions in optics, wind and water power, and mechanical clocks.

Volume 2, which is three times the length of Volume 1, commences with the ‘Renaissances and Reformations,’ pluralising these two terms so as to give the impression that there were renaissances and reformations in the Middle East and North Africa. But since Backman cannot marshal a single argument demonstrating any degree of Muslim responsibility for these turning points, he is compelled to create separate sections for the Muslim world with bits of information about trade connections and European impacts on this world, as well as events within it, none of which can be framed in terms of anything that could reasonably be called a renaissance or a reformation.

The net result of making space in the text for events outside Europe is the diminution and suppression of key formative events, intellectual figures, and even whole epochs in the making of the actual West. He leaves out all the great artists of Renaissance Italy: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Donatello, Botticelli, to name a few. There is nothing about how Italian merchants created modern double-entry accounting, and only one sentence on the printing revolution.

In separate sections, he tries to create the impression that Muslims were at the forefront of modernity; for example, in the championing of the rights of women (807). We are supposed to have a picture of Muslim co-participation in the Industrial Revolution simply on the strength of the eventual adoption by a Muslim country of techniques invented in Europe. Forget that not a single technology of this revolution is shown to have been invented in the Muslim world.

Students are made to think that if there was any opposition to modernity it came from the nasty Catholics. In a section, ‘The War on Modernism,’ Backman writes:

To many in the broader Western society, the [Catholic] church’s war on modernism seemed a painful embarrassment, not merely a flat-out inability to understand modern scientific and textual thinking but a petulant refusal by pious ideologues to think or to allow others to do so (773).

On the contrary the Catholic Church played a crucial role in the development of Western modernity starting in the Middle Ages, as Thomas Woods explains in *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, Rodney

Stark does in *Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism and Western Success*, and Edward Grant also does in *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages*.

Backman acknowledges that ‘few of the advances and discoveries of the 19th century made much of an impact in the Islamic world,’ but then asks his students to show sympathy for Muslims and disapproval of Europeans:

[Muslim] opposition was not merely a knee-jerk rejection of innovative thinking. Rather it was a rejection of European political imperialism (779).

In the Introduction Backman portrays himself as an edgy professor willing to rock the boat, a man with a peculiar talent for ‘eccentric’ ideas, a dissident in a world of conformity; in short, the one and only proponent of the ‘Greater West.’ The truth is that this idea has been in the air for some time, proposed by Ian Morris in *Why the West Rules – For Now*, by many advocates in the West (and the Islamic world) of an ‘Islam-Christian Civilization’.

The idea that Europe’s history has to be seen in connection with the rest of the world cannot be divorced from the political promotion of the colonization of Europe by non-Europeans through mass immigration and indoctrination. This political agenda is being pursued by all the established parties and institutions. Backman is another pawn pushing in the same direction. Deep down he knows it is about politics, and says as much in the concluding pages of his text dealing with Europe after 2001: ‘To center Western identity on Christianity is just bad politics.’ Why? Because ‘the Western world is increasingly Muslim’ (1154).

Good politics equals the rewriting of the history of the West so as to justify the current reality of Muslim mass immigration. It does not matter that the historical evidence invalidates the concept of a ‘Greater West’; students must be made to believe in this concept; they must accept the current Third World colonization of their homelands. ‘We have often forgotten that Islam has been a Western religion from the start’ (1156). From the start? Historical veracity is not the issue. The goal is to create students who will view an increasingly Muslim Europe as a natural phenomenon consistent with the past.

Will these students, then, see the Rotherham rapes as a ‘Western’ problem committed by ethnic groups that were British ‘from the start’?

Ricardo Duchesne is a professor in the department of social science at the University of New Brunswick Saint John.

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The NHS: Foreigners go Free

Myles Harris

When an Argentinian visitor, we will call him Pedro, fractured his ankle in Oxford Street, an ambulance was at his side in five minutes. The latest in splints was applied and he was soon in the well equipped Accident and Emergency department of a major teaching hospital. Not only was his fracture attended to, but when he told the doctor he had previously had heart trouble, an ECG and blood tests were speedily organised to see that all was well. Two hours later, on crutches, a follow-up card in his hand to see two specialists, medical and orthopaedic, he approached the front desk to pay.

The lady behind the desk nearly fell off her chair.

‘But my dear it is free, this is the NHS.’

‘But I would like to pay,’

‘You can’t I am afraid, that’s the rules. It’s an emergency see, emergencies are free.’

‘Anyhow’ she added frostily, ‘the office where people have to pay is closed.’

Pedro, sensing he was causing offence, the English were a strange people, felt it wise to retreat. He was however a man who believed in honouring his debts, and three months later a large cheque appeared on the desk of the CEO of the hospital. It has yet to be cashed in case it breaches payment rules. There have been four meetings already about it.

The above is a story, there is no such person as Pedro, but the reality exists. The lady behind the desk was absolutely right, the NHS is practically free, the list of exemptions for foreigners so extensive one would have to be a Martian demanding a face lift to have to pay, and the reason why Pedro’s cheque is still lying in the CEO’s in-tray is that overseas visitors, as one source said, ‘create debt’. Debt is a dirty word in the NHS, an embarrassment to administrators who run the service and a threat to their bonuses.

This is because treatment is paid out of general taxation, it is not an insurance scheme where treatment

is related to the size of the premiums you pay. The latter is what most countries offer, with a safety net offering free treatment for the poor. Instead the NHS is like a gigantic soup tureen with doctors, not actuaries, ladling out portions strictly in terms of clinical need. Rich or poor you get the same. The arrival of foreigners bearing VISA cards upsets this. They can’t be refused treatment, but if it is to be fair, they can’t pay for it either. If they want to do that sort of thing they can go to a private hospital.

The Department of Health claims it is about to change this. By the start of the next financial year, 2015, visitors to the UK from countries who do not have reciprocal agreements with the NHS (the government

is trying to wind such deals up to save costs) will have to pay a £200 health insurance premium to obtain a visa. In addition, the process of chasing debt within hospitals is to be tightened up with alerts sent automatically to the Office of Visitor Management when a patient is admitted. If you leave the country without paying you risk not being readmitted. One has the strong impression that such changes are cosmetic, with Whitehall determined on an absolute lack of business as usual.

Nor will such checks cover A & E where anything from a stubbed toe to a stroke is treated free. It gets round the difficulty of enforcing payment

in a shifting crowd of people, as well as the problem of identification, more so now with millions of visitors from abroad. The British are not expected to carry ID cards, even NHS cards, so how would anybody check?

The general practitioner would be a good place to start, but GPs recently invited to take part in a scheme to do some low level vetting of patients’ eligibility, taking at most about three minutes of a receptionist’s time, refused. They cited past delays by the Home Office in answering queries about a patient’s eligibility,



“Have you got anything else free at the point of delivery?”

the risk of being sued if they refused treatment and the failure of successive governments to say who was and who was not eligible. They were egged on by the left leaning Royal College of General Practitioners. Its representatives declared that any checks would result in undetected asylum seekers being deterred from seeking medical attention. As a result TB would sweep the nation. Why it has not swept through France, Spain, Germany, Italy or Greece, who have checks, was not explained.

There was no chance of it working anyway. Three years ago, following a lawsuit brought by Nigerian asylum seekers, family doctors received specific instructions from the government, that under no circumstances, even if they suspected blatant fraud, were they to check on the eligibility of new patients for NHS treatment. Besides, the NHS numbers patients get on registration with a GP are not cross-checked to see if they are eligible for treatment: they are merely an administrative convenience to make access to patients' notes easier.

Hospitals are supposed to do their own checking, many until now relying on a GP's letter, an NHS number and general appearance as proof. For instance an old Cockney is unlikely to be dodging payment. Often, however, eligibility depends on a tricky definition of what is meant by ordinary residence. For example a wealthy American with severe heart trouble who has just come to live with his family in Britain, as long as he can prove he intends to go on doing so, can get his coronary arteries reamed out at your expense immediately after he has landed. But if you visit the US uninsured, suffer the same thing, and can't pay, you may find the US hospital seeking a warrant from a British court to seize your house to pay off the debt. Asylum seekers in general are off the hook as you are only an illegal until you ask for asylum. All you have to do then is to play the system until you have been here too long to deport.

Why do we keep such a system? The same arguments could be applied to having a free Waitrose or Sainsburys. Food is even more essential than health. Just as our city A & E's are crammed with patients many of whom are too lazy to register with their GPs or fear (incorrectly) detection if they do, so our supermarkets would degenerate into giant scums with all the best foods swept from the shelves by the fittest and those who shout loudest. Patients often complain about the rudeness of GP receptionists, this is only because, like the staff of a free supermarket, they are trying to keep the hands of the fittest away from the free shelves of the NHS.

Administrators argue that the cost of chasing NHS debt, even granted the means to pay, is not worth

the money we would collect. They miss the point. Payment, like justice, has to be not only made, but seen to be made. Ideally everybody should have an NHS card with their photograph and a fingerprint linked to a database. This we know is impossible, not because it can't be done – we have passports after all – but because Whitehall has proved itself too lazy and too incompetent to do so. Billions have been wasted on failed NHS computerisation.

Yet it need not be expensive. It would cost hospitals no more than the price of a 200 metre ethernet cable and a computer to link the Overseas Visitors Management office to a desk in the A & E above which is written: Foreign Visitor? Please Pay Here. Most foreign visitors are decent people only too willing to pay. Moreover with a simple collection service the rules could be changed from the present giant list of exemptions – designed so administrators can avoid work – to a list of those who to have to pay.

The new desk could also be used for the rest of us to pay a universal charge of £5 a visit to A & E (in Ireland the charge if you don't have a GP's letter is €100 per visit; while the Irish grouse about it, they understand the need, many realising it is a deterrent to illegal migrants) which would clear Britain's casualties of trivial illness. GPs should charge £5 as well. Apart from lives saved, the saving of lost time from work, inconvenience and the anxiety of waiting would be huge. Soon we will wonder why it was not started years back.

Myles Harris is a doctor.

This article first appeared in Crossbow.

Thank You

I wish to thank all those readers who contributed so generously to our appeal in the Autumn edition. We now have a new lease of life.

Our web site remains a handy shop window where you can purchase either a paper copy or the online version and at the same time read weekly blogs by Jane Kelly, Theodore Dalrymple, Gabriel Hershman and Peter Mullen. (www.salisburyreview.com)

Please remember, word of mouth is the most effective way of selling, so please tell your friends.

I wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

Myles Harris, Editor

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Miss Isherwood

W P Hartley

I attended a Catholic primary school with the church situated next door. It was run by nuns who took some classes, though most were left to civilians. Church attendance was strictly enforced. On weekdays my class would sometimes make up the numbers at a requiem mass, which might otherwise be poorly attended. During my primary school years I probably got in as many Catholic funerals as the Co-op undertaker down the road. Imagine being told not to report to assembly but to divert instead to a candle-lit church on a dark winter's morning, with a coffin in the aisle for company. The nuns would impatiently enquire why we were hanging about outside. However in that freezing winter of 1963-64 with its high casualty rate, keeping the dead company indoors was preferable to shivering outside.

Miss Isherwood belonged to a now extinct group of teachers who had qualified well before the War meaning that she had also taught my father. She was a spinster lady who lived with and cared for her elderly mother. A churchgoer (unlikely she would have been employed otherwise), I can still recall her immaculate turnout at mass and even more clearly the reluctant visit I once paid to her home.

This was back in the days when even professional people in a northern industrial town were pleased to have a council house. There was an unofficial policy of corralling the riff-raff in a few streets near the pit, so Miss Isherwood would have been surrounded by neighbours as rigidly respectable as herself. My grandmother was a friend of hers and on childminding duties one day she took me along on a visit. Lacking safety in the numbers usually provided by my classmates I sat isolated and apprehensive as the two ladies mostly ignored me. At least my classroom performance hadn't been discussed as I imagined it might be.

The average class size was around thirty and I suppose backgrounds varied from mollycoddled lower middle class to the kind of home life which would today attract the attention of Social Services. Miss Isherwood faced the daily challenge of inculcating the three Rs into this grubby gathering. Her job was to get them part way along a road that would lead to the Eleven Plus exam. This involved steering us through the pangs of literacy and the complications

of our arcane weights and measures and monetary systems (try multiplying three pounds four shillings and twopence halfpenny by something similar). Her back-up was the incremental acquisition of tables which she would have us chant periodically through the day. Not just multiplication but reams of other stuff too: 'twelve pence one shilling, thirteen pence one and a penny etc'. In retrospect the potential for tedium and loss of attention was considerable. Miss Isherwood's experience had given her an instinctive grasp of how long a class could endure this. Then she would lay on the entertainment. This was done so routinely that it was hard to spot where learning ended and fun began. The nuns insisted on a daily dose of religious instruction, in the midst of which she might direct a couple of children to a large chest which stood in a corner. Out of it would come an array of brightly coloured lengths of cloth and a few moments later the class would be involved in impromptu amateur dramatics of a vaguely biblical nature.

Miss Isherwood's time management was impressive. She could crowd both fun and learning into a single day, even though primary education, little changed from its Victorian origins, could be merciless. Fall behind and you would probably fail. There were no classroom assistants to support the slower learners and going up a year with some material unlearned might mean never being able to catch up. Miss Isherwood's quality control involved frequent testing using such devices as reading out loud. Perhaps today this kind of exposure with shortcomings revealed to everyone would be seen as too brutal to inflict on a child. It did, though, keep us focussed. No-one wanted to be stumbling over a passage of text under the pitying scrutiny of the whole class. Additionally she monitored our handwriting as we made the transition from printing to the joined up variety, dipping our pens into inkwells and trying to get some of it on to paper.

My overriding memory of the time spent in her class was when she decided that noise levels had grown too high. She would suspend whatever activity was in hand and order us back to our seats. This was a familiar preliminary which generated a palpable sense of anticipation. It was time for her to read to us. I still remember Miss Isherwood's style of delivery, her voice dropping to a lower level than the one she routinely

used in the classroom. The proverbial dropping pin would have resonated as she read an extract from, say, *The Wind in the Willows*. She'd done the same thing nearly thirty years earlier when her class had included refugees from the Spanish Civil War and my father was one of her listeners.

What she detested was sloppy or unchallenging literature and she shared the view of those who believed that Enid Blyton's books fell into the latter category. I recall this opinion from the single most significant event of her influence on me. What Miss Isherwood did one day (probably on her own initiative) was to march her entire class down to the local branch library and get us enrolled. In the course of this I got both her

opinion on Miss Blyton and her view on how I should use a library. In a nutshell it was 'try everything'. The children's section was to her merely one aspect of what was available. It may not have turned out exactly how she intended, since I terrified myself with the stories of Edgar Allen Poe at far too young an age. However her influence continues and I still see a visit to the library as a voyage of discovery irrespective of what I came in for. What she did probably seemed unremarkable back then. It took my entire time at school and long after before I could fully appreciate the impact of her influence on me.

Some of us even passed the Eleven plus.

W P Hartley was a management consultant.
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Letter from Australia

'Tie me terrorist down sport'

Daryl McCann

On August 11 2014 Australians discovered that one of their compatriots, Khaled Sharrouf, had posted on social media a photograph of his seven-year-old son posing with the decapitated head of a Syrian soldier. 'That's my boy!' the boy's proud father tweeted to the world. Prime Minister Tony Abbott denounced Sharrouf's behaviour as 'hideous' and 'barbaric', while Labor Opposition Leader Bill Shorten called the photograph a 'shocking, evil image' that would leave Australians 'shocked to the core'. The question that needed answering, opined Shorten, was how Khaled Sharrouf had fled the country last year on his brother's passport: 'I'm pretty angry that this person was able to get through our passport system under this current government's watch and go to where he's gone.' Other people, needless to say, were less concerned about the protocol of Mr Sharrouf's travel arrangements than the psychosis of latter-day headhacking.

The PC-inclined were quick to assure us that Khaled Sharrouf happened to be a madman and – for all practical purposes – that was an end of the matter. The Opposition's treasury spokesman, Andrew Leigh, noted that 'extremism comes in all sorts of guises'

and reminded us that the 'Oklahoma bombing was carried out by a Christian'. Sharrouf's Australian psychiatrist, Stephen Allnut, ascribed his former patient's radicalisation to mental illness. According to Justice Whealy, who sentenced Sharrouf to a brief time in jail back in 2009 for purchasing items

required for the making of a home-made terrorist bomb, three weeks, as it turned out, is all he served. 'None of us could've foreseen that he would've gone back to the radicalism that he's now displaying.' Whealy, despite admitting his lack of awareness about the mind-set of Khaled Sharrouf back in 2009, became the go-to man on the subject of Sharrouf on national television:

He's clearly over there playing a role of the master terrorist –

but he is anything but, of course. He's a very sad, pathetic figure. He remains a highly unintelligent man who has no perception of himself. The only danger he represents, I think, is that he is cast as a sort of proselytiser of the radical Islam image, and Facebook and Twitter and that sort of thing can carry that message across here to young men who might be in the position he was – young men who are angry, dissatisfied, rebellious, looking for a cause.



"Suddenly there was a blinding light on the road to Kobane - I didn't get anywhere near Damascus."

To be fair to Justice Whealy, there were others – including Sharrouf’s barrister – who attested to Australia’s now internationally renowned headhacker as a ‘class clown’ who suffered from ‘severe schizophrenia’ before he joined the Islamic State (IS). All well and good, agreed the average Aussie, but is there not something missing in this well-meaning, well-disposed and well-effected explanation? For instance, what exactly *is* the IS?

Most Australians, until this point, had not paid much notice of the rise and rise of the IS in Mesopotamia. The IS had been causing mayhem in Syria throughout 2013, and in the first week of January 2014 captured the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Ramada. Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, was in the hands of the IS by the middle of June. Forcing Christians to convert or flee, banning education and forbidding the sale of women’s clothing, the new IS administration displayed all the hallmarks of an Islamic version of the Khmer Rouge. Apart from the spectacular cowardice of regular Iraqi soldiers – who ditched their weapons and uniforms *en masse* and hightailed it to Baghdad – the Australian media paid little attention to the collapse of the Republic of Iraq. They changed their tune on August 18 when 800 policemen, including members of the elite SWAT team, raided various establishments in Sydney. Fifteen Muslim men associated with the Islamic State were apprehended. Australians were taken aback when Prime Minister Tony Abbott revealed that some of those arrested were conspiring ‘to snatch and behead a random member of the public, then drape them in the flag of the Islamic State.’ The very next day, as if to re-enforce the terror of it all, the Islamic State released a professionally made video showing the decapitation of the journalist James Foley in Syria.

On Tuesday, 23 September, eighteen-year-old Afghan-Australian Numan Haider turned up outside a suburban Melbourne police station for a pre-arranged meeting with two officers. One of the policemen, attempting to be as informal and friendly as possible, tried to shake the young man’s hand. Haider, who had two knives and a black jihadist flag on his person, stabbed the unsuspecting officer and then assailed the other policeman with brutal thrusts to the body and head. The first officer, fortunately, recovered in time to save his partner’s life by shooting Numan Haider dead. If all this were not bad enough, a representative of the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV), Ghaith Krayem, expressed his ‘disappointment’ with the Victorian police force because it ‘almost said it was the young man’s fault’. Krayem added that it was about time Australians began ‘to deal with the root causes of alienation’ in this country and, while they were about it, review their support for the Iraq government and

the Kurds against the IS.

The whole ‘root causes’ rationalisation was repeated endlessly after 2001 terrorist attacks on America, the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005, the July 2005 London bombings, and so in *ad infinitum*. Many in the West, especially the modern-day left who never find a positive thing to say about their own civilisation, bought into the Islamist narrative that suicide bombers sacrifice their own lives – along with a lot of other people’s, of course – on account of root causes. Terrorism is about blowback. If America and the West were to play the pipes of peace and reach out a hand – much like the police officer in Melbourne – to Muslim Brotherhood types, there would be harmony and concord in our time. Barack Obama certainly ran up the white flag in Iraq and embraced Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, and yet something other than peace appears to have broken out in the Greater Middle East – not to mention in the minds and hearts of radicalised Muslim youths throughout the Western world, including the suburbs of Australia. Last week I watched an Islamic State propaganda video featuring Australia’s very own 17-year-old Abdullah Elmir – also known as ‘Ginger Jihadi’ – warning the Prime Minister of Australia that he and his fellow homicidal mates would ‘take the head of every tyrant’ and keeping fighting until ‘the black flag is flying high in every land’.

There is a palpably different mood amongst Australians than there was before the advent of the IS headhackers. It is not just a fear of a so-called ‘lone wolf’ randomly decapitating people on the high street, but an embarrassment that our country with less than 2 percent Muslims – no more than the population of Buddhists – should be exporting more IS psychotics per capita than any other Western country. We read about the rape and slaughter of Yazidi women, the expulsion of the Christian population from Mosul and the homicidal assault on the Kurdish town of Kobane and feel ashamed that our multicultural policies might be responsible, in some way, for boosting IS numbers in Syria and Iraq. David Martin Jones and Michael L R Smith’s *Sacred Violence: Political Religion in a Secular Age* (2014), which posits that Western PC ideology is responsible for the ascent of the Islamic State, makes sober reading.

Prime Minister Abbott is a multiculturalist but a multiculturalist with a twist. On August 5, the day he foreshadowed new laws that would increase the powers of Australia’s Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) to thwart home-grown terrorism, he introduced the term *Team Australia* into the national lexicon. The ASIO legislation has now become law, although most Australians realise that eavesdropping on IS recruiters in the outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, frustrating

schemes by local terrorists to blow up sporting arenas, and cancelling the passports of young Muslim men keen to join Ginger Jihadi in Mesopotamia can be no more than a quick fix. As Bangladeshi-Australian journalist, television personality and psychiatrist Tanveer Ahmed maintains, there is something wrong with Australia's multiculturalism when a young man living in a veritable paradise prefers the bogus paradise of the IS. Only Team Australia – no less than Team Israel, Team Kurdistan or Team UK – can challenge the appeal of the Islamic State for the hearts and minds of young people 'looking for a cause'.

Enlightened patriotism, as Roger Scruton has often written, must be the bond that holds a liberal-democracy together. The problem, as described by Jones and Smith in *Sacred Violence*, is that the Left despises patriotism and all attempts to reconfigure social institutions towards that end. They will take no prisoners. Saving Team Australia will be no easy matter.

Daryl McCann is an Australian journalist. He has a blog at <http://darylmccann.bigspot.com.au>.

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Where were you on November 22nd 1963?

Ron Capshaw

Historians have argued that an event should be studied fifty years after the fact. Only then can it be looked at objectively, when all the evidence should have come in, and those with an axe to grind have died off. At fifty, the Warren Commission looms less large today than it did in 1964. Much of this has to do with September 11th supplanting the Kennedy assassination as the event that provokes the question 'where were you when ...?'

Those who attacked the Warren Commission back when it was noticed have split into two camps. Both agree it was a snow job but the motives they assign to it differ. For the Oliver Stone crowd, the propaganda arm of the military-industrial complex murdered the 'dovish' Kennedy. The more reasonable among this school of thought argue that the Commission only pursued the theory that Oswald did it alone to steer the public away from believing it was a communist plot, and thus thwart their desire for revenge against a nuclear-armed Russia.

What is amazing is how much of the Commission's findings hold up. True, they shower the reader with overkill in the data department. We are given the name of Jack Ruby's grandmother and a photograph of Oswald's pubic hair. And questions are not posed about



J F Kennedy Wikipedia

Oswald's murky associations with rabid anticommunist David Ferrie (Oswald was in Ferrie's Civil Air Patrol Unit in 1955 – a photo shows them together, albeit far apart at a unit picnic). Nor about him sharing the same building where he cranked out 'Fair Play For Cuba' pamphlets with a far rightist supplier of weapons to anti-Castro groups. These associations certainly warranted further follow-up. Examined in light of Oswald's subsequent actions, this could have been just another instance of him trying to infiltrate an anti-Castro organization as he did another in New Orleans (members of the latter saw him, two days after trying to join, distributing 'Fair Play For Cuba' pamphlets). The Commission did not even entertain the possibility of following them up, which is criminal since neither necessarily negated Oswald acting alone.

Overall however their conclusions have held up. A recent test shot by an apolitical sniper revealed that if a bullet came from the Grassy Knoll it would have exited Kennedy's head and torn Jackie's face off. Moreover to have made the bullet exit the President's brain the assassin would have had to fire standing on a 12 foot ladder – a sight witnesses would have undoubtedly noticed. This same sniper,

on examining the bullet trajectories, concluded that the head shot came from the Sixth Floor Schoolbook Depository, which he was able to duplicate.

For those who argued that Oswald could not have made the shots, there is the vital matter of whether Oswald was enough of a rifleman to qualify as a Marine ‘Marksman’ – a high grade in a branch of the armed forces known for their combat skills.

These ballistics held up even when re-examined by a sceptical Congressional Committee in the late seventies. Mere days before members were about to validate the conclusions of the Warren Commission, a dicta-belt recording from a policeman’s motorcycle was produced, seemingly registering the sound of a fourth shot; this information swayed their conclusions toward a conspiracy. However computer and acoustics experts have since located this sound as being well before the other shots and have classified it as a backfire from said cop’s motorcycle.

Some however still desperately cling to their conspiracy theories. They counter the above evidence with the question of motive: why would the Marxist Oswald murder a liberal President? Radical journalist Dwight MacDonald, who defended the Commission in 1964, brilliantly argued that a liberal made an ideal target for a Marxist; since liberals were trying to improve society within the capitalist system rather than seeking to overthrow it. But it is questionable whether Kennedy was a liberal. As a recent book by Ira Stoll has shown, Kennedy was more conservative than liberal; his hatred of communism was such that he attempted to murder Castro and upped the number of advisers in Vietnam.

Much has been made of Kennedy’s supposed back channel attempts to normalize relations with Castro. But that same month, September 1963, the President had given the green light for a sabotage operation against Cuba. He was also at the planning stage of a Cuban invasion – the pretext being that despite his promises during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev had not removed offensive nuclear weapons from the island – set for December 1963. Nevertheless there are many, usually with a stake in the Camelot myth of a dying king trying to transcend the Cold War, who ponder what might have been. They are confident that Kennedy would have ended the Cold War, to which a normalisation of relations with Cuba was key. But what might have been was that Cuba would have been invaded or, at the very least, Castro murdered. All such plans ended on November 22, 1963, when the new President Lyndon Baines Johnson abandoned these plots (he told an aide that the ‘Kennedy brothers were operating a “Goddamn Murder Incorporated” in the Caribbean’).

Kennedy was the most public face of anti-Castroism, and this could have signed his death warrant with the fervently pro-Castro Oswald. Oswald’s intention had always been to seek asylum in Cuba. Marina Oswald, his wife, recalled him wanting to hijack a plane to Cuba. Mere weeks before the assassination he unsuccessfully tried to obtain a Cuban visa at the Cuban embassy in Mexico City; in his demented mind, he might have believed killing Castro’s number one foe would earn him this visa. This was a missed opportunity by the Commission, who, as historian James McPherson remarked, steered clear of Oswald’s Communist beliefs in order to focus on his mental instability.

When I was a graduate student in one of the few colleges that still encouraged empirical thinking, I was advised not only to debate the message but to consider the biases of the messenger. Mere minutes after the assassination the Soviets peddled the theory, eagerly lapped up by the Grassy Knoll leftists, that Kennedy had been killed by rightist forces. The attention-grabbing Marguerite Oswald, the assassin’s mother, immediately argued that her son did not kill Kennedy, but was an intelligence agent patriotically serving his country.

The eagerness by which this theory was embraced by leftists was suspect. Here was a way for them to eschew the grown-up view of reality, in which irrationality plays a large part and makes it possible that a dead-beat Marxist could kill the most important figure on earth; instead they searched for meaning and a more politically satisfying assassin. Finding scepticism about their theories, the left asserts that the populace never consider them because if they did they would be forced to conclude that evil forces are in charge of the government. Even more horrifying is that failures can still murder important figures; that chaos reigns and history is messy.

Recent polls have not been encouraging for a now ageing conspiracy crowd. Belief that Oswald acted alone has jumped twenty points, from 37 percent twenty years ago to 57 percent in 2013. And why not? In today’s world, disturbed individuals shoot not only important politicians but whole schools.

Ron Capshaw is a writer living in Virginia.

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Bachar el-Assad, Syria's Reluctant Macbeth

Titus F Josephus

Should foreign policy be the pursuit of national interest or the construction of a better world, that is to say a world in which foreigners (never we, of course) behave better? The latter purpose is almost always doomed to failure and will not even serve the former. It is easier to deform the world than to reform it, and it is very rarely that what we aim at is what we achieve.

Moral outrage at the wickedness of foreign powers and their rulers is, of course, a pleasant and gratifying emotion, as well as a welcome distraction for politicians grappling with intractable problems at home, but it is not a good guide to action. It leads to a Manichaean approach to foreign affairs that more often than not leaves a horrific mess in its wake. It is easier, and takes less courage, to bomb an enemy abroad than to persuade an elector at home that his ideas are deeply and dangerously mistaken.

When the uprising in Syria began as the latest episode in the so-called Arab Spring (if spring comes, can winter be far behind?), there was a kind of moral triumphalism in the west. Yet another population was demonstrating its attachment to the West's universal political message of freedom and democracy. Was not Bachar al-Assad a brutal tyrant, the son of an even more brutal tyrant, whose fall was long overdue? Those brave people who took up arms against his regime were fighting for the freedom that we take for granted, or at least once took for granted. Surely we should support them against the monster?

We gave the rebels arms but nothing else; then, slowly, painfully, we discovered that in any case the enemies of freedom's enemies are not necessarily freedom's friend. People are seldom impelled to take up arms and court extreme danger merely for

the opportunity to lose next year's elections, or the elections after those; nowhere is the truth of the Romanian peasant's saying, that a change of rulers is the joy of fools, more amply and dispiritingly borne out than in the Middle East.

People generally fight more ferociously for power than for freedom; and so it has proved in Syria. And President Assad's fiercest and most redoubtable opponents are not those trying to establish a

parliamentary democracy, but a theocracy of a particularly vicious type, all the worse of course in a country with so many religious groups to be butchered. It might have been in Assad's self-interest to point this out from the first, but that does not mean that he was altogether wrong.

Whatever else might be said about Assad, he has never been a theocrat. At one time he was even almost an attractive or tragic figure, in that he had never intended to be a dictator, and would not have been had his brother not been killed in an

accident. His ambition was to be an ophthalmologist, and by all accounts his behaviour, while he was training in London, and before he received an invitation to return to Syria that he could not refuse, was modest and decent. It is likely that when he took over from his ruthless father, he had good intentions; but good intentions count for very little in the Syrian environment, and he found himself in the middle of a Macbethian drama in which he was, *ex officio* as it were

... in blood

*Stepped in so far that, should he wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.*

Power in the Middle East is like pregnancy, you cannot have just a little of it.

Although Assad was never a theocrat, he was always a religious factionalist, as almost any conceivable ruler



"We can put you up but if you need a midwife or a doctor you'll never get one to come out at this time of night."

of Syria, or component part of Syria must be: for Syria is no more a nation state than the European Union would be if it had a unitary government.

In 1982, his father, more a dictator by vocation than his son, put down a revolt by Islamists in the city of Hama with horrendous ferocity, at a cost of thousands of lives and tens of thousands of prisoners. But the Syrian population had little to hope from an Islamist victory. Many of the lives lost by Assad's ferocity were innocent; but the Islamists did not have much of a conception of innocence either where the spilling of blood was concerned.

The rules under a dictatorship such as Assad's (and for that matter Saddam Hussein's) were clear. You did not concern yourself with politics and you assiduously avoided any business in which the President, his family or clan corruptly interested themselves. These were not rules that would recommend themselves to an Enlightenment political philosopher, but they were liveable. What has followed, in Iraq for example, is much worse.

George W Bush, the evangelical Christian, virtually ended the double-millennial history of Christianity in Iraq, something that Saddam Hussein, a secularist, would never have done. It was not his intention to do so to be sure, but his Manichaean vision of an axis of evil, combined with the lack of courage and honesty necessary to confront the source of so much Islamist trouble in the world, Saudi Arabia and Qatar,

meant that, like the school-yard bully, he had to find a substitute. It was easier to attack a weak non-enemy like Saddam: but hark what discord followed!

Never quick to learn from experience, the powerful imagine that they can make work what did not work the last time round. First they encouraged the rebellion in Syria with implicit promises that they did not keep, then they supplied it with sufficient arms to keep it going but not enough to secure it victory, thus ensuring both the massacre of civilians and the extension of Islamist influence and power. It was obvious from the first that any victory by the rebels would soon lead to an Islamist state, for between the *soi-disant* democrats and moderates on the one hand, and Islamists on the other, there could be no compromise. Syria was never a potential Denmark. If from the first they had joined with Russia to support Assad, Aleppo would have been spared, thousands of deaths avoided, and Islamism contained.

A single question should have been sufficient to introduced realism into the slow minds of the policy-makers: why do the Christians of Syria unanimously support Assad in the civil war, and why did they do so from the first? If the west had been intent upon eradicating Christianity from Syria and Iraq, it could not have done better than it has done.

T F Josephus is a pseudonym of a Middle Eastern commentator.

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Farage and Barroso; Political Flat Earthers

Jonathan Story

Barroso is a paper tiger and so is Farage. It doesn't seem like that. Barroso said that the free movement of labour was an immutable pillar of the EU, and Farage tweeted thanks to Barroso for supporting his view.

How come that Barroso and Farage are at one? Barroso is typical of the new generation of European leaders. Most of them were on the left to the far left in the 1960s and 1970s. Barroso was a fire-eating Portuguese Maoist. What all revolutionaries have

in common, even when they migrate to their present comfort zones, is to have a flat earth view of the world.

Barroso's flat earth is the EU's commitment to ever-closer union, which he interprets, as Farage would argue, as the accumulation of formal powers in Brussels. The EEC of 1972 was a protectionist organisation with quite a steep external tariff and subsidised farm exports. France was running out of leverage over Germany to pay for its farm exports, so it turned to the UK, whose government was in a dither

about managing a medium sized economy well.

As Barroso hinted, the UK was a proud state. Up to the Accession Treaty its constitution, unwritten, was an elaboration on the Bill of Rights of 1689. The Bill of Rights was one of the foundation stones, along with Magna Carta, of the United States, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa. In 1972, the authors of the UK's accession signed away the 1689 legacy, and accepted in Article 2 that EEC law would overrule UK law.

Why this was radical has never been properly written up. The UK advocates of accession were super liberal supranationalists. They wanted supranational law to override national law, in order to prevent war, and make large internal markets.

They were more supranationalist than anyone else in the EEC. Germany and Italy paid lip service to federal aims. But their behaviour was distinctly national. The Netherlands was no different. The France of Pompidou was run by Gaullists, to whom supranationalism was anathema: supranationalism, they argued, was the not-so-covert language of German ambition.

So why did the UK side with Germany, and the federalist camp? Because the UK leadership wanted entry, believed rather than spoke the patter about nationalism as the source of war, and had a complete vision of the EU as a substitute for empire. Hence the argument of 'influence', and of the importance of sitting at high tables.

How does that lead us to the present? Simply, the EU is not amenable to supranationalism and the UK supranationalists abysmally failed to sell their vision to the public. The UK public clove to the inherited view of this country as subject to none, with the power to make its own policies, and elected representatives in our ancient parliament as answerable to the electorate.

Barroso tries to defend his flat earth view of Europe. This says that the Euro 'is' Europe: its failure would be a disaster. Underpinning the Euro are the four freedoms, the European Court of Justice, the EU institutions and all the paraphernalia. Farage attacks the flat earthers, not so much those in Brussels, who are now his objective allies, as the Marxists say. He attacks those in London, who have no popular backing in the UK, and have an unrealisable vision of the EU as a prescription for Europe.

Europe is a mosaic of interdependent peoples and states, with one underlying common culture of Christianity, Rome and Greece, but with a great diversity of traditions, memories, languages, literature,

tax systems, and financial systems. Their individuals can marry, do business together, be friendly one with another. But their countries cannot marry. They cannot move to the 'ever closer union' which our supranationalists, here and in Brussels, seek.

This is the rich vein which Farage has struck. Barroso claims the project is a success: but any child can see that this is a fabrication. By casting different countries into a Euro straitjacket, the leaders of Europe, encouraged by the UK supranationalists who wanted part of the action, have created an economic meltdown on the continent, with very serious longer term political consequences. They cannot plead success in their favour. What they can do, by their tunnel vision of what Europe is, is play into the hands of the continent's populists, whom they despise but encourage by their folly.

By casting different countries into a Euro straitjacket, the leaders of Europe, encouraged by the UK supranationalists who wanted part of the action, have created an economic meltdown on the continent, with very serious longer term political consequences.

If Barroso was savvy, he would be laid back about a mosaic of different states and peoples finding their own ways around present difficulties, he would accept the obvious point that such

a diverse collection of members need to bob and weave to manage their complex interdependence with each other and the rest of the world.

By saying that the freedom of movement of people is an unbudgeable pillar of the EU, Barroso is helping to radicalise Europe. The same can be said of our liberal supranationalists. What can be said of them all is that they know nothing, and have learnt nothing about Europe. To live peacefully together and cooperate closely, Europe has to strengthen, not weaken the democratic and constitutional underpinnings of every one of its member states and beyond.

It is doing the opposite. In drawing our attention to this grave failing, Farage is doing us a favour. But he is a paper tiger because the Europe he is attacking is a paper tiger. It is not the real Europe that every person in this country should be concerned about.

Jonathan Story is Emeritus Professor of Economics at INSEAD and author of many books on European and Asian economies.

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Hanged by the Neck

Christie Davies

It is now just over fifty years since the last execution in Britain. In August 1964, two petty criminals, John Robson Walby and Peter Allen, were hanged for the murder in his own home of a laundry-van driver whom they were trying to rob. The Conservative Home Secretary, Henry Brooke, quite properly refused to advise that they be reprieved. In October, 1964 the Labour Party narrowly won the General Election, even though its share of the vote had not increased, and, contrary to the wishes of the electorate, immediately set about getting rid of capital punishment. In 1965, capital punishment for murder was provisionally abolished for five years and in 1969 it was finally brought to an end, again under Labour. In 1966 when Sydney Silverman the Labour bank bencher who had led the campaign for abolition sought re-election, Patrick Downey stood against him as an independent on a 'bring back hanging for murder' platform and got 5,000 votes, 13 percent of those who voted.

In principal there had been a free vote on abolishing the death penalty but only one Labour MP dared to vote against. The Labour government of 1964-6 had many urgent tasks and a tiny majority but abolition of capital punishment was a major priority for its MPs and in consequence for the government and for its Home Secretary, Sir Frank Soskice. Opposition to capital punishment was and remains a key issue for Labour just as it had been in 1930 when capital punishment for desertion from the army was abolished on a free vote; only two Labour MPs voted against.

There have been many attempts in Parliament since 1969 to restore capital punishment. These ended when in 1998 Britain ratified the 6th Protocol and in 2003 the 13th Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights forbidding the death penalty for any crime and under all circumstances, even in war-time. A Labour government and its members of parliament had given away even the possibility of restoring capital punishment. The people's will was now frustrated

not just by the politicians but by supposedly binding international agreements. Any new bill to restore capital punishment is not going to get anywhere, even though about two thirds of the British people support capital punishment.



Albert Pierrepoint executed 435 people

In one way it is perhaps just as well, since capital punishment is unworkable. Some of the public want it as a deterrent and some as natural justice but there is a major conflict between the two. Between 1957 and 1964 capital punishment could only be employed in cases where it was seen to act as a deterrent, notably for murder during a robbery or other crime of theft, murder using a gun and the murder of a police officer. The murders that

most shocked the public, such as murder by poisoning, sex murders or the murder of a child, could not result in execution. The senior judges conducting murder trials were so shocked at often being unable to sentence the most heinous individual murderers to death while forced to order the execution of those less culpable that they became determined abolitionists. Previously they had been, in George Orwell's words. 'that typically English figure, the hanging judge, some gouty old bully with his mind rooted in the nineteenth century, handing out savage sentences.' Once retribution directed against specific individuals had ceased to be central to capital punishment the judges were no longer happy to don the black cap. Deterrence is about statistics, about the relative probability of imagined futures; trials are about actual past events. To execute only as a deterrent seems unjust. We could save a lot of lives by making drunken driving a capital offence but it would not be right to do so. Yet to execute the worst of murderers in the absence of any element of deterrence or of preventing them killing seems pointless. Pure retribution is too close to revenge for comfort.

Retribution is a slippery concept and one on which reasonable people disagree. No one thinks it would be right to execute all murderers. In the days when it was the automatic penalty for murder a large proportion of

those sentenced to death were reprieved on the advice of the Home Secretary and most of these were released after ten to twelve years. It is doubtful whether those who were executed were more morally disgusting than those who were not executed. In any case a persistent blackmailer, a torturer, a serial rapist or a violent attacker who reduces a victim to a pitiable shadow of his or her past self might well be more deserving of execution than some of the murderers who were executed. Murder is not a uniquely awful crime. Those who say the taking of life is in and of itself so much worse than other crimes that the offender's life should be forfeit are either Noah or close to self-contradiction.

Most of the upholders of capital punishment understood these problems and were also uneasy at the arbitrary decisions, in effect made in secret by civil servants, to reprieve some murderers but not others, which made a mockery of trial by jury. So they wanted a division of murders into capital and non-capital kinds according to culpability. But they could never agree on which categories of murder are the more culpable, nor can they do so today. In the nineteenth century and again in 1948, the matter was debated in Parliament but no agreement could be reached. In any case, even within a particular category that greatly shocks, such as poisoning, some murders are clearly far more wicked than others. There is within each category both ordinary foul murder and murder most foul. Currently there is a demand that capital punishment should be introduced for those who murder children. But the person most likely to murder a child is its mother. Who wants to execute mothers? If the child is less than two years of age, the crime is classed as infanticide and treated leniently, ostensibly because the mother is suffering the after-effects of giving birth. Yet of what proportion of mothers who kill their own twenty-month-old child is this true?

Until about 2006 a case could have been made out for saying that the death penalty had been a deterrent, for after 1964 the numbers of murders had risen inexorably until the early twenty-first century. Indeed the full extent of the rise was disguised by improvements in medical intervention, which had saved the lives of many who in earlier times would have died following a 'murderous' attack. After abolition the number of male victims, victims of public murders, had risen far faster than that of female victims who were mainly the victims of domestic murders. Those who framed the 1957 act abolishing capital punishment for domestic murders but retaining it for public murders had been

vindicated. But in the last seven years the homicide rate has fallen markedly, along with the incidence of violent crime generally. Today the number of homicides is back to where it was in 1983. This indicates that we have to seek the determinants of the murder rate elsewhere and frame our responses accordingly. As in Victorian England, violent crime tends to fall in a recession because people have less money to spend on alcohol. If we want to be serious about curbing violence then alcohol has to be made more expensive and there must be an end to the 24-hour drinking introduced by Mr Blair. It is particularly significant that the murder rate is higher in hard-drinking Scotland than in England and Wales. Among the European countries when ranked by the incidence of murder, Scotland comes second only to Finland, another country with a serious alcohol

problem. It also helps that today we lock up more of our violent criminals for longer. Incapacitation works. Let us lock up even more.

In order to justify an execution you have to be certain of three things: that the convicted person is guilty,

that a hanging would deter others and that the crime committed by that person is considerably more wicked than the general run of murders. It is not possible to do this. Since capital punishment was abolished there have been many cases where the wrong person was convicted of murder and given a life-sentence or the conviction was later quashed as unsafe. Who could feel easy today if they had been executed? There is always a temptation for the police and the crown prosecution service to stitch up a likely suspect in a high profile case. Defence lawyers make mistakes particularly in failing to challenge forensic evidence because they have no knowledge of science and even more important no training in statistics. Thanks to the government's inept attempt to save money, we are about to see a marked drop in the quality of criminal defence work. Judges are remote from reality and a substantial proportion of jurors are of below average intelligence. Worst of all, those of repellent mien are far more likely to be convicted than those who are personable and attractive, quite regardless of the evidence.

In the United States, there have been very many cases of an innocent person being executed and also of obviously guilty murderers being acquitted. Eighteen men on death row have been exonerated by improved DNA testing. It is no good pretending that it cannot happen here. The pretence can be as bad as the reality. Timothy John Evans was executed in 1950 after confessing to the murder of his daughter

The case for carrying out executions is poor but it does not follow that Britain should not restore the death penalty. The example we should follow is that of Israel, a democratic country that shares our high regard for justice. Israel has capital punishment but only one person has ever been executed, Adolf Eichmann. The death penalty in Israel may well never be used again.

and implying also that he had murdered his wife. He was a fantasist of low intelligence and the confessions had been fabricated by the police who also threatened him with violence. A key witness for the prosecution was John Halliday Christie who lived in the same house. In court Evans accused Christie, a man with a criminal record, of committing the murders. The jury believed Christie, a plausible witness. But two years later it emerged that Christie was a serial murderer and he admitted having killed Beryl, Timothy Evans' wife. Two successive commissions of inquiry were set up, the Scott Henderson inquiry of 1953 and the Brabin inquiry of 1965-66. Both proved to be dubious exercises in establishment whitewashery aimed mainly at exonerating the police and avoiding at all costs any admission that an innocent man had been executed. When I formally asked the Home Office just over a decade ago to let me see their files on those who had been pardoned for other offences prior to 1950 they refused on utterly bogus grounds even though I was co-author of an earlier book on the subject. They will do anything to cover up error. Only in 2003 was it admitted by the Home Office that Evans had not been guilty and compensation payouts made to his surviving relatives. It does not give one much confidence in the system.

The same problems would arise if the courts had to decide not just on guilt but also on the degree of wickedness of the crime and in consequence whether the murderer should or should not be executed. Most of those on death row in the United States, currently over three thousand, are there not because of disputes about whether they committed the crime but due to wrangles over the balance of aggravating and mitigating factors in their particular case. The arguments employed often tend to be fatuous. It would simply be much cheaper to commute all their sentences to life imprisonment. We in Britain do not want to end up in the sort of quagmire seen in California or Texas.

The case for carrying out executions is poor but it does not follow that Britain should not restore the death penalty. The example we should follow is that of Israel, a democratic country that shares our high regard for justice. Israel has capital punishment but only one person has ever been executed, Adolf Eichmann. The death penalty in Israel may well never be used again.

What is at stake is a question of sovereignty. We need to nullify our signing away our national sovereignty by agreeing never to reintroduce capital punishment regardless of the will of Parliament and people. We must start systematically ignoring the utterly arbitrary and unaccountable decisions of the European Court of Human Rights until such time as it restricts itself strictly to the wording and meaning of the original

European Convention on Human Rights. The latest nonsense from the ECHR in Strasburg has been to rule that judges in Britain may not impose whole-life sentences without any possibility of parole. We would have to hand out sentences of two hundred years with no applying for parole for eighty years to get round the ruling. Why should we allow this oddball bunch of justices, often from countries lacking our traditions of democracy and legality, to decide such a matter? In particular we should take warning from Spain's recent experience. Last year the ECHR forced the Spanish courts to release dozens of murderers serving long sentences, including serial rapist Manuel González. González had raped sixteen women and killed one of them between 1991 and 1993 and was sentenced to 169 years but the ECHR has ruled that he is entitled to considerable remission and he has been released. A medical report says there is a high risk that he will once again start attacking women. This case encapsulates the stupidity of having to comply with distant legal decisions made by judges who know nothing of local circumstances and do not consider the consequences of their decisions. Power without responsibility. Decisions that cannot be reversed by legislation. Arbitrary judgements. Do we really want this?

There have been in Europe cases of smug little countries that abolished the death penalty and then arbitrarily brought it back when faced with a dreadful crime that had never been envisaged, as when the Dutch, who had abolished the death penalty in the 1870s, executed Ans van Dijk a World War II female collaborator with the Germans in 1948. It is distasteful that the European elite should see Europe as morally superior to the United States or even more so to India – a country of over a billion people that has had four executions in twenty years – simply because capital punishment has been abolished in our little peninsula of a continent. Abolishing capital punishment is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a country to qualify as a civilised democracy. Both of these countries are sufficiently self-confident to be able to ignore European bleating on the subject. We in Britain need to dissociate ourselves from this European humbug by restoring capital punishment following a referendum. We should become another New Hampshire where no one has been executed since 1939 but where the death penalty is still in principle possible and has much public support.

Christie Davies is the author of The Strange Death of Moral Britain and co-author with Ruth Brandon of Wrongful Imprisonment: Mistaken Convictions and their Consequences.

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Britain's Turkish Frontier

Gabriel Hershman

Bulgaria, a far away country of which we know nothing? Since Labour and the Conservatives dismantled our borders, Bulgaria is now Britain's south east frontier. Gabriel Hershman describes those who stand on its ramparts.

If you need help to understand Bulgarian politics I can recommend an illuminating film called *The World is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner*. The story, told in flashback, features a sinister Communist interrogator/torturer. By the end (flash forward) he adorns an election poster as a smiling, sharp-suited, not-a-hair-out-of-place, modern Bulgarian candidate for office.

Bulgaria is a place where people re-invent themselves continuously, swanning between 'political formations' – as they call them here – as if they were indeed parties of a very different kind. They rush, as was said of Mussolini, to the side of the winner without a thought for principle or loyalty.

Currently, Bulgaria has no government. But we assume that Boyko Borisov, whose 'formation' won the largest share of votes in Bulgaria's recent October 5 election, will be prime minister for the second time. Borisov is the kind of guy whose appearance at an international summit would/should scare most people. A karate-kicking, ex-firefighting sportsman, he once gave Boris Becker a close contest in a pro-celebrity tennis tournament. Thankfully, though, Borisov lost, sparing Angela Merkel's blushes. Perhaps that's why she likes him.

Borisov leads a centre-right formation called GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria. Pompous and grandiose self-designations like this are commonplace in Bulgaria – as befits the immaturity of the whole process. The further east you go, the more meaningless they become. Hence Russia's Vladimir Zhirinovskiy claims to be a Liberal Democrat!

Borisov was once ex-bodyguard to Todor Zhivkov, Europe's longest serving Communist leader. How Borisov made the leap from minder to tyrant to leader of a pro-European 'rightist' formation would be a difficult road to Damascus anywhere. But this is Bulgaria where people make that walk, to quote the late Baroness Seear on Neil Kinnock, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. At least Borisov does not hate business or foreign companies (unlike some populist

formations) but his government did little to tackle the unabashed corruption that makes wealth synonymous with crime in Bulgaria.

A little history for the uninitiated: in early 2013, Borisov, the self-styled 'tough-guy', quit amid a series of increasingly violent demonstrations over energy prices. In so doing he precipitated 18 months of crisis. Although he won more votes than any other individual party in last year's election, the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) – essentially the descendants of the former Communist party – formed a coalition under the leadership of Plamen Oresharski. Never heard of him? I'm not surprised. No international statesman – except the Vietnamese leader – ever granted him an audience. Perhaps because they knew he was just a stopgap – or perhaps 'doorstop' is more appropriate because Oresharski was besieged by protests at the gates of parliament throughout his premiership. (Oresharski, by the way, was another frequent traveller on the road to Damascus, having been a member of several different formations.)

Fresh elections on October 5 this year resolved little. Borisov's GERB is still the biggest formation but with insufficient support to govern on its own. The BSP is now disgraced following Oresharski's disastrous tenure. So they are highly unlikely to be a coalition partner for GERB; in any case, they have ruled themselves out.

That left Borisov having to do a deal with several small formations who entered the current parliament after passing the four per cent threshold necessary for representation. The no-hopers were former President Parvanov's breakaway formation from the BSP, called Alternative for Bulgarian Revival. I say 'no-hope' but you can't blame Parvanov because this is a country where the former exiled Bulgarian king returned, created a new formation and won a massive victory within a few months. That formation was called National Movement for Stability and Progress. Now it attracts below one per cent, nowhere near the threshold. But that's Bulgaria. In a country where few have hope for the future, a newcomer can capture the imagination 'just like that' – as Tommy Cooper would say.

One such is Volen Siderov, leader of the extreme nationalist Ataka. Well, with a name like that you know it's not appealing to people who sit around

discussing how to attract Foreign Direct Investment. Siderov is anti-Western, anti-Roma, anti-Turk, anti-Moslem, anti-Masonic and anti foreign companies. His headline-grabbing antics include buttonholing the US ambassador and demanding to be reimbursed for the cost of using American military bases in Bulgaria and launching campaigns against loudspeakers at Sofia's Central Mosque. Siderov has warm words for Putin and heaped praised on the late Hugo Chavez. On the morning of October 5, Siderov told Bulgarians to 'vote with their hearts'. Enough apparently did, leaving their brains behind, to enable Ataka to cross the threshold for entry into parliament.

Most of Siderov's past invective is aimed at the DSP, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the party supported predominantly by Bulgarian Turks. Ataka professes to despise its (undeniably) sinister influence. Yet, perversely, it depends on it for its popularity. The more powerful the DSP, the more Ataka benefits. It's a bit like UKIP without immigrants or Brussels. What would be its purpose?

Ironically, both Ataka and the DSP helped (tacitly) to prop up the Oresharski government. The DSP have featured as an ally of many governments. One of their favourite tactics is to ferry in supporters from Turkey – Bulgarian Turks who fled Zhivkov's forced name-changing in 1985 – and who now have dual citizenship. The result is that many who voted for DSP's current leader Lyutvi Mestan also voted for Erdogan. The DSP's former leader, Ahmed Dogan, who was confronted by a gunman while addressing his party congress, was known for his non-attendance in parliament and for his flamboyant lifestyle. The party's supporters are predominantly poverty-stricken tobacco pickers who live in southeast Bulgaria. But they are a 'client' group who always vote the same way.

The most sensible coalition partner for Borisov from the outset was the Reformist Bloc, home to various centre-right parties. Their thinking is most in line with traditional western conservative thinking. This group is backed by erudite, progressive and outward-looking Bulgarians – hence it has had trouble retaining support. The Reformist Bloc is Borisov's most likely coalition partner. But in Bulgaria no amount of political manoeuvring is ever truly a surprise.

No subject illustrates this fantastic *Alice in Wonderland* of politics than that of Gay Rights. If the Red Queen could think six impossible things before breakfast, Bulgarians politicians can think fifty. One of their greatest feats has been to gain entry to Europe pretending Bulgarian gays do not exist.

In Bulgaria it is the one great 'unmentionable'. I'm not referring to the state's failure to deal with rampant corruption or organised crime or its run-

down infrastructure. No, at least people TALK about these things. Then, after widespread consultation and promises, they do absolutely nothing at all.

I was reminded of the 'unmentionable' when I saw David Cameron on TV being asked by Evan Davis how he would react if he saw two gay men kissing in public. Cameron replied that he had no problem with this. In Bulgaria it's not simply that no leading politician would have the 'effrontery' to say such a thing. Well, they wouldn't, of course. But that is not my point. It's that the whole subject is so under wraps that no interviewer would dare even broach it. This is verboten territory. 'Liberal' politicians may occasionally comment on the plight of the Roma or the problems facing Syrian refugees. But they know they risk unpopularity if they do so. Bulgaria is an easy target culture. A human rights watch organisation, for whom I do occasional freelance work, is deeply reviled by some Bulgarians, merely for saying things that are now ingrained into British mainstream thinking. But NOBODY comments on gay rights. It is one of those things that are simply socially unacceptable.

Sofia has an annual gay pride rally; it is officially sanctioned by the mayor. Yet no politician of any party has ever appeared at the rally. At the most recent event the only people who spoke out in support were the American and British ambassadors. The rally is usually attacked by extremists. Yet in Bulgaria most people believe that homosexuality is abhorrent – so many people probably sympathise with the attackers. The worst prejudice in Bulgaria comes not only from skinhead extremists but also from the BSP because here those of enlightened, progressive views tend to be on the centre-right. But even the supposed liberals are silent.

When I worked on an English-language newspaper in Sofia we covered the gay rights rally. Our staff contained Western-minded, progressive young Bulgarians, some of whom had spent time overseas. One week we decided to put a photo of the gay pride rally on the front page. I suddenly heard a commotion from the neighbouring room. The Bulgarian graphic designer had taken gross exception to us even covering the story, let alone including a photo. The argument did not end there. He even wrote to the editor to complain that we were 'promoting' homosexuality in our paper. We were doing no such thing, of course.

I don't like to think of anyone being persecuted on account of consensual practices behind closed doors. If I thought some gay couple were being attacked on account of this I'd be appalled. I once saw two young men kissing on a London bus. If you want the truth, I didn't feel comfortable. But I wasn't about to attack them either. I quote the old Colonel who said as long

as they don't make homosexuality compulsory, he was fine. I can't think of anything worse than a child being raised by two gays but perhaps that's another issue. Yet I'm open-minded.

I remember an interview with Ian McKellen on the Wogan show in 1988. McKellen mentioned his homosexuality in, I believe, the context of the Thatcher's government's support for Section 28. Sitting next to him was Telly Savalas – alias Kojak! Wogan

asked Savalas what he thought of Section 28. Savalas paused for a moment and said – 'hands off, baby!'

In Bulgaria it's going to be a long time before people agree to a hands off approach to homosexuality. And live and let live applies more to the gangsters who always seem to escape uncensored. Queer, isn't it?

Gabriel Hershman is a British journalist and author currently based in Bulgaria.

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May we Borrow your Finger Prints?

Mark Griffith

The Home Office's plan to impose biometric identity cards on everyone in Britain continues. All Her Majesty's subjects are now obliged to provide portrait photographs for US mandated passports that make the irises of our eyes readable by scanners. As anyone who understands security has been saying for a couple of decades, this is an enormous and obvious mistake. 'Biometric' data is made up of information like fingerprints, DNA, iris scans, voice prints which can – it is believed – uniquely identify individuals. There are several major drawbacks – only one of which is that it makes everyone *less* rather than more secure. As security specialists explain, for governments to force a biometric identity on everybody is like having our bank card PIN codes tattooed on our foreheads. That is because, if there's a unique number or label that can be obtained from our bodies, it can be stolen from our bodies. To prove this civil-rights campaigners have on several occasions made copies of government ministers' fingerprints and DNA, simply by stealing his or her drinking glass from the podium after a public event.

Once the data is stored as a digital file, it can be copied and recopied, like a film, song or photograph. State mandated biometric identity files create what security consultants call 'the data honeypot' from which it is easy to steal the master keys to all of a victim's data. Moreover the widely held belief that such data is unique to an individual should be taken with a pinch of salt. From the first use of fingerprint evidence in 1911 until the 1980s juries invariably believed expert witnesses in courts when they said that fingerprints were unique to an individual. Then US criminologists began to show that fingerprints don't always establish someone was at the scene of a crime, and two different peoples' fingerprints can sometimes be mixed up. During the intervening seven decades of the 20th century a number of innocent people were

prosecuted for or convicted of serious crimes solely on the basis of fingerprint evidence hitherto believed to be infallible

In 2004 fingerprints linked the Madrid terrorist train bombings to American attorney Brandon Mayfield. Mayfield had no valid passport, and claimed to have not left the US in ten years. A federal judge signed a warrant on the evidence of two FBI fingerprint experts, one with 30 years experience, that Mayfield's prints were on a bag containing detonators found near where the train departed. Mayfield's story was eventually found to be correct. He had been nowhere near Spain in 2004.

Biometric evidence can even be planted on the scene of the crime. The idea that discovering a suspect's DNA at a crime scene clinches his guilt relies on the curious belief that police officers have never in any country fitted someone up for a crime. Current lab techniques now available to clone an individual's cells, or manipulate his or her DNA can create seemingly foolproof evidence that a given person was at a location. Readers who find it hard to imagine HMG doing this should reflect that it is never governments, but cliques within governments – or even just one or two individual officials – who fabricate evidence and give false testimony (not forgetting agents of a foreign power: remember Alexander Litvinenko and Georgi Markov). The process is getting easier every year: there are even 'DNA hackers', hobbyists who get enzymes or proteins delivered to them like ordering parts from a catalogue.

More mundane but hardly less effective, you can transfer fingerprints held on file on to skintight latex gloves and leave that person's fingerprints wherever you choose. Imagine you give HMG your iris scans which are subsequently stolen. (HMG has a history of losing large amounts of highly confidential digital data.) Anybody who steals this data can,

provided they are the same height and weight, enter a building guarded by an iris scanner wearing contact lenses with your irises printed on them.

If we recall the real reason for introducing passports in Britain in 1906 was a pre-World-War-One spy scare, we might ask if any German spies were actually caught by the trick of forcing everyone to carry documents every time they travelled? One or two perhaps, but German intelligence agencies became so skilled at forging documents that the whole exercise was a huge waste of time – ordinary people’s time, on every journey, every year, ever since. German forgery skills got so good that the Nazis later caused serious problems by counterfeiting British currency.

The introduction of Atlee’s welfare state in the late 1940s, on a model that assumed that wartime identity cards would remain (Labour made British people carry compulsory ID cards right up until 1950), created further problems. We got a system predicated on Labour’s belief that everyone should be forced to continue carrying around a tag showing that the government had decided who they were.

Today much of this is driven by a poorly thought through desire to automate everything. Banks want to employ fewer clerks, so they open call centres and close branches, and suddenly, without familiar faces at a local branch we are told we must prove to our own bank who we are. As Cambridge University security and encryption researcher Ross Anderson has pointed out, the notion of identity theft is simply the banks’ way of pushing the responsibility for fraud on to customers. In the past, if the bank gave your money to someone else, it was called fraud and the bank’s fault. Now banks call it identity theft and blame customers for not safeguarding their identity: blaming customers gives them an excuse not to compensate their loss. So if we should be careful not to have our identities stolen then what is a biometric passport but a piece of theft – or at least hostage-taking – by government? If someone using your identity to remove your money from a bank is defined as identity theft, what is a government doing when it demands we citizens give it our personal identification data?

As ever, the excuse is terrorism (or was it paedophilia? – I forget). How did we get to the point in a free society where tracking movements of all individuals became an acceptable substitute for police work? Another piece of automation laziness, an attempt to replace judicial trials with a checklist-style machine. Like the street cameras whose footage ordinary people aren’t allowed to watch (but which the police can declare they often don’t have the time to watch), tracking known terrorists is easily sold to unthinking people as a way of reducing crime. Success

at hedging in the IRA came from old-fashioned ‘humint’, inserting informers into terrorist groups, not from logging millions of arrivals and departures at airports every week. This is the ‘big data’ fantasy, well known to Silicon Valley journalists, and beloved of the US government: a brand of hubris that persuades once-successful firms to forget their original business and start wasting millions of dollars on grandiose authoritarian projects that belong in the realms of sci-fi. Although biometrics are not so wonderful at reducing crime (though that’s how they’re sold) they are useful for controlling the behaviour of law-abiding people, for example those tiresome types who criticise politicians or irritate our masters by campaigning against things. Moreover the very notion of a state monopoly on proof of identity reverses the principle of ‘presumed innocent until proven guilty’. Once the state has complete control of your identity, you become obliged to repeatedly prove your innocence to its officials, and only they can pronounce you innocent.

For if you think for half a minute about who should really own biometric data it makes sense that only the person himself or herself can be the rightful owner of information that can be used to identify who they are. And what counts as identifying information?

The boundaries between biometric data and basic likenesses are being blurred by facial-recognition software. Not to mention cunning algorithms that can identify your distinctive gait or walk from thousands of other people, even when you’re in a mask and wearing your giant carrot costume. Face-recognition reminds us how we’ve long identified people by their faces. Because digital photos are another form of biometric data might someone even have rights over a photo that recognisably shows him or her?

Recently several shapely American actors and actresses decided to take photographs of themselves naked. These photos were, unwisely, stored on computers in the cloud. Many were then stolen by hackers from supposedly secure networks (no network is truly secure) and now the internet is filled with photographs of several famously pretty girls displaying their unclothed charms to rather larger audiences than they intended. Many of these girls were cross about this.

Their attorney, Mr Marty Singer, was cross too. He wrote Google a stiff legal letter telling them he was not impressed that Google has not taken down all the images. But to whom do photos of Kim Kardashian, Gabrielle Union or Jennifer Lawrence, clothed or unclothed, belong? We have laws protecting people who might paint or photograph beautiful women, because photographers have done work and used skills to make the images. These are intellectual property

laws like copyright, design rights, trademarks. But if we think a little bit, we can see that any image recognizably of Jennifer Lawrence most plausibly belongs to ... Jennifer Lawrence. It might be in joint copyright if a photographer took it, but it doesn't make sense for copyright law to make portraits *not* also the intellectual property of the person you see in the pic.

Which – since facial likenesses are clearly a basic kind of biometric – brings us full circle. Continental-style laws securing privacy have often been proposed and enacted, but they are hard to define, and end up seeming arbitrary. Whereas laws about ownership are well established, well understood, and well tested. The sensible way forward is not to pass clumsy statutes securing nebulous 'rights' for people not to be photographed or fingerprinted in certain situations or

for their blood tests to not be stored in certain ways. The sensible way forward is to establish by law that all that information – from the facial likeness in a paparazzo's furtive snap to the data in a voice print or a DNA file – by default belongs to the individual identified.

Nation states have always behaved as if they own the people who live in them. Yet property rights have been one of the most successful legal ideas of the last thousand years. This is their next phase. If we don't own all the data verifying who we are, everything else we own is in doubt.

Mark Griffith is a journalist and former financial trader based in Budapest, Hungary. He manages a website at <http://greenpencilbooks.com>

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A Future of Tea and Trifle?

Penelope Fawcett Hulme

I had a message from a friend saying that she and her brother are selling the family home. She's sad about this but intends to take from the division of the spoils only an antique biscuit jar and one of her father's favourite books. She is a person of rare grace and part of that grace is her integrity. I thought about her as I travelled up to see my mother this week as she continues to pack up her house for sale and divide up the contents.

I decided that I would try to be as much like my friend as possible and not allow myself to take away things I didn't really need or like just because they were familiar or attached to old memories. I had to battle with myself as my mother showed me the remaining tea sets; strange blue Wedgwood, which she said pointedly, had been left to me by a favourite Aunt. The lid is not the right one, the gold has worn off and the spout is chipped, but she urged, 'do you still want it?' Not really but then I do like the strange Arabic pattern on the china, I did like my aunt, and would I want anyone else to have it?

Then there is the 1930s set, belonging to another well-loved aunt. Very pretty but a bit cracked, the cups not the aunt. I manage to let that go. Below, foursquare and fat sits the brown 1970s teapot, which looks to me more suitable for coffee, with matching plates. We used those all through my turbulent teenage years. It's surprising that there are any left considering the scale of family fights at that time. I think I will take it, then my mother points out that the plates are, 'the wrong

size, as no one has High Tea anymore.'

I decide to take them anyway, for very old and bitter time's sake. We move onto my other grandmother's grand silver-plated tea set from the 1950s. She used it all the time, with sugar tongs. I can't imagine ever doing that, so I decline. With all the other sets I have accepted I am facing a future of serious, dedicated tea drinking. In the cupboard below we find the glass bowl my mother used for making strawberry mousse, every Sunday tea, high or low. Strangely it's much smaller than I remembered and a lot less fancy. We both view it with disappointment.

'Not much good,' says my mother, and more suspiciously, 'not cut glass'.

Further back from the darkness of a cupboard, she produces an astonishingly beautiful bowl, modern crystal engraved with daffodils. It would like wonderful containing a lemon gin jelly.

'Don't put boiling water into it,' mother she says in alarm.

The bowl from an old lady my mother used to visit as part of a befriending the elderly scheme. At the time I thought my mother was nearly as old as the people she supported, in fact they were quite a lot older. The old lady had once been married to a wealthy man.

'She knew a good thing when she saw it,' said my mother, I thought referring to the glass bowl, but she was talking about the old lady. When I knew her she was tiny, frail and rough as guts and had once shown me a photo of her father standing outside his butcher's

shop in Dudley, proudly wearing a blood stained apron, his Jack Russell beside him.

‘He had a dog whip to thrash the dog,’ she told me, ‘especially if he went after bitches.’

I shuddered at the sight of her after that, her words having given me a clear glimpse of the horrors of the workaday English past. I was not keen on visiting her but then she had a stroke so my mother invited her for Christmas lunch. She couldn’t speak well but I remember her reedy Black Country voice suddenly ringing out, ‘Can I have some more of that custard?’ referring to my brandy sauce. I liked her again after that.

Not a very precious memory perhaps, I am not sure. My memories are all over the place, too many of them, I remember a lot from a very early age and don’t want to discount anything. As Soren Kierkegaard said, ‘Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.’ I am still a long way from understanding mine. I think I am trying to resolve things through the prism of these glass objects. I can’t be separated from them, and other things that once belonged to people now dead.

We moved to the kitchen drawers, where I took an old thing for making mint sauce, which I remember my mother using on Sundays, my granny’s whisk, bought some time in the early 50s, my mother’s best fridge magnets, a couple of fishermen, a tiny Cornish pasty made of real pastry I gave her after a holiday in St Ives, and a tiny picture of a child painting at a giant easel, bought from a tile museum in Holland.

On the worktop we scattered metal spouts for ancient icing bags, used for numerous children’s parties and Christmas cakes, which largely went uneaten. I took some birthday cake candles, but having no children,

nulliparous as one doctor coldly put it, I will have to use them for my own rather twee, camp birthday cakes, at parties where aging people half ironically bring back the pleasures of childhood again for a few silly hours. I also took wooden spoons used over the years for brandy sauce, savoury sauces and general roux, worn down and parched with age like bits of flotsam thrown up by the sea. But no, no, at last I could say a real no, to any more mugs!

As well as the daffodil bowl I also said “yes” to another large cut glass dish, which my mother said would be ideal for Christmas trifle. This bowl commits me to inviting a lot of people around at Christmas to eat a lot of trifle. Perhaps I will even have a trifle party. My future is going to be largely about tea, made properly with leaves, drunk from strangely small, delicate cups, and splendid glass bowls full of trifle and jelly. I left with a pincushion embroidered by an aunt I never knew, celebrating the coronation of Edward VIII, which never took place, and a pair of gardening shoes and a potato masher, even though I already have one at home.

On the train I thought about my childhood and my grandparents, dissimilar families living on different sides of the river Mersey, and my rather unlovable grandmother always using her grand tea service. I had decided to have it after all, so I could pay tribute to her standards whenever I used it. Then I thought of the other granny, poorer but so much loved, and felt deeply sad that there is no one to whom I can one day leave her whisk.

Penelope Fawcett is a social observer.

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Conservative Classic – 56

The Country Doctor Honoré de Balzac

Brian Ridley

T*he Country Doctor* lies somewhat outside Balzac’s *La Comédie Humaine*, and, possibly, could be assigned as a set book by the devolutionists in Westminster for all aspiring mayors.

A soldier, Commandant Genestas, rides up a beautiful valley in the foothills of the Alps towards a large village near the Grande Chartreuse, where the country doctor, Benassis, lives. Having heard of the doctor’s skill, he hopes that the niggling wounds he sustained years ago in Napoleon’s many campaigns might be alleviated. Arrived at the village, he finds it is effectively split

into three, an old part with higgledy-piggledy houses and streets, a new part with new houses and many sounds of active industry, and a dark gloomy part with ruined and deserted cottages. He meets the doctor who, discovering the soldier’s hopes, informs his housekeeper Jacquotte that the officer is to stay. The officer offers ten francs for his keep, not including the doctor’s professional services. ‘If you are wealthy, you will repay me amply’, Benassis replies, ‘and if you are not, I will take nothing whatsoever.’ In this, Balzac hints at the doctor’s admirable character, and

sets the framework for conversations between the two that reveals the range of extraordinary practical achievements, social and economic, by the doctor, for the life and well-being of the village.

The story is certainly pertinent for today's discussions of the devolution of power and the creation of mayors. It describes the transformation of a village with a few hundred poor peasants into a thriving township of a few thousand souls through the energy and benevolence of one man. Benassis, once he had secured the abandoned curé's house and plenty of wasteland at small cost, and had been made mayor, decided to exploit his medical knowledge, gained as a student, and become a country surgeon, 'determined to become a friend of the poor, and to expect no reward from them.' 'Above all things, in fact, I clearly understand that I should do nothing with them except through an appeal to their selfish interests, and by schemes for their immediate well-being.' (A manifesto for today? And always?)



Honoré de Balzac on an 1842 daguerreotype by Louis-Auguste Bisson

When Benassis first arrived, he discovered that there were a dozen cretins living with their families in those now-deserted cottages. Seeing these as a heavy burden on the community he arranges to transport them to another community, used to caring for cretins, where they would be better looked after. He then built houses for their families in the village so they could leave their miserable cottages in the gloomy part of the valley, but in spite of this he was immediately regarded as a monster by the superstitious peasants. Cretins were surely here for a purpose. Nevertheless, shrewder heads in the village prevailed, seeing the importance of ridding the village of its idiots. He survived, and set about improving the lot of the village.

He began by noting that the poor folk had to buy wickerwork and baskets that were used for their small trading activities. Noting that there was a good piece of land next to a torrent that was flooded each year, he persuades a bright young man to take a lease on a piece of land that was perfect for growing osiers. In Grenoble he finds a young craftsman without capital and sets him up in business in the village to produce baskets at a cheaper price. Benassis had inherited money from his father so he could help out when necessary. After four years osiers had grown, and the business was thriving.

One scheme followed another. The folk were persuaded to build a road over the mountain to Grenoble, which made the transport of timber from the sawmill and the transport of agricultural products

much easier. A young visiting bootmaker was induced to stay and exploit the local tannery, and he was soon exporting boots everywhere. Slowly, the village became richer and richer with more horses, more carts, and better irrigation of the fields.

But there were still poor peasants who, aged though they might be, were still expected to till the fields and contribute to the community. Benassis dreamt of a future almshouse for those who through age were

unable to work. But he expects every individual to pull his or her weight. Except one. This was a young woman known as La Fosseuse, who proved to be incapable of concentrating on any job given her: needle work, sowing, picking fruit, anything. She would start with good intentions but would soon be distracted by a flower, a butterfly, a cloud. In spite of her not being much use, Benassis ensures she has a house to live in, and expects everybody to put up with her vagaries. The villagers are puzzled, but accept it. Balzac does not develop this odd character, nor does he clarify further

her relationship to the doctor. He keeps Benassis as the principal, the sole protagonist, with little competition from Genestas and La Fosseuse. Instead of expanding further, he includes a rather boring section in which an old soldier and resident of the village recounts to his fellow villagers his Napoleonic campaigns.

Eventually, the reader learns why the talented Benassis has immured himself in these backwoods: thwarted love affairs, of course. A passionate and happy first love affair was wantonly disrupted by Benassis himself on finding himself rich on the death of his father. Wishing to cut a fine figure with similar rich airheads in Paris, he virtually abandoned his first love. She accepted this fate with resignation and with silence until, on her deathbed, she wrote to ask him to look after his son when she has gone. Not knowing he had a son, and crushed with guilt he rushes to her and promises to look after the boy. After her death, he finds his life increasingly fulfilled by his love for his son, but yet, after some years he wishes for marriage. Through friends he meets Evalina, the daughter of a very devout family, and they fall in love. But how to tell Evalina and her father about his first love and his son? In the event the father discovers his past, and that is the end of the relationship. Evalina, at the behest of her father, writes to Benassis informing him of his banishment, which she cannot rebel against. As though that were not bad enough, the son dies, and Benassis, devastated,

contemplates suicide. Instead, always having been drawn to St. Bruno, he opts for life in the Carthusian monastery of the Grand Chartreuse, and contemplates a total withdrawal from the world. This intention does not last long; the chanting of the monks, old and dead to the world, offends him, and he realizes it is better to live among his fellows and be of service.

After the doctor's confession we learn something more of the background of Genestas and La Fosseuse. A love affair in the case of Genestas, a love affair with a spaniel in the case of La Fosseuse. The book ends with Genestas and La Fosseuse standing at the grave of Benassis, and Genestas vowing to finish his days there.

The book is a parable of what can be done with money and imagination. Tender minds may choke on their vegetarian diet, and transporting idiots, but there is a lot to be said for it, is there not? Some may also worry about the expectation that every member of a community should be employed. The doctor's benevolence certainly did not stretch to funding a Welfare State, but it did provide a cost-free Health Service. Are the three elements that he considered necessary to the existence of society – conscience, property, and health – so very far from the mark?

Brian Ridley is a Fellow of the Royal Society

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Reputations – 45

Constable, Turner and Friedrich: great landscape artists of the Romantic era
Christie Davies

The late 18th and early 19th centuries were a golden age for landscape painting in Britain and in Germany. Constable and Turner placed British painting on an equal footing with that of France and Italy for the first time, arguably a position subsequently lost. In Germany Caspar David Friedrich was central to the Romantic movement; his landscapes are to Germany what Constable's are to England. All three were successful in their own time and their reputations remain high today but have experienced curious fluctuations.

Constable is one of the best known and best loved of all British painters, one ever true to nature, who captured for ever the flat and fluvial rural landscape of the borderlands of Suffolk and Essex, now named in his honour the 'Constable country'. Dorset and Salisbury were also among his favourite subjects. Constable had remarkable technical gifts and is particularly famous for his careful observation, study and sketching of clouds, of changing patterns of light and of the details of trees. He is in the same class as the great Dutch landscape artists such as Jacob van Ruisdael, whom he much admired; the British weather has the same rapidly changing clouds and skies as that of the Netherlands and this no doubt inspired him.

Why then should anyone today want to dent the reputation of a great English artist? It is as usual the self-consciously highbrow who sneer. They have been known to describe Constable as 'twee' and fit only for decorating chocolate boxes, biscuit tins and tea towels. As with the incomparable Lowry, they dislike

him for the very reason that he is loved by ordinary people, in their minds inferior folk, who only respond to sentimentality. No doubt such a criticism is true of some artists – look at the kitsch on sale in any department store – but to apply this argument to Constable is ridiculous; whatever the reasons for his popular appeal, he is a great artist. Sentiment is out of fashion, as we can see from the way that today it has to be concealed by a forced jocularly, but its presence does not necessarily destroy artistic merit as in another sphere we know from the novels of Charles Dickens. Constable's supporters have tried to riposte that in his day the artist was *avant garde* and indeed a forerunner of modern taste, but why bother to run such a defence? To be unresponsive to the *avant garde* in art is to be Philistine, but to condemn Constable because he is not is merely to adopt another form of prejudiced narrowness.

One may also suspect that Constable's detractors do not like his essential Englishness, something that does not fit in well with today's multicultural madness, though the same fatuous spite was noted by George Orwell decades before. In any case Constable had a very thorough knowledge of such Continental masters as Rubens, Claude and Poussin and Constable's work has been both admired and influential in France.

It is Turner who today sits on the pinnacle of critical opinion with a medal, a major prize and more than one gallery named in his honour. There are regular exhibitions of his work inevitably greeted with adulation, in part because he is seen as the precursor of the French Impressionists and of modern abstract art. The great

British public is equally admiring. In a 2005 poll to find the greatest painting in Britain thirty thousand votes were cast for the winner, Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*, 1838, as against a mere twenty thousand for the runner up, Constable's *The Hay Wain* 1821. *The Fighting Temeraire* is indeed a tribute to Turner's masterly depiction of light and grasp of contrast and of depth. But its popularity may well also rest on the elegiac and patriotic nature of its subject. The gallant old ship, now obsolete and being towed to the breaker's yard, had been in the thick of the fight at Trafalgar, a battle Turner had painted earlier. But the powerful, black, hard-smoking steam tug doing the towing is a sign of Britain's leadership and supremacy in the new industrial age.

Though the subject of critical attacks, Turner was never the embattled loner depicted by his great admirer Ruskin, and his career with the Royal Academy was smoother than Constable's who had had pictures refused. Some of his later indistinct and ambiguous pictures are, though, better appreciated today than in his own time; in his last years his contemporaries whispered that he was going senile and even his champion, Ruskin, thought Turner exhibited signs of 'mental disease' and turned away from him. He was too experimental for his time.

Friedrich's romantic spiritual landscapes of the mountains, woods and ruins of Germany, often with a lonely figure seeking the sublime and the eternal in nature, enjoyed great popularity among a German people crushed, occupied and humiliated by Napoleon and dreaming of liberation and national unity. When Napoleon's defeat merely restored the previous disunited patchwork of authoritarian states Friedrich then fell completely out of fashion and was almost forgotten. He was only rediscovered at the very end of the nineteenth century by the Norwegian art historian Andreas Aubert; he was then taken up by the now fervently nationalist Germans, sometimes for dubious reasons; nowadays he is again an iconic figure in Germany and his merits fully recognised.

A love of landscape is as strong as it was in the romantic era and it still relates to national identity. When we look at these great artists we should never allow patriotism or sentiment to determine our aesthetic judgement but once we feel confident that they have produced outstanding works of art then we should allow such feelings to enhance the pleasure they give us. What we must exclude from any proper consideration of reputation is fashion, the passing spirit of the age, a mere trend under the dictatorship of the thrusting critic out to decry in pursuit of notoriety.

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Roy Kerridge

Ever since the unfortunate Labour victory in 1945, England has been doing everything it can (all wrong) to help the 'white working class'. In so doing we have destroyed a once invaluable and intelligent body of people, those able to work. Even so called 'unskilled' work requires both strength and intelligence. The old working class seemed to have an instinct for practical work. In their heyday, they were the Saxon tribe in our midst. Now they have become ruined tribesmen, living on dole and drugs in council reservations. They might as well be renamed the Viewing Classes. Jokes and good humour have been replaced by aggression in people who now feel worthless because they cannot pass ridiculous exams.

Expecting the viewing classes to work is like expecting modern Red Indians to hunt buffalo or modern Aborigines to chase the kangaroo. Cutting the dole to force them into employment is cruel. As Oliver Goldsmith might have put it

*Bold artisans, once a country's pride,
When once destroyed can never be supplied.*

If we accept that the former working classes are becoming ruined tribesmen, it follows that we must have immigrants. The Viewing Classes are furiously anti-immigrant, but still expect to be waited on, or tended in hospital. Someone has to do the work. Mark my words, if immigration were to be abolished in England, it would mean the return of slavery. Desperate measures would be needed to make the Viewing Classes work. Of course, we wouldn't call it slavery. 'Community Youth Conscription' would probably be the name given to explain away the chain gangs of the future.

Travel brochures advertising Wild Life Safaris to Kenya or the North Pole fall out of every newspaper I open. My own safari takes me no further than my back garden, where I love to contemplate the ways of the humble woodlouse.

There is something grand about a large grey woodlouse in its prime going about its business of seeking decaying wood to devour. It rattles self-importantly along, with its mid-shell crinkle, the loose plates that enable it to roll into a ball when attacked. For ten years or so, London woodlice forgot how to roll up, but they have now recaptured the art. Like a mature male gorilla with its silver back, a large woodlouse grows white or yellow spots on its shell. There seems to be another species of woodlouse in my garden – a small yellowish-green louse that climbs walls and twigs with more agility than the grey woodlouse. Recently I have discovered, under a flowerpot, a community of bright ginger lice. I think they are albino Greys.

Like myself, woodlice shun the sun. They are active

in daylight in the hollows underneath stones, tiles and flowerpots. Dried moss is one of their favourite meals, and they certainly enjoy meat, as they eat their dead. I have seen one bite a worm, to the latter's astonishment. Though uninhibited in their sex lives, they are not as promiscuous as they seem at first sight. Small woodlice sometimes get on the backs of larger lice just to enjoy a ride. Blue slug pellets kill snails, but woodlice nibble at them and get drunk, reeling around the garden. If put in a dark place to sober up, they are none the worst afterwards. Woodlice form small communities, and seem to enjoy the company of other lice, but lack compassion. I have never seen them cooperate on any enterprise or help a fellow louse in danger. So we have little or nothing to learn from the humble woodlouse.

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ETERNAL LIFE



Good news from the Church of England! An opinion poll of the clergy, devised by Professor Linda Woodhead of Lancaster University has discovered that 83 per cent of the parsons strongly support the parish system. And there is even better news: Professor Woodhead comments, 'The majority of clergy still believe, like William Temple, that the C of E exists not for the benefit of its own members, but for society as a whole.' Quite right. But the determination that the C of E exists for society as a whole goes back a lot further than William Temple. It originates in the 16th century with Richard Hooker and his great book *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

Woodhead's way of putting things is characteristically in the academic sociological jargon which governs all our public utterances these days. 'Exists for society as a whole' is a poor substitute for Hooker's, '...belongs to the whole realm, and the realm is one.' But the perils which threatened church and nation in Hooker's day remain strong today. On the one hand there was the corrosive influence of Puritanism and Luther's Protestantism and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which, if adopted, would have reduced the national church to the status of a mere sect. From the other side, there was the Papists' desire to impose governance by and from Rome – the 16th century version of the EU.

Hooker's resolution, the genius of the Elizabethan Settlement, was the idea – no, more than the idea, the *reality* – of one realm under God; church and state together as one organism with the Monarch as Supreme Governor. The guarantee of this benign Settlement was the polity set out in *The Book of Common Prayer* and the decision that 'all the realm shall have one use,' which use was, of course, the *BCP*.

There were plenty of enthusiasts and sectarians who hated

the Prayer Book in the 16th century and the *Preface* to that book magnificently describes their machinations: '...all the vain attempts and impetuous assaults made against it, by such men as are given to change, and have always discovered a greater regard for their own private fancies and interests than to that duty they owe to the publick.'

These men – and the women will be along pretty soon – are still with us: the bishops who hate the *BCP* and have spent the last fifty years getting rid of it. We're lucky if we can find a Prayer Book service these days, unless it's a hole-and-corner affair held at some ungodly hour and usually reluctantly by a parson who, insofar as he/she understands it at all, is completely out of sympathy with it. The modern liturgists are convinced that their own talkative banalities are an improvement on the language of Cranmer. And that's why congregations have to listen to the priest at the marriage say vacuously that Jesus 'was himself a guest at a wedding' instead of the breathtakingly beautiful and theologically instructive, '...which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee.'

Gone now is the adorning, gone is the beautifying and, of course in these dumbed down demythologised days, gone is the miracle. Later on in that atrocious modern mess that passes for the solemnisation of holy matrimony, the priest prays, 'Let them be tender with each other's dreams.' I have long thought that at this point there ought to be a rubric in the margin: *Here the congregation shall throw up – bride's family's side first.*

But it is not only theology and aesthetics which our present day samples of 'men as are given to change' are allergic to. To borrow that word from Hooker's book, it is the *polity*

they can't stand. For in the prayer for the church in the *BCP*, the Queen comes first and only after her the bishops. Our present episcopal gang have never been able to stand this arrangement. In the – now banned – *ASB* they put themselves before the Queen who comes second. In the newer and even more awful *Common Worship* Her Majesty comes ninth. And the consequence is the abolition of Hooker's one nation, as today the church is only a sect governed by those men forever given to change and in the interest of their private fancies.

Naturally, our contemporary Episcopal iconoclasts, who are ready to abolish anything except their own pre-eminence and privileges, regularly dismiss Hooker, the Elizabethan Settlement and the *BCP* as 'out-dated' and 'anachronistic.' Rather, the truth is that our dangerously fractured contemporary Britain needs the concept of *one nation* more than ever. The original Settlement was wrought only after great difficulty and following upon murderous civil wars and sectarian strife. Now that, as Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali has told us, there are no go areas for indigenous white people in Britain, some way must be found to restore the sense that we are one people. This too is dismissed as 'narrow nationalism' in an age which regards patriotism as a sin more grievous than fornication.

We are becoming a nation of ghettos created by mass immigration of the members of an alien and separatist ideology. The actuality is separate development; in some towns and cities in Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Midlands and parts of London, there are physical boundaries separating what are misleadingly referred to as 'communities'. When such a condition obtained in South Africa, the bishops expressed their detestation. It was called Apartheid. And that's what we now have in Britain – thanks, incidentally, to the policy of our Tories, Labourites and Lib Dems who, while they condemned Apartheid in South Africa, were busy creating a similar reality in our own country. Only they don't call it Apartheid in Britain. Here it's called Multiculturalism and Diversity.

Hooker, with the recollection of that civil war fresh in his mind, understood that it is these 'communities' – whether Puritans, Papists or Calvinists, which threaten the peace of the realm. Today we need to restore the idea and the reality of the one realm. The only alternative is the accelerating drift towards civil war.

Peter Mullen is a retired Church of England Priest and a writer.

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The Republic of Yeah

Under studio lights the statesman smiles
 Devoting Sunday morning to the glib
 Legerdemains of power: he smoothes the nap
 Of his slacks; with no tie, his posture tells
 With an unlovely knack
 Of informal pally nostrums; his speech
 Is negligent, expressed
 With many "sort ofs," "likes," "I means" – a botch
 Of sound in which the letter "t" has died.
 Did Churchill thus present himself when bid
 To action, Clio's finger at his breast?
 – *Yeah*.

Colours and cultures clash in the schoolroom:
 There's shoddy uniform and uncouth hair;
 There's boredom and a vicious background clatter
 Of slang and scuffling as pupils resume
 'The Winter's Tale'; what stir
 Of grief at Hermione's plight can there be
 When language is brute noise?
 For thought and language, complex as the sea,
 Engulf the world and, coarsened, thus degrade
 Their subject animal. At the school gate
 Gangs churn, and their syntax is taught with knives.
 – *Yeah*.

On weekend nights louts befoul the High Street,
 Screaming-mad on Jack Daniels and drugs;
 Filthiest language, smashed bottles and boots

Create chaos; rolling, splay-legged girls retch.
 Informality gets
 Its deserts. What's truly human is not,
 Foolishly given sway,
 Edenic hand-holding bliss, but wolf-pack
 Savagery. And sanctions dispensed with
 Do not produce kibbutz-like healthful growth
 But bloodied streets, where thugs shamle away.
 – *Yeah*.

Father Gerry in nylon vestments squats
 On a front pew, chatting to his charges;
 His sermon excoriates low wages;
 His slipshod altar displays a sick tot's
 Teddy bear; Miss Barge's
 Liturgical dance will follow later.
 Outside, a slapping wind
 Throws about the gulls' riotous chatter.
 Tragic man, brought to the rockface of death,
 Needs marble obsequies to meet that truth
 Not buttonholed whimsy which binds no wound.
 – *Yeah*.

John Medlin

To read the rest of this poem go to:
<http://medlin-the-writer.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/the-republic-of-yeah.html>

<http://medlin-the-writer.blogspot.co.uk>

ARTS AND BOOKS

The Prime Minister's wife

John Jolliffe

Margot Asquith's Great War Diary 1914-1916, ed Michael and Eleanor Brock, OUP, 2014, £30.

This sparkling account covers the months between August 1914 and December 1916 when Margot and her husband were expelled from Downing Street. For them, this was a more sustained traumatic period than anyone else went through, at least until 1945. For a few weeks all went well. Asquith enjoyed whole-hearted support across the nation. But when the casualties mounted, scapegoats had to be found. Kitchener's small army was originally intended to do no more than support the larger French forces; when the breakthrough came and the Germans were threatening Paris, the British Expeditionary Force was thrown into the front line and began to suffer heavy losses. Rows at home increased: the shell shortage, the violent disagreements in the Cabinet over conscription, which among other things might well have removed vital manpower from factories crucial to the conduct of the war. Then there was the disaster of Gallipoli. Margot became increasingly critical of Churchill, his wild egocentricity and his sheer enthusiasm for warfare, even though he was well aware of its horrors from his own army experience in Cuba, Egypt and South Africa. Her comments on him, both before and after his dismissal as First Lord of the Admiralty, are exceptionally revealing.

What counted first and last for Margot was personal loyalty, of which she was certainly a paragon herself. But she could not recognise that there could be different views about the conduct of the war, and that those who disagreed with her, even on reasonable grounds, were malignant traitors and rats, especially when they revealed Cabinet secrets to the (Northcliffe) press, as Lloyd George continually did, while at the same time professing undying loyalty to the Prime Minister. It has often been explained, for example by Churchill himself in his book *Great Contemporaries*, that Asquith was unsuited to wartime leadership. His brilliant talents in the law courts, inexorably building up a case, step by step, and presenting it with irresistible clarity, went still further, and gave him a rare if not unique mastery in debates in the House of Commons (which

unlike today were real debates, not announcements of policies that have already been decided on by an elected dictator.) But in war, unlike in the courts, circumstances can change with bewildering speed, requiring rapid changes of policy.

Neither Asquith nor his wife were capable of adapting to this. Margot's comments on the protagonists, Lloyd George (whose personal charm she freely admitted), Grey, McKenna, Churchill, Rufus Isaacs, Crewe, Carson ('most disappointing'), Montagu, Bonar Law and others were sometimes piercingly shrewd and often arose from conversations with them which only she could have had. What brings the Diary vividly to life are occasional endearing comments, as when they took a few days' holiday in August 1915 in her native Scottish Lowlands, which had been her adored home until she was thirty:

people, politics, domestic troubles, longing for a home of our own, impatience at being so easily tired, the sorrow at getting away from youth, all faded; even the war receded from me. I lifted up my eyes to the hills and breathed the glory of God. The overmastering horror that the war often inspires in me seemed to go ... to evaporate in the mists of the moors, fading between loch and sky.

Later, there is a character sketch of her husband which nobody else could have composed:

Henry has no vanity, and no self-centredness. He is absolutely detached, patient, full of warmth and personal interest (children, games, anecdotes, the meaning of words, the history of men and their beginnings, scenery, monuments, heraldry, everything intellectual, racing – he knows the name and date of every Derby winner, and the breeding – and the Stage, every play, actor, and author.)

Even allowing for minor exaggeration, this adds a lot to what is known of him from less personally well informed sources. Sadly, her vehement nature prevented her from recognising that a political leader, however authoritative and well respected, sometimes has to accept that he lacks the power to act as he would like, above all in a coalition government in time of war. But she also mentions the rock solid support he received from the King, who was appalled by Grey's threat to resign and thereby to give encouragement to the enemy.

No praise can be too high for the editing of the diary by Eleanor and her husband Michael Brock, though the latter died before it was published. Every significant

detail and reference is succinctly explained in the notes which appear, as they should, at the foot of each page. Every reader, however well or badly informed, owes them a huge debt.

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Beauty is truth, truth beauty.

Scott Grønmark

The Soul of the World, Roger Scruton, Princeton University Press, 2014, £19.95.

In the four decades since the publication of his first book, *Art & Imagination*, Roger Scruton has philosophised about the sort of things that give our lives meaning – including sex, morality, wine, music, politics, architecture, and, increasingly of late, religion. *The Soul of the World*, which represents an elegant weaving together of a number of Scruton's long-term themes, focuses primarily on the religious impulse. Rather than promoting belief in a particular religion, it puts the case for maintaining a religious view – specifically, for retaining the concept of the sacred, without which we find ourselves in a world drained of meaning, one in which 'we humans are not truly at home'.

Science and its pseudo-scientific handmaiden, evolutionary psychology, seek to dismiss religious belief as nothing more than an adaptive evolutionary strategy. According to this view, religion has served its evolutionary function and is now a positive force for harm. Those clinging to the old dispensation are enemies of human progress. The unenlightened among us must face the fact that science alone is capable of explaining our world to us.

This variety of hard-core reductivism jettisons what it insists are myths regarding human activity – for example, that we are essentially free agents capable of making decisions based on our reason – preferring instead to delve beneath the chimerical layer of mere appearance to reveal the blind neurological processes that actually decide our behaviour. At a stroke, human beings are reduced to the status of bacteria observed through a microscope, objects acting under the laws of cause and effect. For some reason, we're supposed to adopt this unappealing view of ourselves, wipe what Freud called 'the mud of occultism' from our boots, and embrace the truth that we are simply animals 'swimming in a sea of causality'.

The problem with the claim that evolution offers a comprehensive explanation of human behaviour is that it does no such thing: 'We pursue the true, the good,

and the beautiful, even though the false, the nasty, and the messy might have been just as useful to our genes.' Presumably this is why our anti-religious left-liberal establishment has redefined the good as whatever promotes the modern religion of equality, lavishes subsidies on art which does dirt on the human spirit while ignoring work which even hints at traditional concepts of beauty, and prefers to see truth as culturally relative.

Moral thinking is a particular problem for science's claim to explain the world of human interactions – what Husserl termed the *Lebenswelt*. People are impelled to do what they think they ought to do – 'But it is the moral judgment, rather than some blind instinct, that compels them.' Are we seriously expected to view our moral judgments as a by-product of our species' struggle for survival? Well, yes, we are. This bracing approach – 'nothing buttery', as it's commonly known – doesn't only make a nonsense of morality: 'The human person is 'nothing but' the human animal; law is 'nothing but' relations of social power; sexual love is 'nothing but' the urge to procreation... the Mona Lisa is nothing but the spread of pigments on a canvas, the Ninth Symphony is 'nothing but' a sequence of pitched sounds of varying timbre.'

So widespread and so pernicious is this view that Scruton concludes 'Getting rid of this habit is, to my mind, the true goal of philosophy' and seeing through it 'is the first step in the search for God'.

To counter 'nothing buttery', Scruton advocates cognitive dualism, by which he means that there are two ways of viewing the world: the scientific, which looks for causal explanations of our behaviour, and the human, which looks for reasons. 'We live on the surface and what matters to us are not the invisible nervous systems that explain how people work, but the visible appearances to which we respond when we respond to them as people.' Not only does a purely scientific outlook have nothing interesting to say about our interactions with others, it can't even begin to tackle the religious impulse which has been a defining characteristic of humanity throughout its existence: 'God disappears from the world as soon as we address it with the 'why?' of explanation, just as human persons disappear from the world, when we look for the neurological explanation of their acts.'

If the religious impulse and the very idea of God are dismissed as anachronisms, the concept of the sacred becomes redundant. This desacralisation of the world would, according to Scruton, lead to our dehumanisation (to a large extent, it already has): 'Through sacred things we can influence and be influenced by the transcendental. If there is to be a real presence of the divine in the world, it must be

in the form of some sacred event, moment, place, or encounter...’ The possibility of contact with the transcendental imbues our everyday lives and the objects and people we encounter with a meaning, a reality, they otherwise wouldn’t possess. The search for God, Scruton argues, is a search for a subject like ourselves: we are seeking an encounter with another ‘I’ rather than with some impersonal object or force. It is this sense of God as a subject, which allows us to view other people as subjects.

Without a sense of the sacred, our route to God is blocked. As a consequence, other people become mere objects to be exploited for our own personal ends. The resulting lack of respect and empathy for others destroys our sense of obligation to the past (our ancestors) and to the future (our heirs). Our immediate environment – human and natural – is there to be plundered for our immediate gratification rather than cherished, protected and passed on to future generations. Locked inside our own little sliver of time, traditional obligations become a matter of contracts (think of the way prenuptial agreements make a mockery of marriage vows made before God), human relations become the stuff of barter and exchange, ugly inhuman buildings replace the courteous, humane architecture of previous eras, we are numbed by soulless industrial music created by software programmes, and the sole aim of modern art seems to be to convince us that humanity is essentially worthless, a harmful virus. Denigrating our search for God doesn’t elevate humankind’s status: it diminishes it.

The Soul of the World isn’t an easy book – hardly surprising, given that it represents a leading philosopher grappling with mankind’s greatest mysteries – but it is undoubtedly a profound, rewarding, and oddly moving one. [contents page](#)

A Pigeon Holocaust

Celia Haddon

A Message from Martha. The Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and its relevance today, Mark Avery, Bloomsbury, £16.99 hb, 2014, and **The Passenger Pigeon**, Errol Fuller, Princeton University Press, £16.56 hb, 2014..

The passenger pigeon, a bird with a red breast and blue head on the male and a streamlined body unlike that of the woodpigeon, is extinct. Like the Dodo, its flightless pigeon cousin, the passenger pigeon, disappeared after Western man arrived in the United States. Today all that remains are a few black and white photographs

of individuals in aviaries and some rather tatty stuffed specimens in museums.

What makes its demise remarkable is that there were literally millions and millions of them. An early Massachusetts governor in a letter to his mistress back in England in 1631 wrote that the passenger pigeon flocks were so dense that they ‘obscured the light.’ A few years later, a French colonist confirmed these huge numbers, adding that forty or fifty could be killed by a single shot into the flock.

An early ornithologist, Alexander Wilson, saw the passing of a flock so huge that it was at least a mile wide and took four hours to pass overhead. He calculated this meant 2,230,272,000 individual birds. Such high numbers of birds would strip the forests of beech mast and chestnuts, so that the flock could not settle in an area very long but needed to keep constantly on the move so as to find food.

In their winter roosts, the birds clustered so close that branches would break under their weight. Each pair laid one or possibly at times two eggs (the accounts are not clear) and bred more than once a year. They only fed their young for a fortnight before moving on. The young squabs would fall out of the trees and stagger along on the ground until four days later they could fly off in pursuit of their parent flock. Or so the early accounts tell us.

With these numbers, no wonder nobody worried about their future. In 1857 the Ohio Senate concluded the birds needed no protection as they were ‘wonderfully prolific... and no ordinary destruction can lessen them.’ Half a century later the birds had disappeared in the wild completely. The last pigeon, named Martha, died in Ohio, in a cage in the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, on September 1st 1914 – hence the title of Mark Avery’s book.

The sheer numbers of birds in a flock brought out the worst in mankind’s greed. Native Americans had already been killing these birds for food, using nets to catch them, but the numbers were high enough to survive this. Europeans with their guns went in for wanton destruction. They came close to exterminating the buffalo herds by wholesale slaughter (sometimes from railway trains) just for the delicacy of buffalo tongues leaving the rotting carcasses on the plains. Passenger pigeons were equally vulnerable.

In Petoskey, Michigan, in 1878, a large flock nested. Hundreds of shooters turned up to massacre them and a million dead birds were sent by train to distant markets. ‘Wagon loads were being driven out (of the forest) in an almost unbroken procession, leaving the ground still covered with living, dying, dead and rotting birds,’ reported an onlooker. Pigs were turned out into the forest to eat the dead and dying young squabs.

Interring the Caudillo

Anthony Daniels

Franco's Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory since 1936, Jeremy Treglown, Chatto and Windus, 2013. £25.00.

For most people of almost all political persuasions, Spanish culture of the Franco era was the far side of the moon. Many probably thought there wasn't any, the Caudillo's grim dictatorship extinguishing the possibility of creative work. If by chance anything were produced, it would be so tainted by the regime's rigidly imposed political correctness that it would be without value, mere propaganda. The existence of



Spanish exiles throughout the world encouraged this view: and any intellectual who remained after the Nationalist victor, was therefore *ipso facto* suspect.

It is one of the several merits of Jeremy Treglown's most interesting book that it demonstrates that this a priori dismissive attitude was, and is, more a manifestation of ignorance, arrogance and incuriosity than of genuine sympathy with the country and its people. The desire to create springs eternal, and Franco's dictatorship, ruthless as it could be, especially at the outset of its career, was never quite so rigid or all-encompassing that it prevented work of value being done, even if it did not always welcome or reward such work.

This is only one of the themes of the book, however. Running through it is the problem of how a society or nation – whose unity petty separatists are now trying to undo – deals in retrospect with an historical cataclysm of such immense proportions that it affected every single member of it, not just at the time but for generations to come. The wounds have still not healed, and in meeting Spaniards I have always avoided the

The great size of the flocks had protected the pigeon from natural predators. Hawks and eagles had preyed on them, of course, but could only take a small number of individuals out of such huge group. Those in the middle of the flock were relatively safe. This tactic is used by shoals of fish and large herds of African grazing animals. But the very same tactic was, and is still, useless against the scale of human slaughter.

There was another problem facing the huge flocks. Where they settled, if only for a short time, they needed a big area of forest. The state of Ohio was 95 per cent forested at the time of the European invasion. By 1853 this had shrunk to 54 per cent as forest gave way to field, and by 1900 only about 10 per cent of the trees survived. Men may have killed millions of passenger pigeons by their guns: they starved out millions more by cutting down the forests.

A more flexible bird might have adapted by breaking up into smaller flocks. After all a smaller flock would have been able to survive in smaller forests with more food for each individual bird. But there is something called the Allee effect, which says that when a population falls too low, it cannot survive. For instance, a lone wolf starves without a pack to help him bring down prey. In smaller groups perhaps the pigeons could not survive because something about their mating arrangements required a large number of pigeons around.

In *A Message from Martha* Mark Avery suggests that the smaller flocks may just have become too vulnerable to natural predators. Perhaps the birds didn't keep a proper look out, relying entirely on their large numbers as a protection. Or maybe, just as the native Americans died from introduced diseases like smallpox and measles, the pigeons died from some disease introduced by the domestic pigeons brought by the Europeans.

Could the passenger pigeon have been saved by captive breeding? Avery thinks that would have been possible. But because the birds were always on the move, people assumed that there were still plenty of them – somewhere. Avery's book takes the form of a travelogue round the US looking at the remaining stuffed birds and the sites where once the huge flocks were found. His detailed examination of what may explain the demise of the passenger pigeon is excellent but some of the detail about where he filled up his car or ate a hamburger is less than enthralling.

Errol Fuller's book, *The Passenger Pigeon*, is a celebration of this extinct species, with photographs (alas only black and white) of the last captive birds, as well as coloured illustrations of the bird and photos of the stuffed specimens. It's a visually lovely book to give to a bird enthusiast at Christmas.

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subject, the matter being too emotionally painful for questions prompted by my idle curiosity.

When democracy – perhaps non-dictatorship would be a better term for modern political systems – was instituted after what must have seemed an eternity, there was an agreement, the *pacto de olvido* (the agreement to forget, or rather to overlook, or not to dwell upon, the past), that enabled Spaniards to live together without overt and destructive recrimination, and which was surely a pre-condition of a peaceful evolution. If there was one thing that everybody was agreed about, it was that they didn't want another Civil War.

But the past is difficult to bury and is inclined to return like the undead in vampire films. As time has gone by, the past has come to seem more important, not less; it is even more important in Spanish literary and historical work than is the Occupation in France. The danger of excessive memorialisation is that it will be used for partisan, and often sordid and corrupt, political and economic purposes; but burying the past is not an option either, for men are attached to the truth wherever it may lead and whatever consequences its exposure may have.

It seems, then, that historical contention has become more bitter as time has gone on. Anybody who opposes excessive memorialisation on the grounds that it is harmful is suspected by the Socialist Party (the PSOE) of being covertly Falangist: in other words, you can have any opinion on the matter so long as it is the PSOE's. This restores a Manichaeism, for us or against us, view of the world.

Treglown treads very carefully in this minefield: a minefield, which perhaps only a further elapse of time will clear. Eventually even the worst historical cataclysms come to lose their emotional charge. In the circumstances, however, it was brave of the author to assert that the Franco regime had achievements to its credit, of the kind with which many dictatorships are credited, as well as foul deeds: infrastructure was built, the economy transformed, and so forth. He does not mention it, but life expectancy in Spain increased by twice as much in the 25 years before Franco's death as in the 25 years after it. These 'achievements' are not unique to such dictatorships, however, nor are they the dictator's alone or even in major part; the most that can be said is that he did not actually prevent them. And even if they were his achievements, they would not automatically justify, much less cancel out, the long years of oppression. Man does not live by infrastructure, or even life expectancy, alone.

Among the most interesting chapters in the book are those devoted to art, cinema and literature under Franco. The author has the happy knack of explaining

to the reader the meaning and significance of works unknown to him, and of giving him the appetite to encounter them. For example, I would now very much like to see two of the films by the director García Berlanga, *¡Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* and *El verdugo*, made during Franco's rule, both of which were implicitly critical of it and yet also of universal meaning. In the latter, a man takes on the job of executioner because his father-in-law, the official executioner, is about to retire and wants to hang on to the accommodation that goes with the job. When called upon for the first time to garrotte someone, he tries various means of getting out it:

Begging to be let off his task, José Luis [the garrotter], in a wonderful touch of believable irrelevancy, shows everyone the family pictures he has in his wallet. (The other men dutifully pass them around, explaining to each other, 'The executioner's wife and son.')

This sounds brilliant satire, and one of the most pregnant remarks in the whole book is that, after the establishment of freedom in Spain, the director's work was never as good again. Perhaps the fact that he could not say everything had concentrated his mind on what he could say, albeit indirectly. But since indirection is much more powerful artistically than straightforwardness, a degree of censorship might just be good for art, insofar as it fosters subtlety: not that this, by itself, justifies censorship, because the aim of political policy is not to produce good or even great art. Under conditions of freedom, the artist, if he wants to produce worthwhile work, must censor, or at least control, himself.

Though Treglown's book is well written, it does not quite cohere as a literary artefact, but that hardly detracts from its merits. I doubt whether any reader will not learn a great deal from it and find many of his lazy pre-suppositions challenged. The author's tone is calm and urbane, so that it is a pleasure to have some of one's ideas overturned. It is a book well worth reflecting on from many angles.

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A Gentleman Spy

Ron Capshaw

Kim Philby, Tim Milne, Biteback Books, 2014, £15.

For the first ten minutes of our meeting, I was much impressed...He was quiet, dignified – and most of all – bore himself with no trace of either defensiveness or aggressiveness. More than an hour later, I was bewildered. Mask succeeded mask, role role, personality personality. There was a half hour in which our actual situation was reversed, as though he had granted me an interview... Suddenly something brought this phase to an end, and he became gaminlike, elusive, answering my questions with the manner of a shrewd, precocious boy who was playing games and admiring his skill at them.

The above is a description of the Soviet spy Alger Hiss. He was not on the witness stand being grilled by the prosecution, instead he was attending a job interview with Hiram Haydyn the editor of *Random House*. In the interview Hiss unnecessarily reveals all the layers of his personality. His playfulness has a catch-me-if-you-can aspect, as if he is daring the interviewer to accuse him of espionage.

It could easily have been Kim Philby – head of the anti-Soviet counter-espionage division of MI5, and a Soviet spy. Had Philby been in Hiss' place, he undoubtedly would have offered the same performance; It was simply another form of playing the game called treason, albeit a mental one. Philby played it to the hilt. While it wasn't cricket to admit Communist espionage, which would have betrayed Stalin and his friends/cell members, one could still dare someone to investigate them.

Because of his inaccessibility, Philby continues to haunt us in this age of Aldrich Ames and Chinese hackers. We know when he was recruited by the Soviets (1934, while he was a student at Cambridge) and for what reason (one doesn't have to buy into the KGB-vetted autobiography Philby 'wrote' long after he had defected to Moscow to ascertain it was to fight fascism). We know how long he was a spy, and who his former cell members were (school chums Anthony Burgess, a drunk and loud homosexual, Donald McLean, called the British Hiss, due to his climb through the secretive tiers of the British government; and Anthony Blunt, perhaps the most controlled of the batch, and perhaps the most embarrassing to Britain. He was art adviser to the Queen). We know, although the data still keeps coming, that one thing he leaked were the drop-zones

for spies operating behind the Iron Curtain.

Yet Philby still remains an enigma.

Because his autobiography, *My Secret War*, written from behind the Iron Curtain, was undoubtedly vetted by the KGB, it is untrustworthy. Moreover, his closest friends – Burgess, MacLean, Blunt, all members of his 'cell' – honoured a lifetime habit of 'not giving ammunition to the enemy' (anyone opposed to Stalin). The one who remained in Britain, Anthony Blunt, did speak but gave an explanation for their actions – that they were anti-fascist and wanted to join a group that was 'doing something' about Hitler – which was self-serving (why did they stay in the group after Hitler was defeated and Stalin was embarking on his own anti-Semitic pogrom?) and hence his explanation is as untrustworthy as any KGB-vetted one.

The publication of Tim Milne's reminiscences by his daughter four years after his death (it was suppressed by MI5 under the Official Secrets Act when it was written in 1967) would seem, at first glance, to be an 'in' to Philby. After all, Milne was friends with Philby for 37 years, from their schooldays in 1925, to his defection in 1963. Although they didn't go to the same university – hence, we are not privy to what swayed Philby into a relationship with Moscow centre – they did serve together in MI5.

It is apparent from this account that Philby was born to be a spy. Milne, attending the same public school as Philby, found him remote, a loner with built-up walls. Already his politics were left wing, without any consuming interest in Marxist theory. This bent became more public when he and Milne visited Germany, and sitting in what Milne called 'a workers' cafe', Philby applauded any communist gains in an election in which the Nazis swept to victory. While at Cambridge, he was very public about his politics, risking a display of his stammer by making speeches in support of socialism.

Milne provides little insight because it is apparent throughout this account that he, like others in the British Secret Service, were fooled by Philby. He never saw through the mask, even after Philby's damning defection. He accepted that Philby's shift to the right in the mid-30s, which he describes as Philby simply coming to 'grips with the real world', (he supported Franco) was genuine, whereas keener minds (very few of those in MI5) saw it as a means of gaining entry to Whitehall.

Throughout, Milne doesn't recall any suspicious actions by Philby when serving alongside him in intelligence work. That he knows the ins and outs of espionage is a damning indictment of his abilities to gauge people even if they knew – especially if they knew – the right fork to use. Coupled with the British view that communist beliefs at University were simply

a rite of passage that undergraduates soon grew out of, so it is small wonder that Philby slipped through the net.

One wonders why MI5 halted publication of Milne's 1967 memoir for national security reasons. His only revelation about Philby seems to be that he didn't like apples. Instead, it becomes increasingly obvious that the agency was simply trying to 'cover its back'. One can only conclude the memoir was suppressed not because it had information the Russians could exploit, but because Milne and his superiors were idiots, blinded by class.

On its own, it was embarrassing enough that those entrusted with security never detected a mask upon a mask. It was equally embarrassing that a book editor, Hiram Haydyn (see above quote) was canny enough to detect something not quite right about Hiss within an hour long interview. One wonders what he would have made of Philby.

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Tenured Hypocrites John Hughes-Davies

Intellectuals and Society, Thomas Sowell, New York, Basic, 2013, £12.99 pb, £8.15 Kindle.

This revised edition of Thomas Sowell's book extends his attack on this malign class of intellectuals. He is not describing sound scholars in the pursuit of truth, but the sort of people who trade in the production of complicated systems which are never tested against empirical reality. They are overwhelmingly left wing and obsessed with equality. Not of course equality for themselves – Sowell calls them the 'anointed' and any suggestion that the views of the 'benighted' should be given equal respect is anathema to them. All forms of equality must be eliminated, so that they alone will occupy an elite position in society, not because they claim high intelligence, for they hate the idea that some are born brighter than others, but because they alone possess enlightenment. Their wits are as the wit of ten because their minds are pure. Worst are the so-called 'public intellectuals' who dominate the media and the educational system. If there were a balance of conservative, libertarian and leftist public intellectuals, it would not matter so much but the latter enjoy hegemonic power. Anyone who steps out of line from their politically correct ideology is banished and subjected to an ordeal by slander, dissection of motives or guilt by association.

Most of these intellectuals come from humanities departments. Polls in the United States cited by Sowell show that within university departments only 3.6 per cent of the staff call themselves conservatives, whereas in the business and health departments it is nearly a quarter. There is nothing in the traditional subject matter of those disciplines that would push people to the left. Why are those who study literature and modern languages so extreme both in America and Europe? Sowell offers some good explanations.

They are accountable only to their own kind whose activities have no consequences and where there is no penalty for error. A general can lose a battle, a politician an election, a businessman can go bankrupt, a scientist can see his pet theory confounded by a new experiment which might result in personal disaster. For academic literary folk, there is no crunch of this kind. Even when, like Margaret Mead, they are shown by better scholars to be mistaken and refuse to respond, they continue to be revered because they are saying what their friends want to hear. These tenured radicals are only concerned with the esteem of their peers; this is awarded for novelty, however pointless, for verbal agility and moral fervour. They are usually innumerate and cannot assess cost and consequence but they do know how to cherry-pick statistics and find one that supports their modish case. A policy is judged by how it feels to them and social and political controversies become 'moral melodramas'. They rarely study factual questions – they never ask the difficult question 'but is it true?' but slide into the easier question 'whose interest does it serve?' so that they can smear opponents without having to consider their position. They will pontificate on questions where they not only lack expertise but cannot be bothered to acquire it. Sowell mentions a group of American intellectuals' moral posturing about whether or not a police officer had fired too many bullets during a disturbance; they knew nothing about guns or making decisions in a hurry when physically threatened. Sowell used to be a weapons instructor in the US marines.

He is also a trained and skilled economist who understands the nature of the scarcities that rule out 'cosmic justice' and the importance of 'opportunity cost'. Whatever resources, including time and effort, you put into a particular project, these could always have been used to do something else, something that has now not been done. Even if something positive emerges from the project you may still be a loser, if the alternative course of action would have achieved more. Intellectuals don't understand, nor are they able to grasp, that well-intentioned actions can make life worse, the raising of the minimum wage in America after World War II produced heavy unemployment

among black teenagers, and high-minded disarmament leads to war if your enemy either does not disarm or signs an agreement he has no intention of keeping. The most devastating of their recent obsessions were their protests about the difficulties of blacks getting mortgages compared with whites earning the same incomes. Sowell points out that the average credit rating for blacks was lower than for whites. Asians, who are often discriminated against on the same income level but who had an even higher credit rating, were turned down for mortgages less often than whites. This subtlety escaped those howling for equality based on a single crude statistic. If there had been unfair discrimination in favour of whites not based on market assessments, then they would end up having a higher rate of defaulting. The incidence of default was much the same for all three racial groups, but the egalitarians prevailed and the lenders were forced by Clinton to give mortgages to people whose credit ratings were low. Obama was one of the lawyers who sued reluctant lenders who sold on these hopeless mortgages to foreigners who knew little about the dishonest manipulation of the American market. Once this was realised there was a major banking crisis and economies went into recession. The entire world was damaged by the irresponsible pursuit of equality.

Intellectuals pride themselves on being able to argue, yet as Sowell shows they employ ‘arguments without arguments’. They use ‘verbal virtuosity in evading both structured arguments and empirical evidence’. They know what an argument looks like and can mimic it but cannot recognise a proper argument nor its function. They despise ordinary people for thinking in clichés or resorting to maxims but that is exactly what *they* do: ‘War is never the answer’, ‘I am passionately committed to equality’, ‘arms manufacturers are merchants of death’, ‘peace is only possible through world disarmament’ – silly responses to complex questions.

Sowell accurately dismisses those two great heroes of American leftist thought, John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. ‘Justice is the first virtue of social institutions as truth is of systems of thought.’ Sowell shows this is a contradictory statement, for the essence of leftism distorts the truth in pursuit of its very warped notion of justice, which Rawls arbitrarily defines as fairness, by which he really means a particular type of equality. Justice defined in this way is *not* the first virtue of social institutions. Rawls is merely making an assertion, worse still he is using a verbal trick. Justice is indeed a key virtue, so everyone will tend to agree with him but only later do they realise they do not share Rawl’s definition. They see justice as desert – individuals being rewarded or penalised for their freely chosen

actions. Such a society may be very unequal especially at the lower end where the idle and criminal elements in society are found. In a just society they would be severely disadvantaged which is why justice must be tempered with charity. By all means help out the unfortunate but do not do it in pursuit of the horrors of *social* justice. The nature of these horrors can be inferred from Dworkin’s dogmatic assertion that ‘a more equal society is a better society even if its citizens prefer inequality’. Dworkin has compounded this nonsense by arguing that legal rights over-ride all other considerations which must be sacrificed to uphold these rights. How could anyone be so foolish as to make such a statement without saying which legal rights and to what extent, or trying or measuring the cost? The absurdity of Dworkin’s position is illustrated by the sillier decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on terrorism or immigration.

Sowell is sound on race, markets and patriotism and well aware of the Muslim threat to Europe. He is himself, of course, an intellectual but a rare one, a man who thinks things through. He has documented the way the worst kind of leftist intellectuals betrayed us to Hitler by opposing rearmament, to the Soviet Union by deluding themselves as to its virtues, and now it would seem to Islam. We should be listening to Sowell.

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Champagne Economics

Oliver Williams

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate, Naomi Klein, Allen Lane, 2014, £20.

Few left-wing climate activists get profiled in *Vogue*. Naomi Klein has remained pre-eminent on the radical left since rising to fame as a participant in the anti-globalization movement of the 1990’s. The release of her bestselling new book coincided with the UN climate summit in New York, where Klein addressed a 300,000-strong crowd of protesters. *This Changes Everything*’s premise is that our economic model is at war with life on earth. The book is, unfortunately, a labyrinthine mess of contradictions. Klein argues that we do not have to choose between poverty and pollution. In her mind, the battle against climate change can lead to great things, pulling ‘huge swathes of humanity out of poverty’. Yet she explicitly supports what she calls ‘de-growth’, more commonly known as recession. The emission reductions she advocates have happened, she writes, ‘only in the context of economic collapse or deep depressions’. While the bulk of the 466

page book breezily promises that the green transition will be a solution to world poverty and unemployment, she does accept, briefly, that her solutions to climate change will create ‘a significant number of losers – industries that can no longer exist in their current form and workers whose jobs will disappear’. Klein never grapples with the full implications of what she is arguing for. Blasé about people’s livelihoods, she is remarkably vague about specifics. More green jobs, teaching jobs, nursing jobs; these suggestions are things most people can get behind. But what of the ‘shitty jobs,’ in her words, those jobs tied to consumerism, shopping and resource extraction? She doesn’t bother to make any sort of assessment of just how many of these jobs there currently are and how many of them she would be willing to sacrifice. If the solution to climate change is mass unemployment, her cure is worse than the disease.

Klein spends little time talking about how much things will cost but undoubtedly her policies will lead to a massive rise in energy and petrol prices. She thinks it is only right-wing free-market ideologues who would oppose her solutions. Yet in 2011 over 100,000 ordinary Britons signed a petition to lower fuel duty. While left wing rhetoric has focused on government cuts and austerity policies, one of the key issues affecting ordinary people is what Ed Miliband has called the cost of living crisis. He has promised an energy price freeze as one way of dealing with it. Yet cheap energy takes away the incentive for people to insulate their home and to take other energy-saving measures. From the climate’s point of view, the higher the prices the better. Klein can’t bring herself to accept that there is a genuine moral dilemma – that natural resources aren’t just extracted because the super-rich elite is greedy, but also because the poor have a need for affordable energy. It isn’t just the pursuit of profit that is damaging the environment but the pursuit of better material living standards for regular people. Carbon taxes are regressive, affecting the poor more than the rich, yet are also an environmental necessity. In Klein’s telling, it is only the rich who are negatively affected by green measures.

It’s a long book and there are occasional flashes of honesty. She briefly admits that Communist states were ‘terrible for the environment and brutally extractivist’ and that ‘The big publicly owned oil companies – from Brazil’s Petrobras to Norway’s Statoil to PetroChina – are just as voracious in pursuing high-risk pools of carbon as their private sector counterparts.’ It is a point worth reasserting. In South Africa the state utility Eskom has a monopoly on electricity generation. The world’s 30th largest economy yet manages to be the 13th largest global emitter of greenhouse gases. At least

in Europe emissions buy some material prosperity. It has been South Africa’s private sector that has brought a limited amount of renewable energy to the country. Klein comes clean about her beloved Latin American governments: ‘*these left and center-left governments have so far been unable to come up with economic models that do not require extremely high levels of extraction of finite resources, often at tremendous ecological cost.*’ After these cursory admissions that yesterday’s Communism and today’s far-left populism have both been unviable green alternatives, what does she offer as a solution? Solar panels and wind farms.

Klein is scathing of the World Trade Organization (WTO). She tells the story of Ontario’s Green Energy and Green Economy Act, which included a requirement to buy locally. The WTO stepped in and ruled that this provision was illegal. It was, she writes, ‘an outrage,’ the WTO had ‘let trade trump the planet itself’. Ominously she concludes, Ontario’s solar panel plants ‘could well close, and others have decided not to open in the first place.’ Yet a surreal and idiotic footnote reads:

China has of course emerged as the world’s dominant supplier of inexpensive modules, and in that role has helped to drive dramatic drops in solar prices. It has also flooded the market with cheap panels in recent years, contributing to a global oversupply that has outpaced demand.

It is strange that someone who wants all of the world’s energy to be supplied by solar and wind should complain that free trade has made solar panels *too affordable*.

Climate change for Klein is a ‘catalyst’, an ‘opportunity’ and even ‘a convenient truth’ – ‘Climate change is a tool. Pick it up and use it.’ She is, ultimately, an opportunist more interested in far-left politics than coming up with workable solutions for environmental problems. About her own anti-growth solutions she writes, ‘I question their political feasibility every day’. What would a more obtainable plan look like? A high-profile new report, *The New Climate Economy*, issued by an international commission, has framed the issue in a way far more likely to get the support of finance ministers and presidents – the people who actually make decisions. Reforms necessary to deal with climate change can, the report argues, *promote economic growth*.

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The Rural Dream

Merrie Cave

Dreams of the Good Life, The Life of Flora Thompson and the creation of Lark Rise to Candleford, Richard Mabey, Allen Lane, 2014, £16.99.

The publisher to Oxford University Press, Sir Humphrey Milford, was asked which were the two most important books he had published in a thirty-year career (1913-1938). He chose Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* and *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Both dealt with 'history behind history'.

When *Lark Rise to Candleford* appeared, people couldn't believe it was written by Flora Timms, 'the stonemason's girl', and would never have imagined it and subsequent books would become set texts in English Literature public examinations.

This literary masterpiece resonated with people such as my relatives who had been brought up in Oxfordshire villages and experienced the enormous changes the agricultural revolution had brought. G M Trevelyan remarked that 'An important consequence has been the general divorce of Englishmen from life in contact with nature, which in all previous ages had helped to form the mind and the imagination of the island race'. It was why other European countries, realising the importance of an independent peasantry as a stabilising feature of the social order, placed tariffs on cheap American imports.

Flora's mother, with wider horizons than most village women, had the wisdom to realize her daughter, captivated by books and writing, would never flourish in service. 'My brother and I', Flora recalled, 'used to make up verses and write stories and diaries from our earliest years and I never left off writing essays for the pleasure of writing.' The solution to the problem of her future came with a vacancy at the Post Office in Fringford. She was now able to use the library facilities of the village Mechanics Institute and within a year had devoured Dickens, Trollope and Jane Austen. She spent time in Essex where she watched her first moving picture and saw the sea for the first time. The big change came when, having learnt the single needle telegraph system, which used Morse code, she moved to the Surrey-Hampshire border to run a small sub-Post Office in Grayshott. Here she began her long programme of self-education from the free libraries and cheap boxes in second-hand bookshops. Like Grayshott, the Hampshire-Surrey border housed

a literary clique, the Hilltop writers, including Bernard Shaw, Conan Doyle and the watercolourists Myles Birket Foster and Helen Allingham. Other big names like Alfred Tennyson, Gilbert Murray, Logan Pearsall Smith and Bertrand Russell lived in surrounding parishes. Her first attempt at autobiography was *Heatherley* (Grayshott) which provides a glimpse of her development as a writer. Sketches of some very well known writers can be recognised in *Heatherley*. 'Some of them' she observed 'were brilliant conversationalists'. She did not, however, engage with them, being content to observe other, more ordinary people. Much of her spare time was spent walking the local heath lands.

In 1903 she married John Thompson, a postal worker from Aldershot. He was certainly not a literary type but a conscientious worker, strict to his subordinates but fair. On the other hand he was not the domineering character painted in Margaret Lane's biographical essay, published not long after Flora's books appeared. Several others have accepted Lane's unsubstantiated remarks: Ronald Blythe describes her as being 'dragged' into a prim suburban existence by a husband embarrassed by her writing and 'crushing in his attitude towards her'. However the writer and publisher John Owen Smith tracked down a next-door neighbour of the couple who said there was no substance to such accusations. 'We knew nothing of her being a writer, but my mother, a keen judge of character, soon decided that Mrs Thompson was a lady but her husband no gentleman. People think she was intimidated by him, but at least by the time I knew them, in her gentle way she managed him nicely.'

Before machines freed women from the grinding toil of domesticity her literary ambitions would have been crowded out by running a home. Nevertheless she secretly entered an essay on Jane Austen for a prize in a woman's paper, which she won. Later she wrote essays and stories for various women's magazines and other publications, the earnings from which enabled her to send her children to good day schools. She also started a postal association for literary aspirants; and her marking of her fellow members' work amply demonstrates her abilities as a teacher and editor. Not until 1937 did she at last write about her childhood memories in *the Lady* and *The Fortnightly Review*; Oxford University Press asked her to expand them into a book.

Flora Thompson, who died in 1947, did not live to see the full appreciation of her work. Mabey's final chapter, *Celebrating England*, explains the historiography of her books. They centred on that 'lost domain which is praised every time the country is in trouble' coincided with the need to help the propaganda war effort.

However unlike other accounts written by middle class bystanders, they are free of sentimentality. Mabey's title *Dreams of the Good Life* encapsulates the realities of the rural idyll. Flora Thompson knew she had to get away from the limitations of rural life if she were to follow her dreams. In the second half of the twentieth century many people bought second homes 'dreaming of the good life away from overpopulated towns, often causing a housing shortage in the countryside only to discover that the rural idyll is not so charming if you dislike the sound of agricultural machinery, crowing cocks or church bells.'

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How does your garden grow?

Julian Champkin

The Gardens of the British Working Class, Margaret Willes, Yale University Press, 2014, £25.

In January 1886 Lord Salisbury, Conservative Prime Minister and posthumous inspiration of this magazine, was defeated in a vote on the Queen's speech in the Commons and resigned, giving way to Gladstone. The vote was on an amendment demanding allotments and small holdings for the rural working class: the Liberal policy of 'Three acres and a cow'. Gladstone, having won, did nothing afterwards about promoting allotments.

Move forward a little to the Great War and *In the ambulance* by Wilfred Wilson Gibson:

*Two rows of cabbages,
Two of curly-greens,
Two rows of early peas,
Two of kidney-beans.*

This was the dying Tommy's vision of home and happiness – to be working on his allotment.

Willes includes every kind of garden: allotments, market gardens and window boxes. She also devotes some space to the lives of the working-class gardeners who worked to keep Chatsworth and Hidcote weed-free. However if we want a picture of the working life of an 18th or 19th-century gardener, records from the stately gardens are one of the few sources available.

Garden historians have long argued about the gardens of the poor. Was it really honeysuckle round the door, the overhanging thatch adorned with climbing roses, a front garden bright with sweet peas? Or was it in a desperate attempt to put food on the table, potatoes and turnips plus a few medicinal herbs? 'You never know how much nourishment there is in a turnip until you have had to live on it' wrote Joseph Paxton of

his garden-boy childhood in the 1810s. Paxton rose from the working class via Chatsworth to the Crystal Palace and a knighthood. A former gardener at the Duke of Northumberland's Syon House, on the other hand, ended his working life so poor that a gardeners' benevolent society advertised for donations to help him emigrate to Australia.

Contemporary accounts of the beauty or otherwise of gardens of the poor disagree, depending mainly on the radicalism or rose-tinted spectacles of the writers. Both versions are true, in different places and different times for different people. Gardens varied from place to place and even village to village, depending on the particular circumstance of the gardener. Certainly they were often a vital economic resource. The poet John Clare and his family had to go to the workhouse after their single russet apple-tree did not fruit one year; they had relied on selling the few extra apples. But many working class gardens had a pig, if not hollyhocks or herbaceous borders.

There has always been a nostalgia among the English for the rural idyll, and it transcends class. Willes chronicles the gallant attempts of the poor to make the fantasy partially real; what is also clear is the passion that grips the true gardener. In the 17th and 18th centuries gardens were not necessarily attached to their houses; in prosperous towns like Sheffield and Birmingham so-called 'guinea gardens' might be a mile or more away, where the working class, or lower-middle-class, would erect summer-houses, paying less than a guinea a year rent. These would be everything from a few barrel-staves with a climber trained over them, to a building with cellar and sleeping and cooking arrangements, where they would spend Saturdays to Sundays or, if self-employed cutlers in Sheffield, Mondays as well.

The steam-powered mill ended that. Factory workers had neither time, energy, nor the space to garden although it did not end the desire. A photograph in the book taken before the war of a back-to-back in Birmingham, shows troughs of flowers and climbers fixed on the walls, all the way to the top story, and on the outhouse roof as well. The owner had to grow her plants on the walls because every inch of the tiny backyard was taken up by the washing tub and mangle.

Pathetic, sometimes extraordinarily successful, efforts to garden despite difficult surroundings were admirable. Flower shows in London's East End were as strong as anywhere despite the smog; in 1845 the new Victoria Park in Tower Hamlets was laid out with short-lived seasonal planting rather than anything normally long-lived, because of the smog. After the First World War the non-subsistence garden became possible for the urban working class on council estates laid out by the LCC while others had generous gardens. Here,

gardening fashions that we recognise came into their own: the borders of alyssum, lobelia and pelargoniums, the lawn edged with crazy paving and miniature conifers. The Second War brought the Dig for Victory campaign, with marrows growing well on the soil roof of air-raid shelters. C H Middleton was the wartime radio voice of sound gardening advice on the Home Service; his talks evolved into *Gardeners' Question Time*. Broadcasts from Fred Loads of Lancashire and Bill Sowerbutts of Ashton under Lyme came happily between the main course and pudding of childhood Sunday lunches.

Garden gnomes get a mention; lest we sneer, they were introduced by Sir Charles Isham at his Northamptonshire estate in 1846. Willes does not

mention the affordable lawnmower, which has done more than anything to shape the small English garden. Her vision of London working-class gardening in 1939, taken from a *Picture Post* article, returns with a vengeance to the idyllic. It is the eve of the outbreak of war:

Caretaker Pierce digs his dockland plot, filled with tulips. Mrs Dyble of Blackfriars Road shows her garden of boxes on the roof of a glass-sign factory. Mr Jobson, a tram-driver, attends to his herbaceous borders despite the chemical vapours given off by local industries in Canning Town. And Mr Clarke, unemployed, sets children to work tending beds of flowers against a background of tenement blocks on a new council estate in Hackney.

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FILM

Ida Pawel Pawlikowski Merrie Cave

Everyone who likes seeing films with plenty of ideas should see *Ida*, particularly if they are interested in the recent history of Central Europe. It is a masterly blend of a gripping story, perhaps true, about good and wicked people, coupled with those dramatic insights a history book can never give into what the Soviet takeover did to Poland.

Pawlikowski's brilliant black and white photography makes it look as though the film was made at the time the story took place – in the early 1960's – rather than released last year. This is because he succeeds in capturing the drabness and desolation of post-war Poland. Very few people and little traffic are to be seen either in the countryside or town while the silence of winter and the snow imparts a ghostly atmosphere. The outstanding photography, especially the scenes in the convent, accompanied by long periods of silence, makes one feel one is looking at an Old Master. You can almost feel the bitter winter cold and draughts in churches and dirty barnyards.

The film opens in a convent where Anna, a 17-year-old novice, is on the brink of taking her vows. The fine acting of the girl, played by Agata Trzebuchowska, imparts a mysterious air to the story. She was left in the convent as an orphan baby at the end of the war so she has been completely insulated from the storms of life outside. As in the Middle Ages the religious life has

always been a refuge from the violence and uncertainty of the world. Moreover, in Poland religious institutions did not suffer the same fate as in other Russian satellite countries like Czechoslovakia. The Russians realised that persecuting the Catholic church in Poland was far too tricky because of an historic resistance to Russian rule and the weakness of the local communist party, so they left it alone. Similarly, because the peasant majority was the bulwark of the church, there was no full-scale collectivisation.

Anna has one relative, an aunt on her mother's side called Wanda. The Mother Superior insists that she goes to see Aunt Wanda before she takes her final decision. There is a hint that the Mother Superior already knows something about the mystery of Anna's background. Anna reluctantly goes to see her aunt who turns out to be the absolute opposite to the personification of the religious life – living on her own, drinking and smoking too much. 'Didn't they didn't tell you who I am, and what I do?' she asks as a gentleman visitor absents himself rapidly. Anna is suddenly plunged into the doomed politics of Central Europe and the secrets of her family's past. A flashback reveals that Wanda had been a comrade and we see her in a courtroom as a public prosecutor. She tells Anna she sent dissidents to the gallows but it seems that drinking ended this career. With this and other incidents in the film the director leaves it to the viewer to speculate about the details. Wanda drops the bombshell that Anna was originally Ida Lebenstein and Jewish. She had not contacted her niece before because she dreaded churning up the past; now both of them are forced to confront it along with the added burden of Anna's lost innocence.

Unlike most people Wanda has a ramshackle car

and suggests to her niece that they go on a trip to find out what happened to her parents. It is a journey into the complicated emotional baggage of Polish history; anti-semitism and the end of freedom set against the backcloth of an unquestioned Catholic faith. Many Poles turned a blind eye to the fate of the Jews but others took enormous risks in hiding them – the penalty was instant death if discovered. They find out that her parents were hidden in the woods but later killed and buried along with their son, but Anna survived because she was a baby and not recognisable as a Jew. Wanda stirs people up with her aggressive questions about

Ida's parents; by contrast Anna's nun's habit and quiet demeanour earns respect.

Both aunt and niece find they get on very well. 'How I wish', Wanda confides to her niece, 'that Rosita (Anna's mother) could have seen you'. They visit the local town where Anna makes friends with a saxophonist, and even dares to remove her habit. She returns to the convent to announce that she is not yet ready to take her vows. She goes back to see her aunt and her friendship with the saxophonist becomes deeper. The dramatic denouement of the film will certainly be surprising to some but not to others.

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Making the French love Bach

How the greatest-ever Catholic organist championed the greatest-ever Lutheran composer

R J Stove



French organist and composer Marcel Dupré (1886-1971) playing the Wanamaker Organ in Philadelphia in 1948. (Photo: fr.wikipedia.org)

Among the last 50 years' most unfortunate historical illiteracies has been the myth that it took Vatican II to bring about the most elementary courtesy between Catholics and non-Catholics. Before 1962, the legend goes, Catholics and Protestants were trapped in a kind of eternal Thirty Years' War, lusting after the blood of our 'separated brethren.' For a good answer to this legend, it is worth examining the manner in which Marcel Dupré – whom his star pupil Olivier Messiaen called 'the greatest organ virtuoso who has ever lived' – first

championed the organ repertoire of J S Bach for French concertgoers who, in the years after World War I, still knew very little of it.

Dupré died in 1971. For most of his long life, he dominated the French organ scene, very much as his almost exact contemporary Charles de Gaulle dominated French politics. Today, neither man's reputation is what it was. In particular it has become fashionable to snipe at Dupré's Bach recordings, with their seamless legato and lack of concern for period practice. Yet this sniping is unjust, and one day the

pendulum of taste will swing back. Dupré's level of brilliance at the console cannot be discounted forever.

The impact that Bach left on Dupré's thinking derived partly from the initial instruction he underwent. Born in 1886 – at Rouen, where Joan of Arc remained potent in the communal culture – he had the privilege of knowing at first-hand the Bach-loving, organ-building genius Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, then in the destitute but still deeply influential twilight of his career. Even Dupré was not quite old enough to have met his hero César Franck, but he achieved the next best thing: protracted study with Franck's old colleague Alexandre Guilmant; with former Franck pupil Louis Vierne, the almost stone-blind Notre Dame organist; and with Charles-Marie Widor, whose *Toccata* has adorned a million weddings.

Through Widor and Guilmant above all, Dupré came to know the Bach tradition which had meant so much to Franck. But such knowledge, without the technique to convey it, was not nearly enough, and none appreciated this better than Dupré himself. In a 1948 interview for a Minnesota radio station, Dupré would utter the following credo: 'To get perfection in a work, you must first get perfection in a short passage: that is the root of all virtuosity.' What Dupré preached, Dupré practised, in one of France's most unusual concert events from the interwar period.

The Great War let Dupré off comparatively lightly. Traces of childhood disease (a near-fatal bout of golden staph) had destroyed his hopes of seeing active service, so he spent the years of combat in the pharmacy department of a Parisian military hospital. Army life has been described as '99 percent boredom to 1 percent terror,' and whilst Dupré's hospital enjoyed the protection of distance from the worst fighting, the loss of several colleagues on the Western Front concentrated his mind. Besides, hospital duties enforce contact with human mortality in a way that very little other civilian employment does. Through a gradual process, Dupré concluded that he owed it to Bach, to music, and to whatever European civilization emerged after the war, to do something that had hitherto been thought not just pointless, but impossible.

In one sentence: Dupré vowed that with the advent of peace he would publicly play all of Bach's known organ compositions *from memory*. He could not have horrified his supporters more if, like Albert Schweitzer, he had taken up missionary life in western Africa, surrounded by lepers and goats. Earlier organists, for all their skill, had generally used the printed scores in their Bach performances. Widor probably knew as much Bach as any Frenchman of his time did, but even he had large gaps in his knowledge.

Moreover, although Bach had not actually been

banned from French musical life during 1914-18, affronted Gallic national pride towards the vanquished foe made Dupré's project seem quixotic amid the years of Georges Clemenceau's vindictive prime ministership and calls for 'squeezing Germany till the pips squeak.' Numerous Germans, for their part, assumed that the frivolous French could not understand Bach at all. Moreover, it was not certain that the human brain was even built for so gigantic an amount of memorization as Dupré envisaged.

Through his 10 concerts in 1920 at the Paris Conservatoire – Dupré proved his critics wrong. He repeated his feat the following year, at another venue in the same city: the Palais du Trocadéro, which then housed a Cavaillé-Coll masterpiece beloved of Guilmant and Franck. (During the late 1930s, it succumbed to a more than usually maladroit rebuilding, much to Dupré's regret; in that decade, more organs were destroyed by insensitive renovations without the slightest political agenda, than were wrecked by even the most bellicose kerosene-toting communists and anarchists of the Spanish Civil War.) Widor happily paid homage to his former student's success. In a *nunc dimittis* offered to Dupré's father, Widor said: 'I can die content, for I know the French organ school will remain in good hands.' (With characteristic recalcitrance, Widor didn't die at all after delivering this heroic valediction. He lived on for another 17 years, vigorously energetic till the end.)

At a creative level, Dupré's devotion to Bach bore its most obvious fruit in his *79 Chorales* of 1931, commissioned by Gustave Ogier, a retired banker. Ogier found his enforced spare time oppressive and wanted to start playing the organ in earnest. Dupré easily met the implied challenge of providing material that (unlike his better-known symphonic epics for the King of Instruments) would be technically straightforward enough for Ogier to manage, but at the same time interesting enough for more experienced players to appreciate. Issued by H W Gray of Van Nuys, California – as opposed to Bornemann in Paris, which issued most of Dupré's other works – the *79 Chorales* became that unimaginable thing: an instance of organ sheet-music which made a profit. It has never gone out of print.

Evidence of Dupré's profound esteem towards Bach's own collection of miniatures, the *Orgelbüchlein*, is perceptible in every phrase. None of the *Orgelbüchlein*'s chorale-preludes lasts for more than three pages. The same is true of Dupré's collection. Bach based his pieces on Lutheran rather than Catholic melodies. So did Dupré. He tends to avoid those hymns where the same tune turns up in both Lutheran and Catholic contexts. (Admittedly a few instances do appear: *In*

Dulci Jubilo is one; another is *Nunn Komm Der Heiden Heiland* [‘Come, Saviour of the Gentiles’], note-for-note the same as the plainchant theme *Veni Redemptor Gentium* in the traditional Catholic ceremonies for Advent.) But mere archaeologism will nowhere be found. The 79 *Chorales* can at times administer a salutary shock to hearers – every congregation has them – who want all their organ music to suggest either syrup or lavender-water.

Dupré spent his last years under something of a cloud. He found himself totally out of sympathy with the 1960s’ arbiters of French musical vogue: Pierre Boulez, John Cage, Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, and the rest. Musical counterparts to the student *gauchistes* of May 1968 filled him with especial horror. His biographer and ex-student Michael Murray includes a dejected little anecdote of the octogenarian master confronted with an all-night avant-garde broadcast on French television:

Dupré watched for about 15 minutes as ‘music’ was made by the sole agency of a continually slamming door. Jeannette recalls that he turned to her sadly and said, ‘It is finished, done with, for the arts. Nor was he heartened by her reply: ‘Nonsense! You’ll see. You say that music is finished, but look at your recitals

and what do you see? You see that at least half of your audiences are young people. Look again. All is not ended for the arts.’ But he could not be reassured.

Fortunately we have plenty of recorded evidence showing what Dupré the performer could achieve at the height of his powers. (A gallant if cash-strapped non-profit organisation – the Association des Amis de l’Art de Marcel Dupré [www.marceldupre.com] preserves his sonic legacy in ancient and modern repertoire alike, not to mention releasing his extant broadcasts for Radiodiffusion Française.) And still, like Everest, stands that extraordinary attainment of 1920-21: Dupré’s practical demonstration that Bach was no mere dry-as-dust theoretician, but part of every Christian’s birthright.

R J Stove is an organist and, the author of César Franck: His Life and Times [Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2012]. This article is based on a talk given at Monash University, Melbourne, on Maundy Thursday 2014. Originally it appeared – under the title ‘When Post-War France Came to Love Bach’ – in Catholic World Report [June 2014], and is reprinted here by permission of that magazine’s editor, Carl Olson.)

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The White Devil

John Webster 1580-1654

Ralph Berry

‘Male supremacy is a catastrophically crap idea.’

With this arresting sentence beginning the official programme to the RSC’s *The White Devil*, Kat Banyard revisits the traditional thrills of the 1970s. She has resolved to boldly go where no woman has gone before, other than Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and Gloria Steinem, with her insight that ‘A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle’. The ghosts of the great feminist wars of that era stalk the battlefield, and even Greg Doran, the artistic director of the company, is drawn in to ‘a very real sense of excitement’ at the prospect of ‘our six-year journey through all 36 of Shakespeare’s plays’. ‘Journey’, a word that should have been laid to rest after Tony Blair used it for his autobiographical title, is heralded through a mini-season of plays about powerful women. You could call them ‘feisty’. Of the plays seen to date, I would judge *The Roaring Girl* a fair effort, and I liked *Arden of Feversham*, which celebrates a Desperate Housewife and a pair

of incompetent hit men out of *Fargo*. But Webster’s *The White Devil*, a genuine masterwork, is a disaster, a triumph of lumpen feminism.

It was not always thus. Margaret Rawlings, Vittoria in a notable production of 1947, commissioned Annigoni to paint her in that role. The painting hung in her bedroom for many years, and on her death went to the Garrick Club (which she had been unable to penetrate in her lifetime). Her current replacement in the part, Kirsty Bushell, would have to be content with a *selfie*. In it she would show to advantage in the scanties which she wore throughout much of the action. So did her companions in the House of Convertites, who hung about in what was evidently a PRISON, a traditional male resource designed to keep women locked up. (Cf the RSC’s archetypal *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1978, when Katherina hurls at the stage audience the bitter reproach ‘Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper’.)

The Renaissance has been abandoned for the modern,

and cheap at that. Webster wrote of Italianate corruption and wickedness, of all-powerful Dukes and Popes, of lust and revenge in high places, of Machiavelli (who is named in the text). It is baroque drama, with killings out of Caravaggio. Webster's play cannot conceivably be any kind of mirror to today's world. But Maria Aberg, the director, pretends that it is. Modern dress may seem to be the highway into our world, but evades all the issues. Social class, character differentiation, costume, all vanish into one all-embracing style. Lodovico wears a sweatshirt helpfully dated 1976, and Monticelso is identified as Cardinal by wearing a red blazer over his white trousers. He would not be out of place in Cowes or Henley. Bracciano has no way of showing the greatness of his rank, either in costume or demeanour. He is simply a wealthy playboy, who delivers his opening line 'Quite lost, Flamineo' sprawled on his back, in the manner of one admitting that he is rather taken with this hot chick Vittoria.

Male supremacy takes a knock in the casting of Flamineo (a 'traditionally male role', as one reviewer conceded) which went to his 'sister', played by Laura Elphinstone. I could see no point in the repeated misspelling in the programme of 'Flaminio', unless to suggest a Metro station in Rome. Elphinstone could make no sense of the irreducible maleness in the part, and of 'I have a strange thing in me to th'which/I cannot give a name, without it be/Compassion'. This casting is clearly an agenda, for in Aberg's recent production of *King John* the Bastard went to a female actor. That is a notably masculine role, which in living memory was played by Richard Burton. The all-women short list is now mutating towards the all-women cast list. Aberg

has embarked on the long march through the cast lists.

A deal of Webster has to be cut on stage, but the director has to make the great lines resonate and find space for the wonderful dirge *Call for the robin red-breast and the wren*. And for lesser lines that hit the nerve-ends. Patrick Macnee records in his memoirs that as a young actor, playing a page, he was given a single line 'This is not true madam.' His delivery was noticed by Harold Hobson in his review. No such instinct for the line is present here, and the barrier-fight in which Bracciano is poisoned is reduced to a wrestling-match. When the National Theatre put on *The White Devil*, Claude Chagrin staged the mimes, and nobody ever forgot the exciting rhythms of a muffled drum, followed by dead silence, then the *click*, heard distinctly throughout the theatre, as Flamineo bent back Camillo's neck. That order of theatricalism had little place in the RSC effort.

This season's RSC is schizoid. The two *Henry IV* plays which Greg Doran has directed could in principle have been put on at any time in the last half-century. These are four-square traditional productions, with admirable performances from Anthony Sher's con-artist Falstaff, Paola Dionisotti's quick-spoken Mistress Quickly, Oliver Ford Davies' fussy old bore of a Shallow, and the best Silence I have ever seen from Jim Hooper's blank-eyed oldster. But Greg Doran has thrown open the rumpus room to the ambitious of the league of feminists. He has appointed young Turks, and in *The White Devil* has got a young Turkey.

Ralph Berry spent most of his teaching career in Canada. He has written extensively on Shakespeare.

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*Lord Salisbury on his tricycle
from the Library and Archives, Hatfield House*

LETTERS

Dear Sir or Madam:

I have read many of Theodore Dalrymple's articles, and I am a great admirer of his. Nevertheless, in the article entitled 'Ukrainology' in your summer issue, I think he has missed the point. He attacks the argument of 'Tu Quoque' quite rightly, but that is not at issue. The argument is that if you have done the same thing that I have done, and even worse, then you cannot criticise me without being a big hypocrite. That is the point – not what is right or wrong, but the hypocrisy of the West. Having done far worse than anything the Russians have done, and in many more places, it is not up to us to criticise the Russians, or even worse, to threaten sanctions. The West may not agree with what the Russians are doing, but they have to shut up, because they have done worse. In Kosovo, for example, the West threw out half of the Serb population, and populated Kosovo with 2 million Albanian gangsters, so whatever the West thinks about the Ukraine, it is not for them to judge, having behaved so appallingly themselves. Not to mention Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan etc. The Russians were not opposed to NATO's action in Kosovo only because it was wrong, but also because Russia had always considered itself the Protector of the Slavs.

This brings us to an even more basic argument, namely what gives the West the right to interfere at all in countries which are not threatening them? This behaviour is comparatively new – only in the last 40 years. Whether or not the West's view of any situation is right or wrong, the point is that they do not have the

right to interfere (unless, of course, they are threatened in some way). The West completely ignores the realities of Russia and the Ukraine. The Ukrainians and the Russians come from the same race, which is called 'Rus', hence the word 'Russian'. For hundreds of years, they spoke the same language, and even today they can understand each other. Russia provides the Ukraine with all its energy. If it wanted to, it could turn the lights out in Kiev tomorrow. On the other hand, the Ukraine provides Russia with all its bread. These are not two foreign countries. The Ukraine has not been independent since 1240, when it was destroyed by the Mongols. It has been part of the Russian Empire for almost 300 years. It only became 'independent' about 20 years ago. One cannot ignore these facts because of Western platitudes. One has to face reality.

D P Marchessini

Dear Sir or Madam

Two important concerns have been ignored for decades. I am now almost blind, adding to deafness for 60 years. For people like me, voluntary euthanasia ought to be a basic human right, available without much paperwork, and regarded as normal. Instead, tens of thousands of people simply endure years and the only benefit is carers' wages. This should be addressed before the current House of Commons Select Committee closes its report.

Mona McNee

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IN SHORT

Top Ten Reasons to Leave the EU, John Petley, Bretwalda Books, 2014, £9.99.

Last October Jose Manuel Barroso, outgoing President of the EU Commission, abandoned his accustomed subtlety and started shouting at David Cameron who says he wants to reduce the numbers of Eastern Europeans coming to live in Britain. Barroso said, 'If Britain leaves the EU, the country will have zero influence on the international scene. It would be an historic mistake if Britain were to continue to alienate its natural allies in central and eastern Europe, when you were one of the strongest advocates for their accession.' He accused British politicians of constantly misrepresenting the character of the EU and added, 'The bureaucracy is being cut back and the number of regulations reduced.'

This speech is a perfect illustration of how the politburo which runs the EU operates: by bribes, threats and lies. John Petley exposes the corruption in his book and knows about it first hand, for he worked for two years full time as a researcher in the EU parliament in Brussels.

Contrary to all the propaganda from the Europhiles, Britain would not collapse into impotence and irrelevance upon leaving the EU. Rather, the country, freed from the burden of massive financial contributions and escaping the ever more tortuous labyrinth of regulations, would prosper. What possible benefit is there to our country belonging to the Common Agricultural Policy which was always designed to protect inefficient French farmers? Our signature to

the rules about how many fish we can catch has all but killed our fishing industry.

We need to know that the much-vaunted common market is nothing of the kind but only a protectionist customs union, which is protecting bad business practices and putting up prices. To leave this bureaucratic cartel would allow us to enjoy trade links with the whole world once again. That's the way to improve international relations, increase our influence in the world and bring down prices.

What needs constant repetition is that Britain is governed by the EU and it is not a question of whether our continued membership will damage our national sovereignty. That sovereignty is abolished already. And when we say we are governed by the EU, we do not mean by a democratically elected parliament. The EU parliament is only a rubber stamp for the diktats of self-appointed and unaccountable commissars like Barroso.

I remember Charles Sisson saying when the Soviet Union imploded: 'I can't understand why, when we've got rid of that dictatorship in the east, we're building something very similar in the west.'

Britain's future outside the EU will be exciting. Petley's book is the clearest I have read on this subject. He concludes: 'Withdrawal will create an opening to replace the discredited political leaders of today with something better. Like successful cancer surgery, withdrawal from the EU will be nothing less than a new lease of life.'

Peter Mullen

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by Robert Oulds

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Robert Oulds

The Bruges Group

214 Linen Hall, 162-168 Regent Street
London W1B 5TB


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