THE NEW STATESMAN

Reviewing politics and culture since 1913 | 24-30 October 2025 | £5.95

DOOM LOOP

Why no politician can get Britain out of this mess

By Andrew Marr

9 771364 743216 43

Everywatch™

The Sealander is our 'GADA' (go anywhere do-anything) range. With 36mm and 39mm sizes, it's an anytime watch for everyone. Here, its Lightcatcher™ (another trademark) case protects a precision Swiss movement with a dual time 'complication'. So you can 'be' in two time zones, at once. Every Sealander sports highly legible, highly luminous indices and hands, contrasted against dial colours including two different hues of blue. They're available on leather, Aquaflex rubber, and a choice of either our marine grade Bader Bracelet™ or the more glamorous five-link Consort™ (yup, more trademarks) featured here. Thus revealing another complication: which Everywatch™?

Do your research.

Christopher Ward

christopherward.com

THE NEW STATESMAN
Established 1913

Editor's Note
Tom McTague

I am happy to report, dear reader, that after putting last week's magazine to bed, I made a successful dash to France to recover my battered (but not beloved) old C-Max, with my brother in tow for support. The car had been stuck in the little Breton town of Lannion since it broke down during our family holiday over the summer.

It was a delight to be back in France. Everything was just so, well, *French*. The roads were quiet, the scenery rolling and lovely, the pastries absurdly delicious (a Paris-Brest, my choice this time). Before starting the long journey home, I headed to the beach where I'd spent time splashing with the kids in the summer sun. As I travelled there, I even contemplated a quick dip in the sea.

In October, however, the place was chilly and largely deserted – apart from two women sheltering from the wind beneath some rocks. As I looked out at this scene from La Belle France, I suddenly noticed that the two women had stripped off and were running naked into the sea. Blushing and unsure where to look – now painfully British – I decided the only course of action was to about-turn and make for the safety of my car. *En marche à Calais!*

An hour outside our destination, my brother and I finally stopped for the night. A nice hotel with an even nicer restaurant was my treat for getting up at 4am to collect the family wagon. Romantic visions of France began once again to burn brightly as a dignified old waiter handed us the wine list and began to explain the two varieties of butter we had for our bread that evening.

The meal finished not just with some gloriously improbable dessert, but with what I can only describe as a posh Magnum, followed by a Willy Wonka-style sweet tray filled with lollies and chocolates. There's something very odd – though rather liberating – about being served posh Haribos by a man in a dinner jacket.

At moments like this, it's hard to believe that France really is in crisis. For much of my life, it has felt like this: one moment I read that France is far too bureaucratic and sclerotic to avoid calamity; the next, I visit and find it glorious. And yet perhaps this time it's real: as I write, its former president has been jailed, its current president is loathed and its fiscal crisis appears to be deepening by the minute.

MARTA SIGNORI

In this week's issue: Andrew Marr on why Labour cannot save Britain

Like its restaurants (and beaches), France's crisis can appear oh-so-French. And yet it is also oh-so-familiar. Indeed, in the hotel bar after our meal, a group of Belgian businessmen were desperate to talk about Britain's crisis rather than the one in Paris. Had our economy collapsed, they asked? Would Nigel Farage become prime minister? And why, exactly, wouldn't Keir Starmer let people fly their flags? I made a quick exit. How is it that stories spread in this way?

Our Cover Story by Andrew Marr this week tackles some of the spiralling despair in British politics. It is Andrew's last as political editor – but don't worry, he's not going anywhere. From next month, he'll take on a new role as editor-at-large, focusing on the broader trends shaping British politics and current affairs. Andrew's weekly column will be taken over by our incoming political editor, the fearless Ailbhe Rea, who returns to the *New Statesman* after a distinguished sojourn away.

A quick word about Andrew. When I first thought about becoming a journalist, my dad bought me Andrew's book *My Trade*. Twenty years later, Andrew remains the journalist's journalist: full of gossip and intrigue, stories and excitement about the latest events in Westminster. Every Saturday, when my phone buzzes, I know I'm about to learn something about the inner workings of the cabinet – who's happy and who isn't; what the Prime Minister said to so-and-so; and, crucially, why it all matters. And then we'll talk about Tolstoy. And then about the latest book he's writing. Or the new technique he's using in his paintings. The man is a force of nature, and I'm thrilled he'll be sticking around – continuing to make sense of the world on these pages.

Back in England, I ventured to the Lake District to see some friends and clamber up the Old Man of Coniston. If Brittany was very French, this was very English: windswept and misty on the fells, warm and alive in the pubs. *Home*. In the Black Bull, we sampled the local nectar – Bluebird Bitter, Old Man Ale, and, the best of all, the Premium XB. Perhaps it is my own nostalgia, or prejudice, but pints are better up north; the beer somehow feels alive. I also took the opportunity to order chips, peas and gravy. For a brief moment, I felt like Andy Burnham.

Building homes

Building futures. Building hope.

£20 billion

of finance for social housing since 2018*

Helping Britain Prosper

A safe, affordable home means stability and the chance to plan for the future. That's why we've made more than £20 billion of finance available for housing associations and developers to build more social homes – giving more people the security of a safe place to call home.

Search Lloyds Banking Group social housing

*Finance made available to the social housing sector since 2018 through commercial lending and deal facilitation enabling more homes to be built.

LLOYDS BANKING GROUP

IN THIS ISSUE

Up front

The Front Pages

Columns

The New Society: Books

The New Society: Arts

The Back Pages

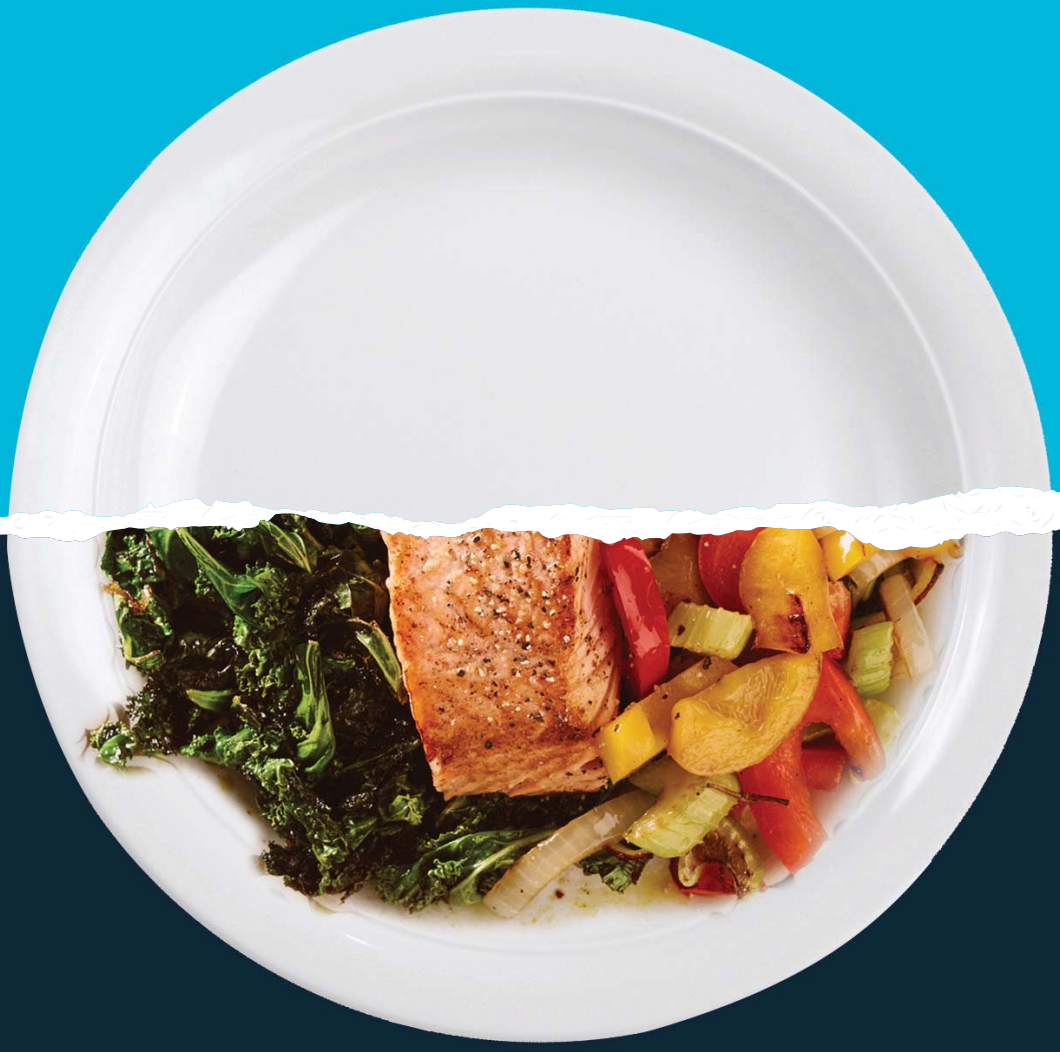
THE NEW STATESMAN

40-42 Hatton Garden,
London EC1N 8EB
Tel 020 7936 6400

Editor in Chief Tom McTague
Deputy Editor Will Lloyd
Executive Editors Pippa Bailey, Megan Gibson, Oli Dugmore
Political Editor Andrew Marr
Creative Editor Gerry Brakus
Head of Design Erica Weathers
Head of Production Chris Bourn
For a full staff listing, please visit newstatesman.com

Cover illustration Lincoln Agnew

Please note that all submissions to the letters page, our competitions and reader offers are accepted solely subject to our terms and conditions: details available on our website. Subscription rates: UK £119.99; Europe €159.99; Rest of World US$199.99. Syndication/permissions/archive email: permissions@newstatesman.co.uk. Printed by Walstead Peterborough Ltd. Distribution by Marketforce. The New Statesman (ISSN 1364-7431/USPS 382260) is published weekly by New Statesman Ltd, 40-42 Hatton Garden, London EC1N 8EB, UK. Registered as a newspaper in the UK and USA. **New Statesman Vol 154, No 5830**



FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

A POLICY THAT CAN HELP UNITE A COUNTRY

Parents and teachers are two of the most powerful voting blocks in England. Free School Meals for All is wildly popular with both.

Read why the Labour Government must go further to end hunger in schools, counter Reform and back every child to learn and succeed.

Get it in your inbox:
National Education Union's mini-series on defeating far-right populism.

freeschoolmealsforall.org.uk/miniseries

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

national education union

THE FRONT PAGES

PASCAL MAITRE/PANOS PICTURES

In the picture

A woman in traditional Aymara dress prepares to dance the "Mineritos" in El Alto, one of Bolivia's fastest-growing and boldest cities. This cultural expression pays tribute to the area's miners. El Alto, which towers above the capital La Paz, has become a symbol of indigenous confidence and aspiration.

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

The Sketch

Smacking kids and the coming race-fuelled civil war: on the front line in the Battle of Ideas

By Emily Lawford

"I'm *gorging* on ideas," said a young man in a long black leather coat, throwing his arms wide open. "I'm excited about ideas and I'm very autistic." It was the first day of the 20th Battle of Ideas festival and the atmosphere, people kept saying, was more febrile than ever.

In a small room in Church House in Westminster, a panel of women were debating whether or not it was OK to smack your children. Answers ranged from definitely yes to, on balance, probably not. It was generally agreed smacking ought to be legal and shouldn't be conflated with violence. The debate was inspired by the *New Statesman*'s August cover story about gentle parenting, but most panellists did not like the idea. Refusing to set boundaries means indifference, which is "worse than hate" said Nancy McDermott, author of *The Problem with Parenting*. She was pro-smack.

Most of the audience had either smacked their kids or been smacked, and they were relieved to learn that was all right. A woman told a long story about subduing an aggressive 14-year-old. "I had him on the floor, rained a few gentle blows and called the police." Sympathetic tuts. A woman with nose, tongue and lip piercings testified next. She had five kids and had tried smacking all of them to mixed results. Ella Whelan, who co-convened the festival, argued that there was a crucial distinction between a smack from a loving parent and an

unloving one. I tried to picture a loving smack. "There's a bizarre view of kids that they're like Ming vases," she explained, "one shake and they'll crack forever." A woman in a pink hoodie complained about the panel being all women. "The masculine energy is more authoritative than the feminine in general," she said. "A father's presence will negate the need for a female to have to shout or use force." Lots of nods.

The Battle of Ideas festival was founded in 2005 by the Academy of Ideas, Claire Fox's think tank. Fox was a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party in the 1980s and 1990s, but, along with other former members, has since swung to the right on social issues. She set up the libertarian *Spiked* magazine alongside other former revolutionary communists including the academic Frank Furedi. For seven months in 2019, Fox was a Brexit Party MEP. In 2020 Boris Johnson made her a baroness.

In a floral dress and a necklace of multicoloured discs, Fox was discussing the possibility of a populist revolt on a panel with Furedi, the Labour MP Graham Stringer and James Orr, the Cambridge theologian and pal of JD Vance's, who recently announced that he was joining Reform as Nigel Farage's senior adviser.

"Populism," Orr drawled, "is Latin for democracy." (It's not.) He leaned back in his chair. "The *ancien régime* is in a state of desperation and panic." Orr, who lives in a sprawling Victorian homestead on the banks of the River Cam, hadn't gone on Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom march, but he'd heard there was "a sense of celebration in the air. A celebration of nation, of country. There was no sense of vitriol, of anger, of violence." Some 25 people were arrested and 26 officers injured at the rally. Orr put this down to "some mischievous and puzzling policing".

We moved on to international politics. Stringer was concerned about Nazis in Germany's AfD party. Orr frowned. "As far as I know, it's a group of egghead economists," he said. "No doubt along the way they picked up some unsavoury types, but look how they've been treated." Furedi agreed solemnly: "They're entirely being censored and quarantined."

A young man put up his hand. "I have a question for Mr Orr," he said. He told a story about confronting Unite the Kingdom protesters and being attacked. "I didn't get an answer. So I'll ask you: I'm an immigrant. Do you want me out?" He sat down, looking flushed. "I'm *thrilled* you're here," Orr told him.

I was sitting between an elderly man and woman. "You can say anything here!" the man told me happily. The woman on my other side wasn't really sure why she'd come. "I suppose I was bored."

The average attendee was of a certain age and a little eccentric looking, but excitable young people in tweed suits and with wispy moustaches concentrated at particular events. At a panel debating "What's next for the young right?", Charlie Downes, campaign director for Restore Britain, was taking a lofty tone. "It's my deeply held belief," he said, "that, just as there are a set of unchanging eternal principles that govern the physical world, so too there is a set of unchanging principles that govern the metaphysical world – the realm of morality and truth and beauty and so on." Downes claimed he wasn't really interested in contesting these ideas with opponents any more. He had ascended to the metaphysical plane.

In place of free debate, Downes had some suggestions: the leftist American podcaster Hasan Piker, for instance, could be imprisoned; the "progress" pride flag – "the flag of the regime" – banned. "It's disgusting," he said. "It's anti-truth, anti-morality, anti-beauty." A blue-haired woman behind me muttered, "I don't think we should ban that." Downes then started talking about the tribes that formed England under King Alfred and Æthelstan. He was starting to lose the room. "It is simply the case," he concluded, "that ancestry has to be a component of national identity. And religion."

The panel host asked who counted as more British: Bob Marley or Rishi Sunak? Downes sighed. "It brings me no joy to live in a time and feel called to do a job where I have to talk about these really dicey topics," he said. He grudgingly concluded it was Marley, "by virtue of having an ethnically British ancestor".

Coming out of the panel, I spoke to a 22-year-old blond man who said he was ethnonationalist. "Deport foreign criminals, unproductive foreigners, politically subversive foreigners," he said. "I don't think all non-British people need to leave the country." His friend, who said he was of Indian heritage, smiled; "It's a comforting thought," he said. The pair thought Downes was "retarded". They resented his suggestion that young people had a moral duty to get married. "I can barely shag in this city because it takes me 50 minutes to get home. I'm living in Zone 4 with my parents," one said. "We need a government that's going to give nice, sensitive young men loads of money."

I asked what he meant by sensitive young men. "You're disposed towards poetry and philosophy and lofty gestures of true love," he said. He then began describing the ethnic heritage of his exes. "I would want to marry a woman who has at least 50 per cent European ancestry," he mused, like a Nazi Romeo.

At the closing drinks on Sunday evening, a lot of people were worked up about an upcoming race-fuelled civil war. "That's the elephant in the room." A man told me it would be a clash between Islamists and non-Islamists. "I don't think the non-Islamist side will fight back," he said. "They'll concede." His friend disagreed. "Some will push back." Someone else told me the revolt would look like a cross between the breakdown of the Balkan states and Latin America-style guerilla warfare. I said I wasn't sure. "Maybe that's because you're in the elite," he said. I hadn't considered that.

I asked Fox if the conference had felt different this year. "People are angrier," she said. "They feel like no one is listening." That was why so many went on the Unite the Kingdom demonstration, she said. "One thing people going on that march said was, 'I didn't have to apologise for who I am.' That really struck me. I thought, 'God, if you can create an atmosphere where people don't have to apologise for who they are...'"

A security guard asked us to leave Church House. The embattled masses were all heading to the pub. Civil war would have to wait. ●

"I can barely shag in this city because it takes me 50 minutes to get home," said one attendee. "I live in Zone 4 with my parents"

OUR NUCLEAR FUTURE

At Sizewell C, we're building more than a power station. **We're transforming lives.**

We will create **1,500 apprenticeships**, giving local young people the chance to gain **skills**, **experience**, and **careers** that last a lifetime.

Learn more

Find out more about how we're training the next generation at **sizewellc.com**

Sizewell C

The power of **good for Britain**

ETHAN CROFT

Politics

Keir Starmer, realising his circle of friends is now perilously small, seeks reconciliation

When the late Labour grandee Robin Cook changed the sitting hours of the House of Commons, he imagined he was creating a modern legislature – one that would allow parliamentarians to spend freed-up evenings and weekends with their family, friends and constituents. Instead, they croon pop songs in seedy London bars a few miles from Westminster. Well, not all of the time. But the secret MPs' karaoke club has become a near-weekly ritual in this parliament for Labour MPs, and some ministers, too. (First rule: don't talk about karaoke club. Second rule: no journalists allowed.)

They sing, get drunk and bond over how grim it all is. Every indicator we currently have says that Labour is on course to lose the next election, no matter how far away it might be. The Budget is expected to bring bad news and political pain. As a shorthand for discontent, some MPs have taken to texting each other the turd emoji in response to disappointing developments – a reminder of the youth of this Parliamentary Labour Party, which is full of people who really don't want their parliamentary careers to be over before they're even staring down the barrel of a 40th birthday party.

While he hasn't quite been reading Dale Carnegie for tips, the Prime Minister has realised that you have to win (back) friends if you want to influence people. And so there is a more determined effort to bring the Labour family together. A No 10 source describes this to me as "smoothing the waters" before the Budget.

First, there is the softly-softly approach of the new chief whip, Jonathan Reynolds. One MP describes him as "amiable and personable" when compared with his veteran predecessor, Alan Campbell. As soon as parliament returned from the conference recess, Reynolds summoned suspended welfare rebel MPs for cups of tea and polite conversations about their future. All are likely to get the whip back soon.

Then there is the bigger question of the ex-ministers, that swelling caucus of people who have left government, including the 15 who were sacked in the September reshuffle. (It is received wisdom that the more people a prime minister sacks from government, the more enemies they create: Tony Blair rightly hated sacking people and didn't relish reshuffles.) Several of them received personal letters from Keir Starmer in the weeks after the reshuffle. The sentiment was nice, but the missives did not explain his decision to fire them. Like every person who has just been dumped, it's the first question they wanted answered.

Now, the charm offensive has ramped up, with No 10's new political secretary, Amy Richards, among the figures from the centre extending the hand of friendship.

Some have been told they can keep themselves useful by working on projects with Labour Together, the government-aligned think tank, or running for various select committee vacancies. These are ways of diluting the piss and vinegar of the rejects.

> First rule: don't talk about karaoke club. Second rule: no journalists allowed

Others remain unbiddable. One, who was once a prominent figure in the Starmer firmament, and was snubbed in September, told me that they have "no interest" in engaging with No 10 and imagine their political future will be under a different Labour leader. Another said: "I have started to give up on him."

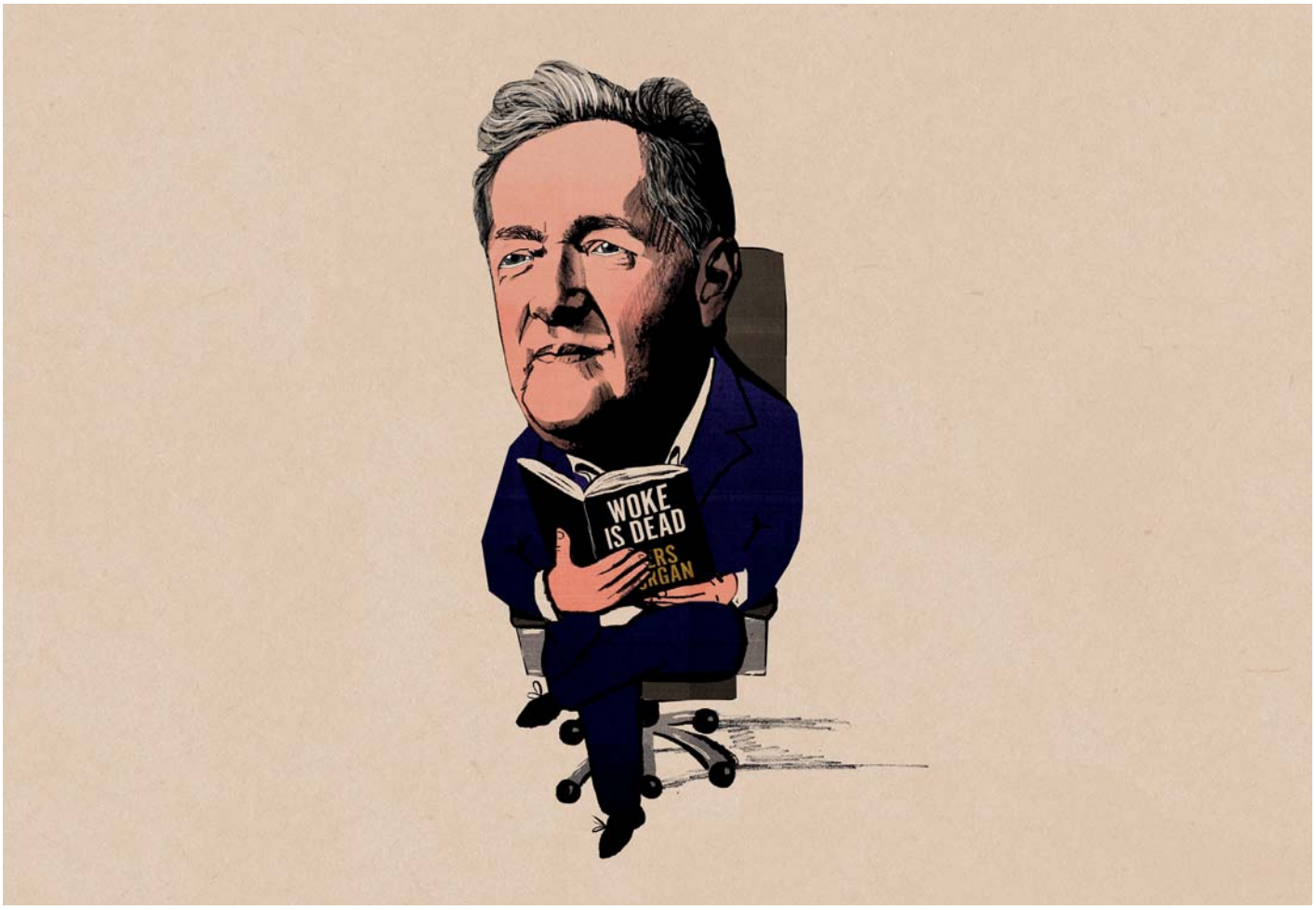
An atmosphere of giving up on the Prime Minister is dangerous and is not limited to the also-rans. There is cabinet-level discontent with the PM for apparently slowing down just as momentum was beginning to build. There was that confidently delivered conference speech in which he seemed to pivot to a new approach – with little, so far, to follow up. There was the bold announcement of a digital ID policy. But it hasn't led a news bulletin or touched a front page in weeks. As an example of how slow and stuttering does not win the race, one cabinet minister wonders, bemused, why it took Starmer a week to decide the Farage deportations plan was morally wrong.

Even among the Starmer lifers, such as they are, there is discontent. This was made apparent on 20 October when Neil Kinnock criticised a lack of "basic political skills" at the top. It was significant because Kinnock is not some party fossil carping from the silt (the dismissal that Jack Straw, David Blunkett and others tend to get). He has known Starmer for nearly 20 years, has been an enthusiastic supporter of his leadership, and was a neighbour and constituent before the Prime Minister moved from Camden to Westminster. And he wasn't just speaking for himself.

Despite so recently winning a historic victory, Starmer has found his circle of friends has been shrinking, to the point where his longest-serving staffer – and newbie MP – Chris Ward made his first outing at the dispatch box to face the Tory barrage over the China spy scandal. The decision to put up Ward was harshly described to me by one plugged-in Labour source as "late-stage government behaviour", when there is a short supply of trustworthy and ambitious allies who are willing to take a beating for the boss.

But in the run-up to the Budget there will be more efforts at peace and reconciliation from No 10. Starmer himself even deigned to have lunch in the Members' dining room of the Commons in mid October. Just don't expect to see the PM at karaoke club any time soon singing, like his beloved Orange Juice, that it's time to "rip it up and start again". ●

MARTA SIGNORI



ELLIE FOREMAN PECK

Interview

Piers Morgan's alpha move

The broadcaster on the monarchy, Murdoch and Paul Marshall

By Will Lloyd

Something spectacular happened to Piers Morgan the night before I interviewed him. He was in London's Mayfair, trying out Carbone, Major Food Group's much-hyped new restaurant in Grosvenor Square. He had taken Joan Collins and a few friends out to dinner, and the Italian-American meal – whether it was the cake tray wheeled from table to table or what Morgan would later describe on Instagram as the "iconic spicy rigatoni" – was met with his approval.

What he loved most was the exclusivity of the clientele. The Clooneys were only a few tables away. Also present were Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie – "They're very nice, those girls; they're both really nice." Meanwhile, their disgraced father was presumably sulking in a black box in Windsor, without any iconic spicy rigatoni to comfort him. Carbone had only been open for a few weeks, but it reminded Morgan of the old Covent Garden Ivy in its starry, early-Noughties pomp under restaurant power couple Chris Corbin and Jeremy King. Hard to get a table. Celebs climbing the walls. Comforting menu.

But what clinched the evening for Morgan was the presence of Mikel Arteta at a nearby table. The notably circumspect Arsenal manager had so far managed to avoid meeting Morgan – the notably uncircumspect and voluble Arsenal superfan – since taking over the

club in 2019. Morgan bounded over to Arteta's table to discuss transfers.

Arsenal had a busy summer window, spending a club record-breaking £257m. That included £63.7m on the clumsy Swedish striker Viktor Gyökeres, who, with three goals in eight Premier League games since his big move, has more closely resembled a slow-turning basking shark that occasionally gets hit by a football than a world-class forward. Morgan loved Gyökeres, though, and told Arteta. "Why?" asked Arteta. "Because his work rate is unbelievable. He takes two defenders off whenever he goes," Morgan replied. Then, according to Morgan, Arteta went: "Exactly!" The leading strategist in English football agreed with the leading journalist in the English-speaking world. Spectacular.

Morgan works most Mondays and Wednesdays in the News Building, a glass-and-steel Death Star owned by Rupert Murdoch that squats next to the Shard and overlooks the River Thames. HarperCollins and the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* occupy the top-floor offices, where imperial views encompass all of London – and, beyond the city, seemingly the whole world. Morgan's seismically popular *Uncensored* YouTube show is located in a basement – or, at least, down a flight of stairs from the first floor, deeper in the building's bowels – where I am ushered to meet him in his admirably small dressing-room-slash-lair. Framed splashes, a typographic print of a Winston Churchill quote and magazine covers about Piers Morgan swarm the walls beside a sofa. I sit down. The self-described liberal wants to talk to me about his new book, unambiguously titled *Woke Is Dead*.

But it's also a big news day. In Morganese, it's "sensational and massive", it's "huge and explosive". Donald Trump rattled into the Holy Land yesterday, releasing several doves over the bloodthirsty warring tribes there – apparently bringing peace to the region and the surviving hostages back to Israel. Lions, at last, were lying down with lambs. Roses were shedding their thorns. Should Trump – whom Morgan considers a mate – get the Nobel Peace Prize?

"Why shouldn't he?" Morgan shoots back. He's dressed in blue suit trousers, a white shirt and shiny black shoes. He has a large forehead, surrounded by an even larger face and small, clever eyes. He looks steamed somehow – pinkish – as if he's been simmering in a pot on the stove for a couple of hours. He swivels on a chair in front of a dressing mirror and looks at me. The small eyes grow smaller.

"I'm serious!" exclaims Morgan, grinning. He wants to know how the *New Statesman* could possibly suggest that Trump is not worthy of the prize, something we never suggested. He's rolling now: "Barack Obama got a Nobel Peace Prize after eight months in office and two fancy speeches, and did nothing to warrant it all; why would Trump not get one?"

I realise Morgan would like a row, but I find him too funny and interesting for that. He speaks in perfect tabloidese: irreverent, indignant. Every question is answered either with a baiting return serve or a completely unambiguous statement. Listening to Morgan is like travelling back in time to hear him dictate copy to a cringing leader writer on the *Daily Mirror* circa 2002. Did he meet Obama when Morgan replaced Larry King at CNN during the former president's first term? "Yes, once." What was he like? "Frosty." We both laugh. Morgan says he was about "number 1,800" in a 3,000-person queue at a meet-and-greet with the Obamas at some overwrought Washington DC comms event back in the day. While Morgan scrolls through his phone to find a picture of himself with the president and Michelle, I tell him a rumour I've heard about one of them.

"Really?!" Morgan looks up from his phone. I can almost see the screaming headline flashing in his mind: "BARACK OBAMA REVEALS..." He turns the idea over in his mind for a couple of seconds. Ten years editing both the *Mirror* and the *News of the World* have given him a nose for bullshit. "I would be astonished if that was true. I think that's wishful thinking." Still, it's clear he prefers the current president to whoever Obama was back then – or has become now. He last spoke to Trump on 18 September, the morning after the state banquet at Windsor Castle. I mention that a member of the cabinet thinks Benjamin Netanyahu is the most "alpha" politician in the world – this is genuinely the kind of thing politicians talk about in WhatsApp groups. Morgan is having none of it. Only his man Trump has the "alpha personality" and all the "alpha moves." I realise that Morgan's swivel chair is much higher up than the blue sofa I'm sitting on. He towers over me, despite being shorter. Alpha move.

Morgan is by some distance the most successful British hack of his generation. His life reads like a schoolboy's dream of journalism realised in every detail. Born 1965. Grows up in an East Sussex country pub. Dad, a dentist, dies very early. Mum, usefully discreet and immensely supportive. Local news reporter. Then showbiz reporter at the *News of the World*. Rupert Murdoch makes him editor of the most ferocious tabloid in the Anglosphere at 28. Sensational. Unbelievable. World exclusive. Defects to edit the *Daily Mirror* just a year later. Jaw-dropping. Huge. Truly staggering. Fired in 2004 after dragging the paper into a no-holds-barred confrontation with Labour over Iraq. Morgan wouldn't apologise for publishing images of British squaddies appearing to abuse Iraqi prisoners that many thought fake. Horror show. Gutted. Derided. Loses his chauffeur. Writes *The Insider*, the funniest book written about British journalism in the past 30 years.

Moves into television. *Britain's Got Talent*. Absolutely massive. Moves over the Atlantic. *Piers Morgan Tonight* on CNN in 2011. Bigger, better, bolder, but bad ratings. Show axed. Complete disgrace. Back over the Atlantic in 2015. *Good Morning Britain*. Storms out amid controversy after he'd called Meghan Markle a liar. Farce. Rehired by Murdoch for TalkTV. Staggering. But the channel bombs. Disaster. Morgan buys the rights in 2024 and moves the whole show to YouTube. It explodes. Interviews, debates, world ▸

"Obama got a Nobel Peace Prize after eight months in office and two fancy speeches. Why would Trump not get one?"

Morgan is houndishly loyal to his old masters. He talks about Murdoch and Simon Cowell the way the Pope talks about Jesus and Mary

◂ exclusives. The editor has become the ringmaster of the internet's biggest talk show. "I'm my own boss," he tells me proudly. Millions of followers, subscribers and views. Millions of pounds in revenue. Gigantic. Global. They know him in India now. I looked before the interview for a photo of Morgan in the past 30 years where he isn't beaming like a nutter. Impossible. The guy just loves it.

We only have 45 minutes, although we end up talking for an hour. I get Morgan to rattle out some instant op-eds. He would still have dinner with the thrice-disgraced Peter Mandelson, but he knows it's over for him in terms of public life: "I feel sorry for him." Likewise, Prince Andrew deserves to be banished to the outer darkness, because you can't carry on with a paedophile like Jeffrey Epstein once you know he's been convicted. British print journalists are facing a reality check: "Newspapers are dying."

Morgan thinks Keir Starmer is a dud, with Labour "awful" since they took power, but he is fond of Wes Streeting, "a skilful politician". Nigel Farage is the "best communicator in politics", but his economic policies "are a massive Achilles heel". Prince Harry is "as dumb as a rock". The monarchy itself is "quite a tenuous thing now". What about GB News co-owner Paul Marshall? "Paul is a smart guy." Why didn't he join the channel? They made Morgan multiple offers, but he doesn't think he's right-wing enough to take his show there. He saw Murdoch – "driven, genius, forward-looking" – this time last year. They lunched. Murdoch had just been to a Starlink satellite launch site run by another Morgan mate, Elon Musk. "He was absolutely blown away by it all."

Morgan is houndishly loyal to his old masters. He talks about Murdoch and Simon Cowell the way the Pope talks about Jesus and the Virgin Mary. "He was like a teenager talking with excitement about what he had seen. That's Rupert's mind and that's what Elon is like. The really transformative figures in our world, in our lives, are the people that always look forward."

I ask Morgan if he's sentimental about anything. "Not really, no." Even Arsenal? "No. I always look forward."

Woke Is Dead feels like a bit of a period piece. Woke definitely is dead thanks to Trump's re-election last year, although I suspect Morgan thinks it is alive and well at the *New Statesman*. Disappointingly for him, I basically agree with the parts of the book I skim through before going back to *The Insider*. (I find it impossible to resist a text that describes the late Queen Mother like this: "Absolutely tiny and moves very, very slowly – like a little shrew moving through a sea of treacle.") Still, I suppose we must argue about what Morgan refers to during our conversation as "woke", "wokeism", "the woke mob", "the woke brigade", "the woke outbreak", "the woke mind virus", "the woke ideology" and "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah".

If we take "woke", broadly, to mean altering the balance of societies to enhance the rights of women and minorities, in order that they achieve equity with other groups, wouldn't a totally "woke" world actually be a happier place? Would it be terrible for Pakistan to become woke? Or Chad? Morgan cuts me off. He looks like a python that's about to pounce on a cornered gerbil. "Are you woke?"

"Not really," I confess. He suddenly looks sad. "I'm not even sure people will admit to it any more." I try to make him answer the question: surely a "woke" Chad would be a better Chad? "I don't buy that argument." He says it's contradictory for "people on the woke left" to support Hamas. I point out that if the Gaza Strip were ruled by a "woke" dictatorship, there probably wouldn't be much room for Hamas there. "The woke wouldn't be in charge," Morgan says, with some menace. But if they were? "Right, well, if Mother Theresa ran the world it would be a nicer place. You can take a hypothetical to the *n*th degree. It's not gonna happen." Is Susanna Reid, his former co-host on *Good Morning Britain*, woke? "She's pretty woke, yeah," Morgan chuckles. Although, when he watches her now, she "sounds increasingly less woke". Morgan 1-0 Reid.

I change the subject from "woke" by asking Morgan a question he asked Gordon Ramsay in 2005. "If you could have sex with one other woman with your wife's permission before you die, who would it be?" Morgan bursts out laughing and doesn't stop for a while. "Did I really ask him that?!" I tell him he did. "Hmmm. With my wife's permission..." He looks thoughtful for a vanishing split-second. "I think the gentleman in me is going to have to take a pass on that." He applauds the *New Statesman* for asking him one of his own questions, though. "The Morganisation of journalism is complete!"

He's probably right about that. Journalism is barely recognisable from the industry that Morgan bombed out of in 2004. Anybody with a phone can have a go at it. While traditional reporters are tethered to paralysing libel rules, podcasters like Joe Rogan can and do say anything they like. Social media revealed that far from the tabloids being as uniquely cruel as they were thought to be in the *News of the World*'s phone-tapping heyday, there is a miniature, fulminating Piers Morgan or Kelvin MacKenzie inside each and every one of us, merrily posting trash online. Is daily life more or less cruel for not being dominated by tabloid headlines? You can find the same stuff every day in Facebook groups or X threads.

Morgan has to go. A gleaming black Mercedes is waiting for him outside the News Building. He doesn't want to stop talking. We argue about Trump. Morgan thinks he will respect the results of the next presidential election. I tell him about a conversation I had with a senior diplomatic source who thinks Trump will run again. We are standing outside the office. Journalists stream past us. "I bet you £100 Trump will step down," says Morgan. I accept. "Only £100, though," he cackles, "I would go higher but I know you can't afford it!" He steps into the powerful car. Alpha move. ●

The Diary

Freshers' week redux, losing to my daughter, and a lovely day to visit the Louvre

By Rosie Millard

If it's Monday, it is three hours of linguistics. And if it's Friday, two and a half hours of French; no English allowed. At the age of 60, I have embarked on a BA degree in French at Birkbeck, University of London, and I have *frappé* the ground running, as the French probably don't say. Friday is by far the hardest. Under the tutelage of the good-humoured Agnès, and her electronic whiteboard that doubles as a screen (forget blackboard and chalk), we watch chic women and sexy men (this is France), disseminating cultural issues in extremely rapid French. Then we discuss what we think they are saying, while Agnès giggles.

I have been a Francophile since buying that Serge Gainsbourg single at the age of 14, and the four-year syllabus beckons me with thrilling promise. The reality is slightly tougher than the dream. I only achieved O-level in French and have totally forgotten how to use the indicative. If I ever knew. After the video, we engaged with 14 different ways to say "when", including the mysterious *au fur et à mesure que*, which I will obviously never knowingly use in conversation. "*Il faut toujours utiliser un dictionnaire*, Rosie," sighs Agnès as she pings me back my homework on Turnitin (get it?).

A cyclist saw the jewellery thieves clambering into the museum and called *les flics*, but they arrived *trop tard*

Coming full circle

I don't really like art fairs, but at Frieze Press Day, I hoped I would see someone I knew. And lo, there was Paul Hedge of Hales Gallery, whom I interviewed 25 years ago for my book on the YBA phenomenon, *The Tastemakers*. Hedge has ridden the vicissitudes of the market brilliantly, and his stand included a £65,000 Ken Kiff painting. "I started out as a postman, and St James's Square was in my round, including a gallery where I saw Ken Kiff for the first time," he said. "I told the gallerist: 'When I open my own gallery, I will show Ken Kiff.' He laughed and said to his friends, 'The postman is going to have a gallery, don't you know!'" Hedge smiled. Last year, Hedge took over running the entire Kiff estate. Tee hee.

"Take your shoes off and stand in the dome"

The antithesis of the art fair is the domestic show. My Islington neighbour, the artist Markus Hansen, a former assistant to the great modernist Joseph Beuys, has built a huge dome in his basement. It is called Dusk Pavilion. "Take your shoes off and stand in the dome," he advises. I stand in the middle of a dark rotunda. Nothing happens. I lie down. Suddenly, blinding light for about eight seconds. I stand, and see my body "printed" on the white floor, like a murder victim. The whole vault has been painted in luminous paint. The light flashes again. What larks! I move around the dome, leaving fading handprints that look like those on the caves at Lascaux.

Dusk Pavilion is part of "ROUTE 19", a show inspired by the number 19 bus route (which goes through Islington). "It cuts a perfectly plotted trajectory through the best and worst of London," says the curator, Adrian Dannatt; the show gives "a deeper understanding of the city's unique character". The main exhibition at Mayfair's Belmacz gallery (near the Green Park stop on the number 19 route), includes work by Grayson Perry, Allen Jones and Peter Doig, who all live near the infrequent presence of this bus.

Big weekend for Paris

Royal property now has a secondary value as race tracks. London has the Royal Parks half marathon, but Paris hosts La Grande Classique, a ten-miler that is shorter, and far more glamorous, as it goes from the Eiffel Tower, via a colossal hill, to the Palace of Versailles. I ran it with my daughter, Honey, who beat me by about 20 minutes.

Abandoned by my child, I ran alongside the local police, who are fit enough to deal with the hill, but not the Louvre. Apparently a cyclist saw the jewellery thieves clambering into the museum and called *les flics*, but they arrived *trop tard*.

High drama

The day of the heist, we were at the Bastille to see Paris Opera's new production of *Aida*. Lovely show, terrible audience. I was sitting alongside a grim trinity: someone with a fan, someone with a working phone and someone chewing gum. The god Ptah was thence invoked alongside Alex Ferguson-style mastication.

The next morning, I ran to the Louvre. I looked up at the crime scene. There was no sign of the break-in. Outside, Paris is rainy, beautiful, *comme d'habitude*. Chic women plus tiny dogs. Men in slim suits plus bikes. An advert for a jewellery store, "Contemporary mountings of antique artefacts", summarised what might become of the stolen stones. ●

Rosie Millard writes "The Arts Stack" on Substack.
Michael Prodger writes about the Louvre heist on page 46

COMMONS CONFIDENTIAL

By Kevin Maguire and friends

Rupert Lowe mistaking a charity rowing crew on the Norfolk coast for Channel small-boat crossers raises questions over his attention to detail now he's on a Public Accounts Committee scrutinising the state finances. Desperate for a Reform defector to shore up the party's leaking starboard, the sinking Tories gifted the hard-right howler, sitting as an independent after acrimoniously parting ways with Reform, one of its prized berths on the prestigious parliamentary body in the hope he jumps aboard. Suella Braverman's mentor John Hayes and committee chair Geoffrey Clifton-Brown are schmoozing Lowe, whispered a snout. Loose-cannon Lowe was Elon Musk's pick for Reform leader and raging Rupe declared Farage "must never be prime minister". Kemikaze Badenoch clearly agrees. Saner Tories fear Lowe would be a disastrous recruit.

Conservative front-bench flag-waver Andrew Rosindell is complaining he's mistaken for Keir Starmer. The Tory MP, champion of a potential pact with Reform, revealed members of the public occasionally think he's the prime minister. Rosindell blames his glasses. One scathing Labour MP guffawed that the role of unofficial doppelgänger was the nearest the Romford right-whinger would ever get to No 10. There's no word on whether Starmer intends to sue for defamation.

David Cameron, never a Stakhanovite when he was in Downing Street and Chequers, strolls casually around the House of Lords as if he's honorary president of a country club, I hear. My snout spotted Baron Cameron of Chipping Norton sauntering along a corridor in washing-machine-fresh white tennis shorts and socks. To be fair to the former PM and foreign secretary, Cameron wasn't carrying a racquet so it might have been squash gear. Either way, it's nice he hasn't changed.

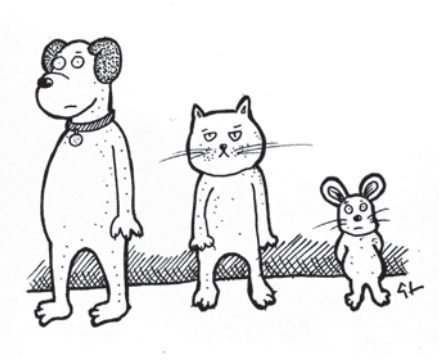
GEORGE LEIGH

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood's appointment – technically election, but without the democracy when votes are stitched in advance – as chair of Labour's National Executive Committee passed largely under the radar. The post gives Mahmood a tight grip over party machinery. Which is handy for any cabinet minister who might fancy themselves heir to the ultimate crown. But how will she find time away from a hectic day job? "Shabana wants to be PM so nothing these days gets in the way of that," purred an admirer.

Under-pressure parliamentarians have a new outlet to relieve stress: an MPs' yoga club. Labour backbenchers Yuan Yang and former personal trainer Kim Leadbeater have invited colleagues to bend and twist in the gym. A degree of flexibility is crucial to the political career of every MP.

The cheers that once followed Boris Johnson have been replaced by jeers. The partygate liar and his third wife, Carrie, were recently spied in the trendy Notting Hill eaterie Chez Lui celebrating a chum's birthday. When the cake and candles were brought out, a chorus of boos from around the restaurant were heard over the table's "Happy Birthday" singing. This time, however, no Covid fixed-penalty notice was served.

The New Statesman caption competition



Send your entries to caption@newstatesman.co.uk. Our three favourites will be published in the next issue

Fractious and factional Your Party's latest battleground is Nato. The old warhorse Jeremy Corbyn led Labour into the 2017 and 2019 elections with Labour manifestos promising to keep Britain in the organisation, yet his co-founder and, increasingly, rival, Zarah Sultana, wants to quit. Your Party's remain-leave Nato split is part of a wider in-out division on the populist left. Green Party eco-socialist competitor Zack Polanski is a stayer. "The world is in turmoil; we need to make sure our country is defended," he said. That triggered Sultana to hit back. "I'm sorry, you cannot greenwash Nato. The socialist position is that we must leave Nato immediately," she exploded. Polanski's Nato stance was shared widely on Twitter/X, including by Blackburn MP Adnan Hussain, Sultana's comrade in the Independent Alliance and Your Party. "I think Zack has a very sensible approach to this question," he posted. Your Party has said that no policies will be agreed until its conference. Nato could prove a red line some will not cross.

Burnley FC was Alastair Campbell's club but former protégé Tim Allan appears to prefer more rarefied surroundings. I've heard on good authority that the smoothie moneybags PR, hired by Keir Starmer as executive director of communications, entertains in the £2,336-a-year RAC club on Pall Mall. It boasts an opulent Great Gallery, art deco Brooklands Room, Long Bar and Turkish baths. Labour spin has upgraded from Bovril and pies in the Tony Blair era to fine wines and canapés during Starmer's.

The government is championing stronger workers' rights yet the same can't be said, alas, for all the party's MPs. One has annoyed her staff by demanding medical appointments be taken as annual leave or the hours made up through overtime. Everything's too good for the workers.

Is Bridget Phillipson trolling the private-school lobby with her shake-up of vocational education? V-levels alongside existing A-levels and T-levels will tax a fee-paying elite still gurgling over the introduction of VAT on private schools. ●

Snout Line: Got a story? Write to tips@newstatesman.co.uk

CORRESPONDENCE

letters@newstatesman.co.uk

Letter of the week

A means to an end

Andrew Marr's analysis (Inside Westminster, 17 October) is spot on. But he doesn't follow through with the conclusion – to means test the old-age pension. Fairness demands it. Even if only 10 per cent of pensioners are wealthy, why pay them a pension? £17.5bn per annum would be saved, and more in the future. Wealthy boomers didn't contribute to this pension by paying adequate tax (the UK has more debt now than ever before). They have benefited from rising asset prices, often have corporate-funded, defined-benefit pensions that hardly anyone under the age of 60 was ever offered and have enjoyed tax incentives to save that barely exist any more. Enough's enough. Welfare is for the poor, not the old. If this is unthinkable policy, why is other welfare means tested?

Labour needs a mission that cuts through with voters. It also needs an enemy, as any populist leader will tell you. If the mission is fairness, the enemy is middle-class welfare. Those who would miss out from a means-tested pension wouldn't vote for Keir Starmer anyway. Of all the choices facing the Chancellor, this is more palatable than most. Like Andrew, I'll likely be one who misses out under this regime, but if it is not implemented, there won't be any money left when I retire anyway.
Matt Hammond, London NW3

Out with the old?

Andrew Marr's admonition to Rachel Reeves not to neglect our nation's youth (Inside Westminster, 17 October) is timely, given we are led to believe 16-year-olds are shortly to receive the right to vote. He points out that "oldies" (like me) vote in much greater proportion than our youngsters: in 2019 only 47 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds voted, compared to 74 per cent of those over 65. It follows that governments reflect this by favouring us with policies like the triple lock on pensions. One might suppose that if young people voted in greater numbers, they might find governments handing them a few goodies?

But I recently talked to a few dozen 16-to-18-year-old school pupils and found a worrying disengagement from anything political. Not one claimed to have any interest in politics and, assuming they do get the vote, not one intended to exercise it.
Bill Jones, professor of political studies, University Liverpool Hope

As a pensioner who retired at 74, I pay tax on my modest state and small private pensions. I'm fairly taxed on earnings. The real issue isn't pension income or taxable earnings; it's tax-avoided wealth which can disadvantage the younger generation.
Sally Litherland, Salisbury

Andrew Marr suggests that pensioners wield disproportionate power by voting. The remedy for younger voters who feel disadvantaged by this subversive practice is obvious. As someone who, after 44 years of full-time work, is now semi-retired (I work part-time for my local parish council), may I be permitted to vote in local elections, where I have skin in the game, if I agree to abstain in general elections and accept whatever largesse the youth-conscious government of the future deems fair?
Steve Kerry, Alveley, Shropshire

Channel for despair

I read the letters in response to the 10 October Cover Story about small boats (Correspondence, 17 October). Were it not for the clear-sighted, dispassionate analysis of Andrew Marr, I could have been reading the *Guardian*! Care4Calais, the Refugee Council and similar organisations, along with a coterie of MPs, seem unable to tell us where resources are to be found to provide proper housing, jobs, healthcare and other welfare provision for the stream of asylum seekers/economic migrants that arrive on our shores. So what of the needs of the families who already live here, call the UK their home, but who cannot find decent accommodation, work, schooling, medical and social care? That is, who cannot find a halfway decent chance in life?

To make such comparisons is to be labelled a "racist", or a "fascist", or a wild-eyed, violent member of the far right! This is the way a large number of decent, liberal people are labelled. The immigration fiasco is one part of the disillusionment, even despair, felt by ordinary folk.
Brent Charlesworth, Lincoln

I read with dismay your Cover Story on the suffering in the pop-up camps around Calais. Added to the deaths of those, attempting to cross the Channel, I am left with a profound sense of grief. And anger. Anger at the failure of governments on both sides of the Channel that have created and propogated this tragedy. There is only one realistic way to end this continuously compounding misery: removal of all and any hope of remaining in the UK if arrival is via a small boat. Suggesting otherwise betrays an increasingly grotesque disregard of the reality of human nature.
Julian Lyons, London SE14

A fan of his early work

Will Dunn quotes from the Edward Thomas poem "The Combe" (The Sketch, 17 October), but makes a mistake saying "it was one of his last poems before he was

killed in the First World War". According to Edna Longley's annotated edition of the poems, Thomas wrote his first poem, "November", on 4 December 1914, and "The Combe" on 30 December of that year. That makes it one of the first of the 144 poems in the Edward Thomas canon.
Chris Moore, London SW4

A Gove-able feast

Kevin Maguire notes Michael Gove's patronising of Pret (Commons Confidential, 17 October). When he was education secretary, Gove was often seen walking to buy his own lunch – unlike most ministers. I, a civil servant, was told to vary my routine in case of attack. Gove seemed oblivious to such advice, though considerably more of a target.
Martin Post, West Sussex

Lord, help the mister

As a Catholic who was taught by Catholic nuns, I so enjoyed Lamorna Ash's column (Contact, 17 October). Who could blame these women for their desire to return to their convent? Thankfully, their saviours appreciated their homesickness and rescued them. You can take the nuns out of the convent, but you can't take the convent out of the nuns. May they reside there until they die, after lives well-lived, and so respected by the local community.
Judith A Daniels, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk

Alan Faragetridge?

Steve Coogan's Alan Partridge (The New Society, 10 October), with his *Daily Mail* views, "old git" wardrobe and politically incorrect verbiage, is surely a depiction of a Reform voter, if not the great Nigel Farage himself. Next, Coogan should make Partridge a satirical Reform politician.
Sally Wilton, Bournemouth

Discontent on the continent

Finn McRedmond's observations on London's pizza scene struck a chord (Silver Spoon, 17 October). After a rewarding day spent walking Pompeii's ancient streets recently, it felt appropriate, in Naples that evening, to order a Vesuvio. While it wasn't flung at me like a frisbee (or discobolus), it was laden with so much salty *formaggi* that hours later, I was sleepless from a raging thirst – the same gasping insomnia had we frequented a certain PizzaExpress, Woking.
Richard Baker, London SE24

Finn McRedmond's seasonal melancholy is tipping over into pure grumpiness (Silver Spoon, 17 October). In our family, the Champagne Bar at St Pancras is a totemic spot that has marked the start of priceless occasions. Expeditions to Prix de L'Arc de Triomphe, Fondation Louis Vuitton exhibitions and birthday celebrations in Paris have all kicked off there. We have also discovered that in an overcoat I look exactly like John Betjeman. As for conducting extramarital affairs at Carluccio's, I couldn't possibly comment, but I have been made happy by their *spaghetti alle vongole*. On the other hand, Finn, if you want to wallow in grumpiness, come up here to Keighley.
Tim Appelbee, Sutton-in-Craven, Keighley

My word is my bond

I agree that if we want to solve the housing crisis we should look to the Victorians (Future Perfect, 17 October). We should revive the social reformer Octavia Hill's idea of 4 per cent philanthropy. One of the barriers to high-quality affordable housing is governments' unwillingness to commit public capital to housing. However, I would be willing to buy housing bonds, attracting a modest rate of interest, if I knew my money would be spent on good-quality housing, offered on secure terms to people in need. If it worked then, it could work now.
Adam Penwarden, Brighton

Matters of the heart

So, dating app companies are turning their priorities to profit at the expense of users (Out of the Ordinary, 17 October). Never thought I'd be drawing that parallel with privatised utilities...
Rob Ingram, Bovey Tracey, Devon

Write to letters@newstatesman.co.uk
We reserve the right to edit letters

Outside the box By Becky Barnicoat

THE NEW STATESMAN EVENTS

Future of Healthcare Conference

28 October London

The *New Statesman*'s annual Future of Healthcare conference will rethink the challenges facing our healthcare systems to find actionable policy solutions that improve patient outcomes, empower the workforce and build a resilient, forward-looking NHS.

Through panel discussions, private roundtables, interviews and keynote speeches, we will examine how partnership between policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, and healthcare experts can tackle the pressing issues facing our healthcare systems.

The release of the government's long-anticipated 10-year health plan makes this an opportune time to align priorities, shape responses, and build momentum for implementation. The plan sets out a strategic vision for the NHS and social care systems over the next decade - touching on everything from workforce planning and digital innovation to prevention and chronic disease management.

Scan QR code to register

Key topics for discussion include:

- Prevention first: How can we tackle the root causes of poor health?
- Driving innovation in life sciences: How can research and development unlock a new era of positive patient outcomes?
- Fit for the future: How can public-private sector collaboration ensure the 10 Year Plan delivers healthier, longer lives for the British people?
- Road to recovery: How can we build a healthcare service that meets the needs of people with long-term conditions?
- Investing in the 51%: How can levelling up the gender health gap boost Britain's economy?
- Adult social care: How can we build a social care system that empowers independent living for older and disabled people?

Sponsors

epilepsy society

LifeArc

novo nordisk®

Scan for more info

The above organisations have provided sponsorship funding to support this event and have had no influence over the content of the event or selection of speakers.

FREDDIE HAYWARD

American Affairs

The Trump regime's dream of making America white again is closer than ever

I spend more time arguing with proud nativists in bars around DC than I would like. You might be surprised how blatantly some spout their horror of the US's ethnic diversity. But these conversations are an indication of the toxic cauldron that is bubbling away inside the Trump administration.

It's not long before well-read Maga-ites – and I encounter more literate people on the right than the left – ask whether I've read David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* (1989), which traces American culture back to the English counties from which the first colonists came. The implication is that the US must restore its old ethnic make-up in order to be truly American again. They see the United States as defined by its Anglo-European ancestry and therefore a non-European United States is no longer America. Donald Trump seems to agree: a thread running through the past eight months is the attempt to restore that European heritage.

America's leaders have always grappled with how to distinguish the US from the many countries this nation of immigrants is made from. Language has long been the subject over which this battle is fought.

A problem for the US's Founding Fathers was fashioning a distinct national identity apart from Britain, even though they shared a common language with the mother country. The Marquis de Chastellux reported in 1780 that some Bostonians wanted to make Hebrew the official language. In 1795, the House narrowly voted down a proposal that all its proceedings be printed in German as well as English. Congress had to satisfy itself by renaming English as the "language of the United States". The great lexicographer Noah Webster wrote in 1789 that as an "independent nation, our honour requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard."

So much for Webster in Trump's America. The idea that the US is exclusively defined by its English or sometimes European heritage – and therefore not other cultures – has been building for some time on the American right. This nativism increasingly means conceiving of the US as an Anglo-Saxon creation with a single language. By 1988, 17 states had voted to make English the official tongue in response to the wave of Asian and Hispanic immigration that ramped up after 1965. But it is Trump who has gone the furthest.

In March, he symbolically declared English the official language of the US. His executive order said this was necessary to secure a "unified and cohesive society". Trump has re-proclaimed Leif Erikson Day – to memorialise the Viking said to be the first European to set foot on continental North America – and has commemorated Christopher Columbus Day without doing the same for Indigenous People's Day. Imagine how different this would be if Kamala Harris had won the presidency. (In 2021, she said Columbus's expedition to America "ushered in" part of the US's "shameful past".)

There are calls for naturalised citizens to be denied the same rights as US-born ones

What might seem like a redundant fight over a nation's symbols is backed up by real policy. The *New York Times* has reported that the administration wants to prioritise refugees from European countries, particularly those suppressed for supporting populism and opposing immigration. At the same time, the administration sees "immigrants' rights" as an oxymoron.

There are now calls for naturalised American citizens to be denied the same rights as the native born. The Maga congresswoman Nancy Mace has suggested that Ilhan Omar, a fellow member of Congress, be deported back to Somalia, where she was born. Laura Loomer, an online activist the president listens to, has called for Muslims to be banned from standing in Congress. "Why do we even have Muslims in Congress?" she tweeted. "What a stain on our country."

Or consider the right's reaction to the announcement that Bad Bunny, a Puerto Rican rapper whose lyrics are mostly in Spanish, will headline the Super Bowl's half-time show at the start of next year. Remember that Puerto Rico is part of the US. Trump called the decision "ridiculous" and Maga influencer Benny Johnson complained there would be "no songs in English". A counter-programme called the All-American Halftime Show is being put on instead. On its website, attendees are asked what music they would like to hear. One of the options is "anything in English".

The progressive congressman Ro Khanna said to me earlier this year that Trump and his vice-president, JD Vance, want to turn America into "another ordinary nation". In other words, they want to get rid of the idea that anyone who believes in US ideals can become American in favour of a country for those who can prove that their American lineage goes back generations. I suspect Vance would have little to disagree with in Khanna's characterisation. As Vance put it in July, those who fought in the Civil War have a "have a hell of a lot more claim over America" than progressive liberals.

The question is, how far is the administration willing to go to make its vision for America a reality? It calls to mind Fritz Stern's line on conservative revolutionaries wanting to "destroy the despised present in order to recapture an idealised past in an imaginary future". ●

MARTA SIGNORI

Doom loop

My trust in Labour to get us out of this mess was misplaced. Britain has become ungovernable

By Andrew Marr

The postwar British political establishment is collapsing. The Conservatives threw themselves into a death spiral last year, though it had been a long time in the making. Now in government, Labour is heading in the same direction, corkscrewing downwards, touching 15 points in one recent poll and haemorrhaging votes in every direction.

We are in a unique position, with a fragmenting multi-party politics stuck awkwardly inside an electoral system built for two. The likelihood is that at the next election, almost whatever happens, we will be stuck with a government we didn't expect.

The nation's patience has snapped. So many failures have brought the end of a politics of management and, both to right and left, the emergence of a politics of outrage and disgust. You can detect it almost everywhere, from the once-Tory shires to the NHS.

This issue is my last as the *New Statesman*'s political editor before becoming editor-at-large to look backwards and peer ahead. What follows may be bleak. But there is always the possibility of redemption. Nothing is set in stone. And politics is a messily emotional vocation, trading on leadership, inspiration and guts.

When I arrived on these friendly pages, Boris Johnson was prime minister and his administration was falling apart. For me, it was personal. The Downing Street lockdown parties had coincided with the constrained, limited-numbers, outdoor funeral we held for my father. The partying felt like the perfect example of selfish Conservative Westminster, the same elite heedlessness that brought the terrible Brexit deal from which Britain still suffers.

Then came the implosion of the Johnson government and that spectacular cascade of resignations. This was journalistically exciting in the same way that standing a little too close to a tower block being demolished must be. Then, interesting Liz Truss. You know about that. Then Rishi in the rain.

But at this point I succumbed to that hard-to-forgive journalistic sin: the faint prickle of optimism. I felt it as much as a citizen as a hack. With Keir Starmer, there was a public-spirited, faintly puritanical, undeniably serious figure, surrounded by colleagues who spoke well about the need for reinvestment in British infrastructure, clearing away the barriers to growth and giving the shunned, dilapidated parts of the country a new start.

We knew it wouldn't be easy. Almost everyone understood that the forward budgeting left by the Tories meant there were gaping holes ahead in departmental spending. It was clear that trade with the EU was a big, continuing problem for growth. We weren't talking about tariffs. Joe Biden was still in the White House, but Vladimir Putin had launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine; energy costs were streaking upwards and the sky was darkening. The Rwanda scheme was binned but the border immigration problem couldn't be ignored. Whatever this was, it wasn't the benign outlook Tony Blair found in the late 1990s.

Still, with a big majority, it seemed that, perhaps at last, the "grown-ups" were in charge. After the clown show, there was, Labour people thought, a pent-up surge of overseas investment waiting to arrive in a refreshingly competent Britain. Standing outside Downing Street, Starmer promised "to restore service and respect to politics, end the era of noisy performance, tread more lightly on your lives, and unite our country".

But overseas shocks kept coming. Any prim air of Church Army virtue about the new government was stripped early on by scandals – Waheed Alli, spectacles, clobber, concert tickets. They were small but profoundly demoralising.

Above all, the Labour establishment had underestimated the deeper difficulties of so much it was facing. The intractable problem of ballooning welfare spending and worklessness; the sheer incompetence of much of the state; the pressures on housing and public services caused by the post-Brexit immigration wave.

It did not feel as if a new government meant a new start, not in daily life. "Nothing works" continued to echo everywhere: from train travellers, swimmers on dirty beaches, millennials struggling to get into decent housing, motorists stuck in urban gridlock and outraged shopkeepers whose stock had been looted by gangs with no fear of the police. Very quickly, managerialism seemed as disappointing as ever. ▸

LINCOLN AGNEW

The new government was also doing much that was good, useful and urgent: investment in clean energy; breakfast clubs for poorer kids; the announcement on new towns; getting a decent deal from Donald Trump on tariffs; a fairer regime for workers in the gig economy; supporting Ukraine while agreeing higher defence spending.

Very little of this sticks in the mind of the voter. Why? In part because there seemed to be more announcement than action. What happened to the radical rewiring of the British state we were promised? Meanwhile, a combination of hyperactive social media and inherited problems pushed fear of "the migrant" as an all-weather, all-purpose explanation of British failure into the politics of outrage. The riots and the flags mattered far less than the quiet turning away from managerial politics that started shortly after the general election and has continued ever since.

For now – perhaps for the rest of our lifetimes – the two-party system lies in ruins. On the right, Reform, we must assume, will continue to reshape itself for power. Policy after policy is being reassessed, including the extreme deportation proposals. Reform is discussing the future with the commanding heights of the British establishment, from Whitehall to the BBC and the Bank of England. The recent jettisoning by Nigel Farage of £90bn of promised, incredible tax cuts was a significant moment.

Yes, it's possible that we are living through a Reform bubble that will burst. There are many hurdles ahead for the new party, both in policy and personnel. But the belief in some Labour circles that, offered a choice between Starmer or Farage, the country will inevitably choose the former is grossly complacent. From once-Labour Wales to inner-city London, people who a few years ago would not have given Reform the time of day are privately reassessing, due to impatience and despair. Unless something substantial changes, we are heading for a Reform government.

Meanwhile, to Labour's left, Zack Polanski's Greens have, in one poll by Find Out Now, nudged slightly ahead of Labour. It showed Starmer's Labour polling with a 15 per cent share, a fraction behind the Greens. For comparison, Labour under Jeremy Corbyn scored its lowest share at 23 per cent. The Greens are also piling on new members.

But in a multi-party contest, the problem for Labour may be slightly worse than it looks. As Starmer tries to rally the centre ground against Reform, Farage will surely use the Greens' positions on lax border controls, drug legalisation and higher taxes to discredit the prospect of a post-election Labour-led coalition. This is akin to when the Tories once suggested the Scottish nationalists would pull Labour's strings. In the end, the underpriced Liberal Democrats may yet prove big winners.

To all of this, from ministers and others, I get a repeated "calm down, dear" – things are moving so quickly and there's more than three years before the next general election. All true, except that with every day and week that passes, it is obviously a little less true. We will get a foretaste next May when elections take place in Wales and Scotland – and where an SNP triumph would revive the argument on independence.

Starmer, I insist, is a decent man with strong public values who is doing his level best. But thus far, he has been a managerial leader, unable to catch the nation's attention and unwilling to force through the drastic changes Britain now requires. These are days for eloquence, fire and argument.

But even if Starmer is removed, his successor would have to be a leader of extraordinary skill and charisma to turn things around. Such people don't grow on trees. The exit of this prime minister would mean a jink to the left, for if current policies aren't cutting through, there is politically nowhere else to go.

Only a month or two ago, that seemed to be an open door for Andy Burnham, Ed Miliband or Angela Rayner. Cabinet-level gossip remains hot. Is the new Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper, for instance, comfortable with her grand berth? Or does she, like some others, suspect that the next sacrifice for the greater good will be Chancellor Rachel Reeves if the Budget misfires? In that case, Starmer could hardly sack her from the government without creating a future danger for himself: would not the grand offices of the Foreign Office be the obvious place for her? In which case, what would that mean for Cooper?

Starmer has been a managerial leader. But these are days for eloquence, fire and argument

You may think all of this is silly and irrelevant to the real problems of the country, but I'm afraid it is how people think as the corrosive, authority-sapping impact of the polls works its way through government. In terms of what might happen next, the tilt by Wes Streeting towards the left is the most interesting indicator of all. Further strikes by doctors or nurses could sink him. But for somebody we are regularly told is not liked by the Labour family generally, the response to Streeting's conference speech was magnificent.

Whoever were to succeed Starmer, a changed Labour government looking for a "bounce" in the polls would need a story that goes far beyond managerialism and the end of "noisy performance". It would need to go out looking to win arguments about fairness for workers and between the generations, about Europe, welfare and crime in a relentless, confident way. Streeting, like Miliband, is a man who seems to like an argument. But, I say again, nothing is inevitable. And nothing is foretold.

It will be for my successor, the brilliant Ailbhe Rea, to bring you regular stories as that tale unfolds. Political journalism doesn't need to be either bitterly critical or slavishly deferential to the party in power: there is a sweet spot between them, which is found in these pages.

As for me, I've been panting long enough on the hamster wheel of weekly parliamentary journalism. I will continue writing here on politics but also on the harder stories that disrupt our beliefs, from arguments about faith to ones about our fragility in the age of immature yet hugely powerful technologies – as well as about the glories of these times, particularly in culture, that do not, perhaps, please and awe us as much as they should.

For somebody who has been writing about British politics since the early 1980s, the past few years have been shocking and disconcerting. During the 20th century, and well into this one, the two great forces shaping British politics – Labour and Conservative – seemed as much part of the world's rhythm as winter and spring. You picked a side. But economic failure and a lack of patriotic confidence is driving us into an unfamiliar season.

The Conservatives, underpinned by business, hereditary wealth, the military and the poor old Church of England, are being scattered to the winds. The party of organised labour has gone the same way as, well, organised labour. Yet the old arguments about economic vitality, fairness and cohesion will also be the new arguments. My greatest fear is that we come to feel, before too long, that these past wildly turbulent years were relatively calm and kindly ones.

RACHEL CUNLIFFE

Lines of Dissent

Amid the Prince Andrew fallout, we should not forget the tragic life of Virginia Giuffre

There is a line in Virginia Giuffre's memoir that stopped me cold. It isn't her account of the three times she had sex with Prince Andrew during the two years she spent as a sex slave for Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell as a teenager. (Andrew continues to deny ever meeting her.) It isn't a description of the many men who raped her before she turned 20 years old: the trucker who shoved a gun into her mouth in a cheap motel when she was 15; the politician and associate of Epstein who asphyxiated her until she was unconscious and left her bleeding; her own father. It isn't her tortured exploration of the battles with her mental health – eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation – that plagued her throughout and beyond the narrative of this memoir, published posthumously on 21 October, six months after she took her own life at the age of 41.

No, the line that floored me concerned the period towards the end of her time in Epstein's orbit. Nearing 18, on the cusp of ageing out of the bracket that most appealed to the multimillionaire paedophile yet still totally financially reliant on him, Giuffre is forced into procuring other, younger girls on his behalf, participating in a "pyramid-like recruitment scheme". Her self-awareness is chilling: "When I targeted girls who were hungry or poor, I knew I was exploiting their vulnerabilities," she writes. "That I targeted girls who said yes only proves how good I'd become at spotting those who were the neediest. The faces of girls I recruited will always haunt me. I know their pain, and I will never get over playing a role in causing it."

In those short sentences, Giuffre shows far more understanding, more empathy and more repentance than have Epstein, Maxwell and Prince Andrew – who in his 2019 *Newsnight* interview with Emily Maitlis could not even bring himself to say he regretted his friendship with Epstein or offer sympathy for the victims. Giuffre's humanity, her ability to feel remorse for what she has done even under extreme duress, stands in stark contrast to the denials and dismissals of those ultimately responsible for the abuse. But her admission is also a searing insight into how such abuse happens in the first place.

Her book, *Nobody's Girl*, is all about power: obtaining it, exploiting it, trying to reclaim it. Finished shortly before Giuffre's suicide, it is an eerie rallying call for survivors of sexual abuse to demand justice, issued from beyond the grave. The frenzy surrounding this book was inevitable given the royal connection that turned Giuffre from just one of many Epstein victims to a household name in the UK. The harrowing question of what that transformation may have cost her hangs over its 366 pages.

The Prince Andrew angle is what has always gripped the media about Giuffre's story. Shortly after an extract of the book was published, in which Giuffre refers to him as "entitled – as if he believed having sex with me was his birthright", the Palace released a statement from Prince Andrew stating: "I will therefore no longer use my title or the honours which have been conferred upon me. As I have said previously, I vigorously deny the accusations against me." A debate is raging about whether parliament should step in to formally strip Andrew of both his land and the titles he has promised to voluntarily avoid using. Questions about the "peppercorn" rent he is paying (or not) to live in a 30-room mansion on the Windsor Estate, and who is funding his annual £3m security bill, remain. The prince may have ceased to be a "working royal" after the *Newsnight* interview, but the layers of privilege that have cocooned him since birth remain.

> Abusers don't always need lavish mansions and private jets to operate with impunity

It is sickening to wonder: without such a high-profile figure thrown into the mix, how invested would we be in Giuffre's story? She is far from alone – as an Epstein victim, and as a trafficking victim full stop. We are paying attention because of who she says her abusers were, not because of the abuse itself. "We were girls who no one cared about, and Epstein pretended to care... he threw what looked like a lifeline to girls who were drowning," Giuffre writes at one point. When I read that, along with her confession of how she targeted teenagers whose poverty or past trauma made them vulnerable, I thought of the victims of the grooming gangs: thousands of young girls with chaotic home lives and scarce resources lured into a nightmare by people they thought were offering them a lifeline. I thought of the men who raped them – not billionaires, but ordinary men with just enough power to turn susceptible girls into objects. And to convince the world it was those girls' own fault. Abusers don't always need lavish sex mansions and private jets to operate with impunity. They just need victims no one will care about.

As for the consequences, Epstein was found dead in a jail cell in August 2019 while awaiting trial for trafficking charges. Maxwell is serving a 20-year sentence in a low-security prison. Most of the men who abused Giuffre have never been named, let alone arrested. And to date the repercussions for Prince Andrew, who maintains his innocence, seem limited to no longer enjoying honours he did nothing to earn. Reading Giuffre's unflinching account and knowing what her fate would be once she put down the pen, it is painfully evident that victims like her continue to pay the heaviest price. It's clear who still has the power – and, tragically, who does not. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

The myths of post-liberalism

The UK may be descending into Hobbesian chaos – but Farage is not the answer

By John Gray

Sometime in the mid Eighties, not long after he published the seminal text of post-liberal philosophy *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Alasdair MacIntyre and I had lunch in Oxford. I asked him whether there was a contemporary example of a society that was not corroded by individualism. "Rajasthan," he replied. I was unpersuaded. A society like the one he imagined in the north-west of India, in which individuals were embedded in an all-encompassing social order, has not existed in Western countries for centuries, if ever. After finishing our meal, we walked over to Wadham College and sat together on a bench under a tree in its garden. We talked, in all, for nearly four hours. Then, exasperated by my scepticism, he got up and left, turning on his way with a parting shot: "I will pray for you."

This impressive performance foreshadowed MacIntyre's subsequent intellectual development. He spent the rest of his life fleshing out a version of the ethics of Aristotle, transmitted to the modern world through the Roman Catholic Church to which he converted in 1983. He died, at the age of 96, in May of this year. Looking back, I see that our conversation crystallised my doubts about the doctrinal anti-liberalism he preached in *After Virtue*.

Reading the book when it first appeared in 1981, I was struck by its political thinness. A diagnosis of the ills of individualism that invoked Benedictine monasteries and small Scottish fishing communities offered little useful guidance for modern urban-industrial societies. Of course, this was hardly surprising: the book is an avowed critique of the modern world. But MacIntyre began as a Marxist, publishing a short study *Marxism: An Interpretation* in 1953 and participating in New Left debates until well into the Sixties. Karl Marx never imagined it would be possible to roll back modern development. In 1853, he described British imperialism in India as a progressive force: by constructing railroads and other innovations, it disrupted the "stagnation" of village life. Whatever one may think of Marx's communist utopia, he understood that revisiting an idealised past is an exercise in futility.

Some 40 years on, these suspicions have been confirmed. Post-liberal visions of a seamless social order have proved as illusory, and in practice as divisive, as the progressive hyper-liberalism that has led us to our present pass. The identity politics of the right aiming to restore a homogeneous culture and the left's project of conferring rights on minority groups are equally destructive. Liberal societies are now in a condition of advanced and possibly terminal decay. Liberal individualism was an accident of history, and never a universalisable

Aristotle or bust: in today's emotivist discourse, driven by feeling, the central concepts of ethics have lost their meaning

JASPER JAMES/MILLENNIUM IMAGES, UK

way of life. But if there is a future for the societies in which it once prevailed, it is in renewing not rejecting liberal values. For countries such as the UK, radical illiberalism is a dead end.

Post-liberalism can refer to many disparate sets of ideas. Anti-modern traditionalism and Catholic integralism, Nietzschean elitism and Anglo-futurism, ethnonationalism, left-conservatism and majoritarian populism are some of the varieties on display. Despite their differences, they can all be understood as corroborating MacIntyre's disquieting suggestion in the first chapter of *After Virtue*. He asks the reader to envision a world in which science has been destroyed in a cultural backlash. When efforts are made to revive it, what emerges is a cargo cult, mimicking scientific traditions without understanding their methods or purpose.

MacIntyre's unsettling suggestion is that this is the condition of modern moral discourse. People talk – or shout – about "justice" and "rights", but the central concepts of ethics no longer have any determinable meaning. Emotivism – the theory proposed by philosophers such as AJ Ayer, in which moral judgements are expressions of feeling with no cognitive content – has become the way we live.

The situation today is worse than that posited in MacIntyre's thought experiment. Science has followed the trajectory of ethics. In key branches of inquiry, the pursuit of knowledge has been subordinated to political projects in which feelings are the final authority. Biological sex is denied because it is supposed to deny the ability to choose one's gender. Social science is devoted to uncovering hidden structures of domination – racist, heteronormative and the like. Class inequalities, which Marx recognised as social facts, hardly feature here. Oppression is a subjective experience, the refusal of society to recognise and privilege a self-defined identity.

If rampant subjectivism is the pathology of our time, pursuing an imaginary prelapsarian idyll will not solve our problems. Western civilisation has always been ridden with conflict. The scholastic synthesis of Jewish revealed religion with Greek rationalist philosophy was never stable. Medieval Europe was racked by antinomian heresies and savage wars of religion. A harmonious pre-modern way of life is the stuff of legend.

Nor is individualism a peculiarly modern phenomenon. As the anthropologist and historian Alan Macfarlane showed in *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978), a fluid, mobile society existed in this country from the 13th century onwards. Enclosures in which common land was expropriated ▸

◂ enhanced the power of the property-owning classes, but pre-industrial society was not made up of Arcadian villages. Ironically, the working-class street communities that formed around the factories and workshops in the Midlands and the north in the late-18th and 19th centuries were spin-offs from industrial capitalism. Torn down in Labour clearance schemes, decimated by Thatcherite economics and finished off by bourgeois-environmentalist deindustrialisation, they cannot be resurrected. For us, individualism is a historical fate.

As a former Marxist, MacIntyre should have understood that the maladies of modernity are the result of technological and economic change abetted by state power, and are not simply a consequence of shifts in ideas. Yet he was right in thinking that liberal philosophy facilitated the dissolution of a liberal way of life. Astutely, MacIntyre recognised that Friedrich Nietzsche – regarded by illiterate progressives as a counter-Enlightenment reactionary – represented a logical endpoint of the Enlightenment project.

After "the death of God", the human good is living as you choose to live, a freedom Nietzsche insisted can only be exercised by a superior few. (A version of this view is promoted in the writings and posts of Bronze Age Pervert, the pseudonymous internet personality, who celebrates an archaic Greek world of piracy, predation and misogyny.)

But Nietzsche was prefigured by a canonical liberal, John Stuart Mill. Sections of his *On Liberty* (1859) read like the fantasy of the *Übermensch* seen through a *bien-pensant* prism. For Mill, progress meant promoting a higher type of human being that displayed "individuality". The goal for everyone was to realise themselves as unique personalities. Transmitted through the Bloomsbury intelligentsia and resonating in the cultural revolution of the Sixties, self-realisation has become the core liberal value. Human beings must be able to make of themselves whatever they wish. Hyper-liberalism is Nietzsche for the masses.

In practice, things are more complicated. Our ultra-individualists are gripped by an insatiable need for collective belonging. It is not enough to be free to love whomever you want; you must be recognised as a member of a group with specially protected rights. Fighting racism does not mean equal treatment but positive discrimination for favoured minorities. The proliferation of identity groups is not only a demand for status and resources, but therapy. For many, autonomy means anomie – the lack of a stable identity. Self-realisation is difficult when you have no self to realise. Solidarity with selected victims gives purpose to lives that are otherwise empty of meaning, and a sense of identity is discovered in the madness of crowds.

Hyper-liberalism has not produced MacIntyre's dystopia – a chaos of free-floating individuals. Instead, society is being segmented into exclusionary communities. Multicultural diversity is proving to be a process of what we might call quasi-milletisation. Under the rule of the Ottoman empire, each religious community or "millet" – from Armenian Orthodox to Jewish communities – had its schools, marital arrangements and daily observances under its own laws. The leaders of the millets – mullahs, rabbis, priests – acted as intermediaries with the imperial authorities. Millets were based on religion not ethnicity, so migration from one to another was possible – but only by conversion. Autonomy was collective, not individual.

The Ottoman model has been praised as a regime of toleration, and so it was compared with medieval Christendom. But pluralism of this kind does not safeguard anyone who does not belong to one of the protected communities. In the variant that has evolved in Britain, thousands of white working-class girls subjected to industrial-scale rape by ethnically networked gangs have been let down by the justice system. Christians face expulsion from their professions for voicing their beliefs. Muslims and other immigrants face threats of attack when peaceful protests are hijacked by agitators. As the hideous attack on a Manchester synagogue on 2 October demonstrated, Jews are now targets of murderous assault when they gather to practise their faith. Post-liberal Britain risks descending into what the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes described as a state of nature, with an enfeebled state unable to prevent catastrophic breaches in civil peace.

In *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (1993), I argued that "contending projects for the political protection of cultural identity... each of which seeks privileges and entitlements that cannot in their nature be extended to all" were creating "a new Hobbesian dilemma". Reasserting the authority of government as the guarantor of peace, as conceived by the author of *Leviathan* (1651), the first and greatest liberal thinker, was the overriding imperative.

The kernel of truth in liberalism was a type of individualism – not the crypto-Nietzschean cult of self-realisation, but one which accepts that, left to themselves, individuals are weak and vulnerable creatures. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes's conception of the state rested on the consent of those it offered to protect. This is what made him a liberal – and the most incisive critic of

Strength in numbers: protesters at the Unite the Kingdom march in September

KRISTIAN BUUS/IN PICTURES VIA GETTY IMAGES

what currently passes as liberalism. Dismissing any idea of divine right, he also rejected Platonic rule by philosophers – an idea crudely and unwittingly parodied in progressive thinking. For Hobbes, the office of government is not to make human beings more rational or more virtuous, but to protect them from the ever-present danger of anarchy. The truth in post-liberalism is not dissimilar: human beings need shelter from the anarchical forces of the global market, including mass immigration. The error is in thinking safety can be found in communities.

Hostility to the modern state is a fatal flaw in post-liberal thinking. In societies divided by religion, MacIntyre's monasteries risk being sacked. Unless they are shielded from foreign competition, his small fishing communities will be ruined. There is peril from despotic powers, not just of military invasion but the disabling of essential services by cyberwarfare. In any world containing Vladimir Putin's Russia, Xi Jinping's China or a millenarian Iran, returning to neo-medieval communalism is a non-starter. The same is true of reviving the liberalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, an offspring of European (and later, American) global hegemony, now in steep retreat following the implosion of the "rules-based" international order.

Britain is responding with the construction of a security state. Organisations associated with terrorist activity – such as Palestine Action, the neo-Nazi Maniac Murder Cult and the white supremacist Russian Imperial movement – have been rightly proscribed. Incitement to violence, from whatever quarter, must be rigorously suppressed. Internet censorship of the kind permitted by the recently passed Online Safety Act, on the other hand, will strengthen the forces it seeks to curb. Conflating peaceful protesters against mass immigration with the far right can only help legitimise it. The disruption that goes with the sudden appearance in residential areas of hundreds of young males, many of them from illiberal cultures, is real, growing and felt across society. A digital ID scheme will do little to improve border control while facing opposition from those who fear it as the prelude to more invasive control of everyday life. A security state that brands an emerging British majority as potential criminals is programmed to self-destruct.

The unending small-boats saga shows government defaulting on one of its most basic functions. One reason is chronic underfunding of the police, courts, prisons and armed services inherited from Cameron-Osborne austerity. The deeper difficulty is a fundamentalist ideology of rights, which in prioritising legal fictions over social and political facts is itself a species of subjectivism. As MacIntyre wrote: "The truth is that there are no such things as rights, and belief in them is one with belief in witches and unicorns." Slowly, and then quickly, regimes that attempt to enforce these figments at the expense of public order forfeit legitimacy. The risk is not of civil war – British society is too fragmented for that. In France, civil strife may end with an authoritarian Sixth Republic. The risk for us is ungovernability.

The true danger of a Farage government is that his policies are undeliverable

Of all European countries, mainland Britain has been among the least afflicted by *Völkisch* nationalism. There have been outbreaks of xenophobia, such as the "yellow peril" backlash against Chinese immigrants that provoked the 1905 Aliens Act. But until the unprecedentedly large inflows of people in the Tony Blair to Boris Johnson era, successive waves of newcomers – such as Huguenot refugees from France in the 17th and 18th centuries, Irish families escaping the 1840s famine, Jews fleeing pogroms in eastern Europe in the 1880s, and the Windrush Generation of Commonwealth immigrants – were absorbed and most prospered. Enoch Powell lost his gamble on a politics of white identity. Demonising popular resistance to continued large-scale immigration could reanimate that ugly spectre.

Few now expect a Keir Starmer-led government to survive until 2029. An early general election precipitated by fiscal crisis is not impossible. Reform would most likely be the biggest beneficiary, even though Nigel Farage has now admitted his party's proclaimed programme to date was fiscally unsustainable. The true danger of a Farage government is that his policies are undeliverable. There is zero chance of stopping the small boats in weeks or of implementing deportations on the scale he has proposed.

If a Reform-led government collapses under the weight of its empty promises, trust in democratic politics will be damaged irreparably. More extreme forces like those that manifested themselves in the mass demonstration orchestrated by Tommy Robinson in London last month will grow in strength. Riven by ethnic and sectarian divisions and insurgent movements of the far left and right, Britain could fast become a failed state.

In these conditions, post-liberal fantasies of cultural restoration are a distraction. In any realistically imaginable future, this country will continue to encompass a variety of faiths and values. Not only in Europe but throughout the world, the age of large-scale migration is over. But there can be no going back to the monocultural nationhood of the past. The issue is not how to integrate minorities into an overarching culture, but how ways of life that will remain divergent can cohabit in some sort of *modus vivendi*.

The way forward is to constrain communities rather than to entrench them. Everyone should be subject to a rule of law enforced equally on all. Nobody should be denied freedom to exit their community or subjected to coercion by other communities. The tyranny of minorities in stifling free expression should be firmly resisted. Individual liberty must be reasserted against the invasive claims of collective identity. But can the political will be summoned to bring about such a radical change in direction?

We all know the quotation from Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, where the prince's nephew Tancredi says: "If we want things to stay as they are, things must change." A more pertinent quote – since things are not going to stay as they are, whatever anyone wants – may be an observation the prince himself makes: "The Sicilians never want to improve for the simple reason that they think themselves perfect. Their vanity is greater than their misery." The same is true of our progressive ruling classes. Their self-love is greater than their love of power. Blinded by their subjective certainties, they are preparing the ground for their own extinction.

The downfall of liberalism will not open a path to any Rajasthan of the imagination. Post-liberalism had another fatal flaw: most people in this country do not want to live in integral communities. The world they have lost is one in which they could rub along together, forming families and communities along the way. If what Hobbes called "commodious living" cannot be reinvented by a strong state, our future will be a war of all against all, fought out not between individuals but identity groups – a life that might not be solitary or necessarily short, but will be nasty, brutish and certainly poor. ●

Special Report

Welcome to Viagra Town

How did Little Island, a small former fishing village in rural Ireland, come to be responsible for maintaining the world's erections?

By Kate Demolder

You'll rarely hear someone say they're from Little Island, County Cork. The long road into town, lined with green metal fences and replete with two-lane roundabouts, passes through an industrial estate – home to a KFC, a car testing centre and the household retailer Harvey Norman, among others. In the evenings and on weekends, the area is deserted. Locals boast that, during these times, they don't see another soul while out walking. "It's so peaceful after 7pm," one woman pushing a pram smiles to me. "It's like the place has a double life."

Neighbouring Corkonians tend to look less favourably on Little Island. Some liken it to Shutter Island; others describe it as a liminal space, or a facade. "It's like stepping into the twilight zone," says a young man waiting for a train into Cork city. "It's more like *The Truman Show*, actually," his friend proffers. "The same people pretend they work in whatever shop or restaurant you visit." By evening, Little Island may be something of an unnerving, uncanny valley. But on weekdays, from about 8am, it swells with people, there to produce the town's most potent export.

Since 1998, Viagra – the brand name for sildenafil, a medication used to treat erectile dysfunction – has been manufactured in Little Island, first by the pharma giant Pfizer, then by Viatris. (The rumour the plant's fumes pass the benefits of the drug to locals via the tapwater has been laughed off by Pfizer as "an amusing myth".) Today, the town produces the majority of the world's supply.

That Ireland's history with sex is fraught simply adds to the Brontëan romance of this tale. "What few could have predicted was that Ireland would become centre stage in the international push to prolong erections," the historian Diarmaid Ferriter wrote in his 2024 book *The Revelation of Ireland*. In the process, it helped to pull a nation from recession, part of "an economic boom – also powerful and throbbing – that some came to believe would last as long as they wanted it to". But today, plans for the factory's closure are imminent – a final turn of the page on a chapter of Ireland's sexual history.

How did a tiny Irish rurality, a former fishing village-cum-industrial estate, come to be responsible for creating and sustaining the world's erections?

Ask anyone how Ireland became the epicentre for some of the world's sexiest drugs – another Irish coastal town, Westport, makes some 80 per cent of the world's Botox – and they'll likely mention three words: low corporation tax. In 1999 Ireland's then finance minister, Charlie McCreevy, dropped the levy from 32 per cent to 12.5 per cent, but the history of Ireland's allure to pharmaceuticals is far deeper. ▸

PAUL BLOW

◂ Some 40 years earlier, in the mid 1960s, Ireland's foreign investment agency, the IDA, engaged the US consultants Arthur D Little to assist in a major reappraisal of its programme to attract foreign industry. They recommended government investment in and initiatives focusing on Ireland's strengths, including the economic sectors that were growing at the time, of which pharmaceuticals was one.

In the following decades, as foreign investors were persuaded to consider Ireland for their expansions, a combination of factors contributed to Ireland's drug production scene: a highly educated workforce (free second-level education was introduced to Ireland in 1967), consistent investment in Stem subjects, government policy such as the First Programme for Economic Expansion, a strong regulatory environment, an English-speaking workforce and EU membership.

From the late 1990s on, in the attempt to recover from the desolation and low employment of the previous decade – a time marred by high interest rates and ballooning national debt – Ireland redoubled its efforts to court foreign business (including with McCreevy's intervention on corporation tax). In 2011, for example, two Irish subsidiaries of the US multinational Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Mature Products International and Abbott Laboratories Vascular Enterprises, paid no tax, according to the *Irish Times*, despite reporting profits of €1.8bn and €1.1bn respectively. Today, Ireland's pharmaceutical industry employs more than 50,000 people.

As to how Cork specifically became the home of Viagra, Pat McCarthy, author of *A History of the Irish Pharmaceutical Industry* and a former stalwart of the drugs manufacturing world, attributes it to one man. "The US company Pfizer in the 1960s was a world-dominant player in citric acid, a compound used primarily in flavouring and preservatives, but also in cleaning, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals," he told me. "When looking to expand their European presence, their research and development team originally fixated on Sandwich in Kent. However, a member of the board, John A Mulcahy, insisted upon Ireland."

Mulcahy was active during Ireland's War of Independence and later imprisoned for his involvement in the Irish Civil War, having found himself on the losing side. When released, he moved to New York and quickly rose through the ranks of Pfizer-Quigley Magnicide, becoming a major shareholder and chair of the board. When planning expansion, he asked the project team to consider his homeland of Ireland. After discovering that the port in Ringaskiddy, south-east Cork, was deep enough to import big tankers of molasses coming from South Africa – a key ingredient in citric acid – the decision was made.

Rumours that the Viagra plant's fumes gave locals the drug's benefits were dismissed

Pfizer opened a plant in Ringaskiddy in 1969, and "upon realising how successful it was, they quickly built two more", McCarthy said. Pharmaceutical companies around the world began to notice, and the state capitalised on this interest by offering more favourable opportunities. "The IDA wanted several plants side by side to share specialist knowledge, skilled people and ultimately create something from the wisdom of clustering."

Today, Viatris's Little Island factory sits just 16km from Pfizer's in Ringaskiddy. The area is still dominated by drug developers: Johnson & Johnson, Thermo Fisher Scientific (which in 2019 acquired GlaxoSmithKline), Sterling (formerly Novartis), Hovione, Recordati and BioMarin all have premises there.

Viagra helps men obtain and maintain an erection by improving blood flow to the penis when aroused. It was developed by Pfizer in the UK in the late 1980s and was initially intended to treat cardiovascular disease, until its useful side effect was discovered in clinical trials. Since 2020, Viagra has been produced by the American giant Viatris.

Its arrival on the US market in 1998 began a wave of cultural interest, inspiring songs such as "Little Blue Pill" by Mac McAnally in 1999, and earning the nicknames "vitamin V" or "blue diamond". But its introduction in Ireland that same year was even more seismic. "Viagra arrived in Ireland before sex ed came into schools," said Caroline West, a sex educator and sexual violence and harassment prevention and response manager at University College Cork. "That speaks volumes on where we were at the time." In 1998, the same year the *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner dubbed the drug "God's little helper", people in Ireland were still regularly refused contraception by their doctor, and sex education was so poor that it was made mandatory in both primary and secondary schools (an intervention not made in England until 2020).

"The 1990s were a time of huge change in Ireland when it came to sexuality," West continued. "Young girls were getting pregnant and having absolutely no idea how it happened, resulting in formal sexual education happening for the first time. Bear in mind, the last Magdalene laundry [institutions usually run by Catholic orders that confined unwed mothers to prison-like workhouses] had closed just two years earlier [than the introduction of mandatory sex education]".

In 1993 homosexual acts were decriminalised, and in 1995 the constitution was amended by referendum to remove the prohibition on divorce. But reminders of Ireland's doctrinaire Catholic past persisted, despite the nation having one of the youngest populations in Europe at that time. Married couples were often unable to buy condoms in certain pharmacies, even after the law changed to allow it.

Eventually, it was economics that shifted the culture. "The openness of Ireland's economy was clearly working in its favour," Ferriter writes in *The Revelation of Ireland*. The rise of the Celtic Tiger, a period of dramatic economic growth from 1995 to 2007, significantly altered attitudes toward sex by increasing female participation in the workforce, which led to greater support for female financial independence and a growing recognition of their roles beyond the home.

Today, Little Island is threatened not by Catholic prudery but by a phenomenon far more Protestant: tariffs. "Even a small percentage tariff on health products, including medicines and their components, would damage patient care and the pharmaceutical sector in the EU and the US," the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations has warned. "Tariffs threaten global medicine supply chains, hinder research and development and ultimately harm patients and communities around the world."

Viatris plans to close its manufacturing plant in Little Island in 2028, with operations shifted to its plants in Galway and Dublin. Could this mean the end of Cork's long contribution to lovemaking? "I hope not," a Fine Gael councillor for the area, Jack White, told me. "You know, some of the highly educated workforce in these factories are fourth-generation... You can see how much these companies mean to both local families and Ireland's GDP."

White paused, considering how to tactfully phrase his next point. "I hope a way can be found for us to continue to do what we do best here... even in the face of tariffs. I hope the presence of these companies here can justify a continued investment into, I suppose, lovemaking. Because it's clear we've been quite good at that so far." ●

ANOOSH CHAKELIAN

Bursting the Bubble

Rising racist attacks on public transport are a symptom of our hostile politics

From attacks on synagogues and mosques to graffiti across shopfronts and garden walls, racism appears to be overt in the UK today. Never before when out reporting, as I was in the ex-mining town of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire a few weeks ago, have I heard an ordinary member of the public – a mum rocking her baby outside a shopping centre – tell me, unprompted: "I am racist." Gone is the sheepish "I'm not racist, but..." prelude to mutterings against immigrants. The caveats have dropped as masks have slipped.

In a year of protests against asylum hotels, politicians have been piling in with increasingly hostile language about immigration, from Keir Starmer labelling Britain an "island of strangers" to Nigel Farage likening the arrival of asylum seekers to an "invasion". The language of public figures has consequences: I remember Muslim women in 2019 telling me they had been called "bank robbers" and "letter boxes" in the street after Boris Johnson used those terms about women who wear the burka in a *Telegraph* column.

Since the 2010s era of Islamophobia passing Sayeeda Warsi's "dinner-table test" of socially acceptable behaviour, racism has cleared the dining table, put its boots on and marched out the front door. You could call it the "bus-stop test" or "train carriage test" now. For nowhere is the rise of everyday racism more visible than on public transport.

Racially and religiously aggravated crimes have risen 67 per cent on transport networks since 2022, according to British Transport Police stats I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. Police recorded 1,578 crimes from 1 January-21 September 2022, and 2,638 in the same period this year up until 21 September (the latest date for which stats are available). There was a 46.6 per cent rise between 2022 and 2024, and a 10 per cent rise from last year to the same period this year of 1 January-1 September.

The details of these crimes are shocking: they include battery, sexual assault of girls and boys, theft, threatening with a blade, death threats, indecent exposure, grievous bodily harm, attacks on police and beating up emergency workers. And this is just a snapshot. The British Transport Police only covers the railways and some tram networks. I requested data from every police force in the UK on racist, religion-based and anti-migrant attacks, but most refused to supply it on the grounds that it would have been too expensive to collate.

When asked what could be behind this dramatic rise in recent years, the British Transport Police didn't respond directly to my question. A spokesperson told me, "Everybody deserves to feel safe when they travel on the rail network... abuse, intimidation, and violence – especially that which is motivated by hate – will never be tolerated, and we have acted swiftly and decisively when we receive reports of hate crimes on the network."

Racially aggravated crimes have risen 67 per cent on transport networks since 2022

Chandra, a 23-year-old engineering student who also works at McDonald's, was attacked on a bus in Newcastle city centre earlier this year. At 7.30pm, when travelling home from playing a match at his cricket club, he took a backwards-facing seat at the back of the top deck of the number 37. A white man in his mid-twenties kept throwing sweet wrappers at the back of his head. When he turned around to ask him to stop, the man repeatedly called him a "fucking Indian" and squared up to him, asking for a fight. Chandra stayed calm and descended the stairs at his stop – on his way down, the man punched him on the top of his head. He had swelling there for days. The bus driver said he couldn't help, and Chandra had no luck following up with the police or bus company either, despite CCTV capturing it all. No one on the bus defended him.

"I've noticed a lot of racist posts and casual racist jokes on Instagram – on all social media – lately," Chandra told me when we spoke over the phone. "The other day when I was on a McDonald's shift, these ten-year-old kids were making stereotypical jokes about me – imitating Indian music and doing a fake accent. I was shocked. I haven't had that before; people here in Newcastle are generally tolerant and friendly."

While he doesn't feel unsafe, he told me that next time he would defend himself more robustly against racist remarks rather than maintaining a dignified silence. "I saw that no one else [was] going to say or do anything, not even the police."

Others have also noticed a shift towards open racism. Sophia Choudry, a businesswoman whose TikTok video went viral last month when she was repeatedly called a "P**i" on the Elizabeth Line, told the *Metro* newspaper: "I have not heard that word in 25 years."

Shaky smartphone videos of racist abuse on trains and buses fly through our social media feeds every day. Outrage fuels the spread; if you spend too long on these platforms, you could begin to believe every journey is marked by such hate. It's not, and often these same clips show bystanders stepping in to help. But the police stats I've seen reveal a grim trend that cannot be dismissed as a simple uptick in reporting. More than 40 years ago, Stuart Hall contrasted "overt" with "inferential" racism in the British media in his 1981 essay "The Whites of Their Eyes". Today it looks as if the inferences from our political class are unleashing the overt in the world around us. ●

MARTA SIGNORI

The government's **Taxi Tax** will **break Labour's manifesto promise**

It is a new tax on working people

STOP THE TAXI TAX

The Taxi Tax would **increase fares sharply**, pricing out key workers and vulnerable people who rely on minicabs for safe, affordable transport

The Chancellor should not balance the books on the backs of the most vulnerable

Scan to learn more

www.stopthetaxitax.co.uk

THE NEW SOCIETY

JENS GOERLICH / GALLERY STOCK

Books How the Norwegian writer Jon Fosse led a literary revolution from the shadows

Plus The Basil Fawlty theory of Britain | Grand Theft Louvre

Jon Fosse's acts of self-sabotage

The Nobel-winning writer is no autofictional laureate. Instead he leads a movement that spurns simple subjective narratives

By Amit Chaudhuri

Jon Fosse, a novelist and a playwright and one of Norway's best-known living writers, was born into a family of Quakers and Pietists in 1959. This religious formation is important for Fosse. At the age of seven, he had an accident that resulted in a near-death experience whose qualities – luminosity and a sense of peace – are in part responsible, Fosse has said, for his being a writer. But surely his sense of what those qualities were arises, retrospectively, from the *kind* of writer he is. His 2023 Nobel Prize citation borrowed from this vocabulary – to do with what hovers on the edge of life – and called him a writer of the "unsayable". His new novel, *Vaim*, is about absurd, life-changing volte-faces as well as life's calm sameness. In it, one of the characters, Frank, after having been drawn casually into a complete realignment of his existence, feels as his boat moves forward that "a kind of peace comes over everything". The phrase again raises the question: what kind of writer is Fosse?

Although he's long been eminent in Norway, few Anglophone readers would have heard of Fosse before he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2023. By this time, his work – in particular, *Septology*, a seven-part novel that appeared in one volume when it was translated into English – had barely begun to reach the English-language world through Fitzcarraldo Editions in translations by Damion Searls. *Septology* was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize, which these days has become one of the routes to the Nobel, at least for European writers.

It's not the Nobel that's of interest here, but a kind of writing that, from the romanticism of the 19th century onwards, constituted a subterranean stream in cultures dominated by the Enlightenment, and which made the literary such an inexplicable but powerful category in the modern world. One characteristic of this stream is an obsession with what another Nobel laureate, the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, called the *anavashyak*, or the "unnecessary" or "superfluous". It's a way of thinking that is deliberately indifferent to the thematic. When the filmmaker Satyajit Ray said that some of the worst films have been made on the noblest of themes, he was speaking from the heart of this tradition. The stream seems to have dried up in the time of globalisation, not least because of the monetisation of the thematic, the "relevant" and the representational by publishing houses and the role these categories have played in the new morality of today's sociologically driven humanities. But a counter-movement has been at work, in which Fitzcarraldo has played a significant role, restating literature's oddity while downplaying what's so important about it to the mainstream – its moral temper and cheerleading capacities.

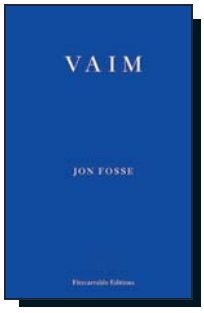
This counter-movement aims to interrogate genre, because genre no longer suggests the history and outline of a form: it's a marketing tool. Fitzcarraldo publishes two kinds of book – non-fiction in white, fiction in blue – and then allows these demarcations to waver, as the white books sometimes feel fictional, the blue ones essayistic. This decision appears to signal that genre is a redundant parameter. The Rothko-like abstraction of the Fitzcarraldo covers and their Warhol-type repetition recall the formalistic (rather than thematic or genre-driven) nature of writing itself.

At the core of the counter-movement is the essay, often referred to as the "personal" essay, and a kind of novel that uses autobiography self-reflexively, known by the slightly ugly label of "autofiction". This term can refer to any work that doesn't seem conventionally realist or doesn't adhere to the kind of "global" fiction we've become used to since the 1980s. Any misfit novel runs the risk of being called autofiction. The term has been applied for no good reason to Fosse's work, and he's been at pains to distance himself from it.

The market has been quick to naturalise this literary counter-movement (comprising novels, memoiristic non-fiction and the non-academic critical essay), to semi-recognise its peculiarity and christen it with complacent names that rob it of its impact: "genre-defying" or "genre-bending'". According to publishers' blurbs, genre-defying works are suddenly in abundance. This neither confirms nor denies a renaissance in this kind of writing – writing that refuses to serve as a transparent window into the world or our current preoccupations.

The pervasive misconception regarding this counter-movement is that it involves the rise of confessional writing, which speaks to our time for its subjective disclosures, for bearing witness to trauma. The "personal" in personal essay and the "auto" in autofiction signal to us the way these forms supposedly function. In Annie Ernaux's work, in which personal essay and autofiction converge, ▸

Vaim
Jon Fosse
trs Damion Searls
Fitzcarraldo Editions, 120pp, £12.99



THOMAS EKSTRÖM/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

With drawn: Jon Fosse, soon after his 2023 Nobel Prize win, holding a portrait of himself by *New Statesman* illustrator Kristian Hammerstad

◂ disclosure is undertaken (so goes this interpretation) without breast-beating, in the precise language of art. The 2022 Nobel citation for Ernaux (who is also published by Fitzcarraldo) rehearses the notion of confession mediated by a distancing artfulness: "for the courage and clinical acuity with which she uncovers the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory". "Courage" means we must congratulate the writer for her difficult candour. "Clinical acuity" gestures to the Enlightenment subject's dispassionate rationality: it's what makes disclosure possible and legible to the reader.

The breakthroughs of misfit writing arise not from a restatement of subjectivity, but the opposite: a questioning of the authority of the subjective voice, and a consequent freeing up of language, form and worldly objects. When Ernaux begins her Nobel Prize lecture by posing the question "Is it really me this is happening to?" she seems to be saying what any beauty pageant winner might in tearful ecstasy. But she is actually drawing attention to the looseness of ownership that the misfit writer has over the self or narrative, even if the work is autobiographical. "Is it really me this is happening to?" is what her memoirs and fictions ask. The "I" is an accident – it's there to bear witness to and also to wonder at existence, but it is fragile and replaceable.

You have a sense from Ernaux's writing of the mysterious fact that the person who experiences pain and delight in the world with such immediacy could just as well have been any other "I". It's this emptying out of the subject that leads to what she calls, in the same speech, "a neutral, objective kind of writing, 'flat' in the sense that it contained neither metaphors nor signs of emotion". Not confession, then: the counter-tradition marks a late return to the practice of impersonality – not in the workaday or Enlightenment sense of the emotionless or scientifically "objective" (Ernaux uses this word with deliberate irony) but of being unbounded by a fixed perspective. Subjectivity becomes a child's illusion, to be used in play but not invested in: "It was necessary for me to continue to say 'I'."

Fosse, in his various observations about writing, is keen not so much to escape the label of autofiction as the way the word privileges confession. He seems to see Ernaux in these terms. His caveat against subjectivity, in his Nobel lecture – "In any case, I have certainly never written to express myself, as they say. Rather it was to get away from myself" – is not that far away from Ernaux's ambivalence about the self's authority. Fosse's words are almost a contemporary version of TS Eliot's reminder to his readers: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." Eliot is arguing for what he calls "*significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet". This genealogy is where autofiction, the personal essay and the misfit writing of the last two decades should be placed.

Fosse is keen not so much to escape the label of autofiction as the way the word privileges confession

The practice of impersonality, which Eliot theorised in 1919, was perhaps dependent on Europe's encounter, from the 18th century onwards, with non-representational traditions from Asia and Africa: it's from here that, to a great extent, what's strange and compelling about modernism gets its resources. Eliot's understanding of the self was deeply formed by his readings of Buddhist and Upanishadic texts.

Fosse mentions Beckett, Kafka, Woolf and the Bible among the works and authors that were formative for him. But the writers he cites all emerged in the aftermath of, and were the progeny of, this non-representational turn. The Bible by itself could never have caused the turn to occur. The "unsayable" in Fosse's work, his novels' abandoning of "message" (his word), is part of a longer subterranean intercultural itinerary than any idea of "Europe" can contain. To see autofiction or the contemporary essay as a purely European efflorescence misses its genealogy. To the Man Booker International Prize we owe, through its recognition of the likes of Ernaux and Fosse, our awareness of the emergence of a counter-tradition. But it's an emergence that, for us, is inadvertently European. The new European novel comes to stand for the "genre-defying"; the Indian winners of the Man Booker International Prize, say, continue to stand for India.

Vaim is a 116-page novel in three sections. Brevity is one measure any counter-tradition might adopt to resist the realist or global novel's large representational claims. Some of Ernaux's books, for instance, seem to be between 5,000 and 30,000 words. This, too, has a genealogy in both publishing and fiction-writing. It's only in the Anglophone world that the novel needs to exemplify the "fully formed". For more than 100 years now, relatively tiny works have been published in Bengali, Japanese, French, Spanish, German and more as full-length books. It's always a delight to hold such a seemingly slight volume in one's hands, and you have to be grateful that Fitzcarraldo gives us the opportunity to experience this deceptive slightness.

Each section is narrated by three characters whose lives have been altered, or at least touched, by Eline, *Vaim*'s inexplicable, self-willed heroine. The first section is Jatgeir's, Eline's second husband. Jatgeir, a recluse, arrives in a big city, Bjørgvin, on his boat to buy a spool of black thread and needle, and is ripped off by the shopkeeper: he has to pay her 250 Norwegian kroners. He reflects on his stupidity: he should have bought the thread and needle from the Vaim General Store. He decides to proceed on his boat to the small town of Sund. The boat, as it happens, is named *Eline*, after a woman he was in love with when he was a young man. Eline had married Frank years ago and moved from Vaim to the town. Reaching Sund and succumbing to his notions of small-town generosity, Jatgeir buys another spool of thread and a needle and is overcharged. At night, lying in his boat, recovering from his day-long

humiliations, he hears his name being uttered by a woman. It's Eline. She has a suitcase with her – she's about to leave Frank. Without quite knowing how, Jatgeir finds himself returning to Vaim with Eline, with whom he'll spend the rest of his life.

The second section is Elias's, Jatgeir's one friend in Vaim, though the two have drifted apart. Through Elias, we glimpse Jatgeir's life from a distance – the changes that came over it after Eline arrived; the new, alienating tidiness; the piles of the daily, the *Northern Herald*, removed from the "middle of the floor". We also learn here of Jatgeir's passing. The third section consists of Frank's tale of how he met Eline in a restaurant named The Fowl: they didn't know each other, but she was certain they had to be married, which is what happened. Frank is the name that Eline called him by from the moment they met, for reasons unknown (his real name is Olaf). By now, Jatgeir, Elias and, most recently, Eline are dead: Frank, with whom she was later reunited (again, on her initiative), must arrange for her to be buried next to Elias, who lies next to Jatgeir.

"Section" means sentence: strictly speaking, the novel is made up of three very long sentences, with occasional line breaks for dialogue. Each sentence constitutes a voice as well as disparate reflections merely held together by commas, and punctuated by obligatory yeses. Jatgeir's, Elias's and Frank's voices sound the same. Yet since the purpose of the sentences is not to convey voice, as in a dramatic monologue, but contain shifts in thought, mood and occurrence, the matter of sameness becomes irrelevant. Instead, we're entangled in knots of syntax and time, in the utterly riveting banalities that preoccupy people. This is in keeping with Fosse's interest in the self-sufficiency of "writing" (which he says is "its own world") over speech, whose principal function – for the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida as it is for Fosse – is to communicate: that is, to enable the subject to express themselves. Fosse's sentences are part of a larger countervailing project today of making autobiography, personal reminiscence, voice and character inextricable from the aim of undoing the illusion of subjectivity.

The novel's three movements, beautifully composed, are pattern-like rather than progressive in their exploration of the intersections between lives: Fosse might say "musical". Yet their careful measure doesn't diminish our sense of a shape determined by accidentality. Jatgeir and Frank must think, in Ernaux's words, "Is it really me this is happening to?". The characters' tenuous relationship to their "me" is pointed to by the provisionality of their names: Jatgeir was really Geir; Frank was Olaf; and Eline wished for her actual name, Josefine, to be engraved on her headstone. Only Elias is reliably himself; Elias, and Vaim (a location which people escape from and return to, and which we know next to nothing about), and the Vaim General Store. This, like the tobacco shop of Fernando Pessoa's well-known poem, comprises the novel's subtle, ongoing referencing of the quotidian – an everyday that's a counterpoint to the "unsayable". ●

The NS Poem

Beaded Chestnut
Simon Armitage

We blundered
onto a country lane
by a NO TRESPASSING sign,

bare legs buttoned
with nettle stings
and raked by thorns,

the green shield bug
a prefect badge
on your white blouse,

the moon
an ironic smile
in the afternoon sky.

Somewhere behind us:
a flattened nest
in a cereal crop

where a pair of otters
had topped and tailed.
Had not.

The summer of couldn't-care-less,
didn't know our oats
from our barley,

barley from wheat,
wheat from corn.
Didn't know we were born.

This poem appears in Simon Armitage's latest book of poems, "New Cemetery", published by Faber & Faber

Sixteen months a hostage

This first-hand account by an Israeli taken by Hamas on 7 October is a harrowing tale of hope and despair

By Rachel Cunliffe

Eli Sharabi attends a Holocaust memorial event at Auschwitz, 24 April 2025

BEATA ZAWRZEL/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

As he is being dragged out of his house by Hamas terrorists with Kalashnikovs on the morning of Saturday 7 October 2023, 51-year-old Eli Sharabi tells his wife, "Lianne, don't freak out." She will be safe, he is sure. So will their daughters, Noiya and Yahel, who had turned 16 and 13 the week before. Terrorists would not kidnap women and children. And besides, they have British passports. It is this thought that enables Sharabi to stay calm as he is forced, still wearing his pyjamas, into a vehicle stolen from Kibbutz Be'eri, where he has lived for 35 years, and driven into the Gaza Strip. "I'm being kidnapped," he tells himself. "I understand this is a catastrophe. I understand what this means. I don't mind that they're beating me. I don't even feel it. Because in these moments, as I'm being led past the kibbutz fence, under the blazing sun, engulfed by the smell of smouldering ruins, a headband strapped over my eyes, dragged by terrorists gripping both my hands, totally aware that I am being abducted into Gaza but knowing at least that Lianne and the girls were left behind, I focus and concentrate on one mission: surviving to return home."

Sharabi was one of 251 people abducted by Hamas that day. He spent 491 days as a captive, most of that time buried in the network of cramped, fetid tunnels underneath Gaza. He was released on 8 February 2025, broken and emaciated, weighing just 44kg. Less than four months later, *Hostage* was published in Israel, a first-hand account of his ordeal.

"It was important to me that the story come out as quickly as possible, so that the world will understand what life is like inside captivity," Sharabi told the *Times of Israel* when the book was first published in Hebrew. "Once they do, they won't be able to remain indifferent."

What is it, exactly, that Sharabi wants the world to understand? To call his book harrowing is an understatement; any illusions readers might have about the treatment of hostages by Hamas, thanks to the stage-managed handovers where soon-to-be released abductees were forced to recite scripts written for them by their captors, should be quickly dispelled. At first, he is held in a family house in Gaza along with a terrified Thai captive who speaks no Hebrew, English or Arabic. Their hands and feet are bound; later, they are shackled instead. Then, 50 days in, the real hell begins as Sharabi is taken down a ladder under a mosque, to "a bottomless underworld with no light, no air, and no return", along with six other Israeli men and their Hamas captors. After a few days, three of them are told they are being released as part of a temporary ceasefire and exchange deal. It is months before Sharabi learns that the men he bid farewell to and promised to see again in Israel were in fact murdered underground.

Over the next year, Sharabi sees daylight only three times, when moved between tunnels. The hostages are fed little, then less, then barely enough to survive – perhaps one piece of pitta a day. They are taunted, told they've been forgotten by their government, by their families. They are chained throughout, humiliated, barely allowed to wash, forced to beg to use the toilet, often beaten. At one point, Sharabi's ribs are broken. They receive no medical treatment for their injuries and

worsening malnutrition, beyond the occasional paracetamol or eye drops. The Red Cross or other international aid workers aren't able to come.

Nor do they receive any news about the outside world – the war, the hostage negotiations, what has happened to their families. *Hostage* is dedicated to the memory of Yossi, Sharabi's brother, who was taken by Hamas kidnappers from the same kibbutz and who died in a collapsed building after 100 days, possibly as a result of an IDF air strike. It is also dedicated to Lianne, Noiya and Yahel, who he was sure would be safe. Their photos are on the first page; right from the start, we know their fate. The heartbreaking irony is that until the very end, Sharabi himself does not.

From his initial capture, throughout his 16 months in captivity, it is the thought of returning to his wife and teenage daughters that stands between him and insanity. "He who has a *why* can bear any *how*," he repeats to himself, again and again. We hope with him, feeling his faith sputter as he learns that women and children were taken hostage too, that a pregnant woman gave birth in captivity, that there is no guarantee Lianne, Noiya and Yahel are alive. Still, he will not give in to despair.

In "rehearsals" in the days leading up to his release, Hamas officials coach Sharabi to say in interviews how much he is looking forward to seeing his wife and children. He learns they are dead, killed in the Kibbutz Be'eri massacre after he was dragged away, only once he is on Israeli soil and asks a social worker where they are. "It's all clear in that moment, right there, standing in front of her. I understand everything. I understand it in my bones. I understand it from head to toe. I understand it, and I feel the pain pulsating through my broken body, a pain without a name."

Amid the unrelenting bleakness, there are flickers of the enduring spark of human spirit. Sharabi and his fellow hostages come to know one another like family. As the oldest in the group, he becomes a surrogate father to the others, including Alon Ohel – a pianist, who was 22 when he was abducted from the Nova festival, and dreams of studying music. They recount their lives, their ambitions, the people waiting for them on the outside. They pray, they mark Shabbat underground – a group of secular Jews taking comfort in the hymns and rituals that have strengthened their ancestors through the ages. They commit to working together, to sharing the scant food they are given, to refusing to give up their humanity or their hope.

They give nicknames to the Hamas guards with whom they share their subterranean existence. "The Triangle". "Nightingale". "The Mask". The guards have wives and families, too – they grieve for their loved ones as the war takes its unimaginable toll, as the Gaza death count rises. For the most part, the brutality is such that chances for empathy are limited. But sometimes Sharabi wonders what has driven the men keeping him chained in this hellish dungeon to this barbarity, if perhaps he could even have been friends with one of them in another life. "Under his terrorist exterior, there is still a calm and mild-mannered human being. In our interactions, I begin to understand the depth of his ignorance and how badly he has been brainwashed. They're absolutely certain that Israelis only want to kill them and dream of doing evil."

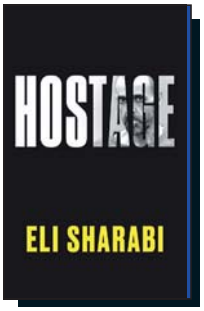
And every day, the Israeli hostages find things to be thankful for: a drink of tea, a piece of fruit, a particularly cruel guard being absent that day. "Hope is never something that comes easily," Sharabi writes. "It's always something you've got to fight for, to work on."

The Hebrew version of *Hostage* was the fastest-selling book in Israeli history. Yet when the book came to be published in English in the UK, mainstream publishers passed up the opportunity. By this time, the events of 7 October that had sparked such horror had faded in the public consciousness. The focus had moved on: to Israel's offensive in Gaza, to the famine, to more than 67,000 dead Palestinians and the increasingly fraught warnings of genocide. The hostages, photos of whom had been plastered on posters begging "Bring Them Home" across the world, seemed to have become an afterthought – no longer a priority for either the global community, aghast at the situation in Gaza, or for the Israeli government, whose military aims had expanded far beyond retrieving its citizens.

It was the independent publisher Swift that chose to take on the book. Neil Blair, Sharabi's literary agent, said he hopes the commercial and critical success of *Hostage* "gives mainstream UK publishers pause for thought". It was published in the UK on 9 October 2025. Then on 13 October – eight months after Sharabi was freed – a ceasefire deal orchestrated by Donald Trump saw the release of the 20 remaining living hostages.

I read Sharabi's book that day in a single agonising sitting, footage of the celebrations in Israel and Gaza playing in the background. I listened on the radio to Gill and Pete Brisley from Bristol – the parents of Lianne, Sharabi's wife, whose British passport was not enough to save her or her daughters from being murdered by terrorists. I saw the photo of Alon Ohel, the young musician held in the tunnel with Sharabi, who was among the 20 finally released from his nightmare after more than two years in captivity. I read that he played the piano in his hospital room in Tel Aviv.

Since his release, Sharabi has been a relentless campaigner – for the return of Alon and the rest of the hostages, and for the bodies of those like his brother, Yossi, who were killed. Within two months of emerging blinking from the tunnels, he had met Donald Trump in the White House and Keir Starmer in Downing Street, and addressed the United Nations Security Council. His resilience is almost as hard to comprehend as the ordeal he suffered; his mantra that "he who has a *why* can bear any *how*" continuing to drive him on. This book is vital for anyone wishing to understand the horror of the past two years from a perspective that has too often been overlooked. But there is a more general message here too, about survival, perseverance and the power of human endurance in the face of unimaginable trauma. Now that the final hostages have been released – now that Alon can play the piano once more – I hope that Eli Sharabi can find some semblance of peace. ●



Hostage
Eli Sharabi
Swift, 208pp, £18.99

The hostages find things to be thankful for: a drink of tea, a piece of fruit, a particularly cruel guard being absent that day

Don’t mention the Seventies

When Basil Fawlty appeared on our screens 50 years ago, he embodied a Britain that was already fading rapidly

By Nicholas Harris

It’s the late 1970s. Eleven million people are watching as Basil Fawlty collapses to the floor. We’re on the first-floor landing of the Torquay “Towers” bearing his name. The two metres of his stick-insect frame have slowly folded into an arched human ball. Then, arms clenched behind his head, he starts to hop, like a giant clothed toad. Four times he jumps, as two of his hotel guests watch on, before he rolls backwards in final mortification and the screen fades to black.

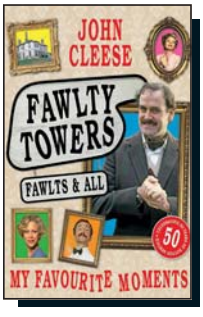
Of course, it’s taken a complex series of events to bring him down to this. Basil hasn’t only compared one of his guests to a monkey, told another how frequently he and his wife have sex and been discovered hiding inside a wardrobe. He’s also peeped (with the help of a ladder) through two of his guests’ windows, been locked out of his own room by his wife, and left a sooty handprint on an Australian girl’s breast. But it’s all been worth it because this is the delicious pay-off, the physical humiliation of our lead. That’s the purpose of the episode, and of any episode of *Fawlty Towers*: to see a very tall man reduced to the very small man inside.

Half a century since this collective ceremony began, we’ve never lost our taste for it. So much so that John Cleese, the actor and writer behind Fawlty’s degradation, has published *Fawlty Towers: Fawlts & All – My Favourite Moments*. Cleese is no stranger to commercial opportunism: his two previous stand-up tours were titled “The Alimony Tour” and “How to Finance Your Divorce”, and in 2023 he fronted a GB News show called *The Dinosaur Hour*. You can almost sense the regret that, cleaving roughly to the anniversary of the first series of *Fawlty Towers* airing in 1975, he couldn’t have launched this glossy almanac closer to Fathers’ Day or Christmas.

Nonetheless, in these several thousand words, which bear no strong trace of having been dictated, Cleese emerges as a committed and reflective practitioner-critic. There’s self-reproach (“As I performed it, he is a real asshole”), theoretical digression (“The philosopher Henri Bergson said that any laughter requires ‘a momentary anaesthesia of the heart’...”) and only the occasional swerve on to the rocky terrain of Cleese’s contemporary politics (“Unless you are an extreme woke believer...”). But why not: this is merely the latest and far from the most tawdry ornament in a Fawlty continuity empire that comprises everything from collected scripts and long-players to *Fawlty Towers* teapots. The scale of industry only serves to stress the power and longevity of Cleese’s invention.

Modern British comedy should thank *Fawlty Towers* the way poets thank spring: that’s where it all begins. Just look at its contemporaries: *Till Death Do Us Part*, *George and Mildred*, *Are You Being Served?* and something called *It Ain’t Half Hot Mum* – all moulder in the Britbox archive and the care-home VHS cupboard. And as older allusions stale in the thesaurus – who are Mr Pooter and Lord Fauntleroy anyway? – Basil Fawlty remains terrifically, terrifyingly alive.

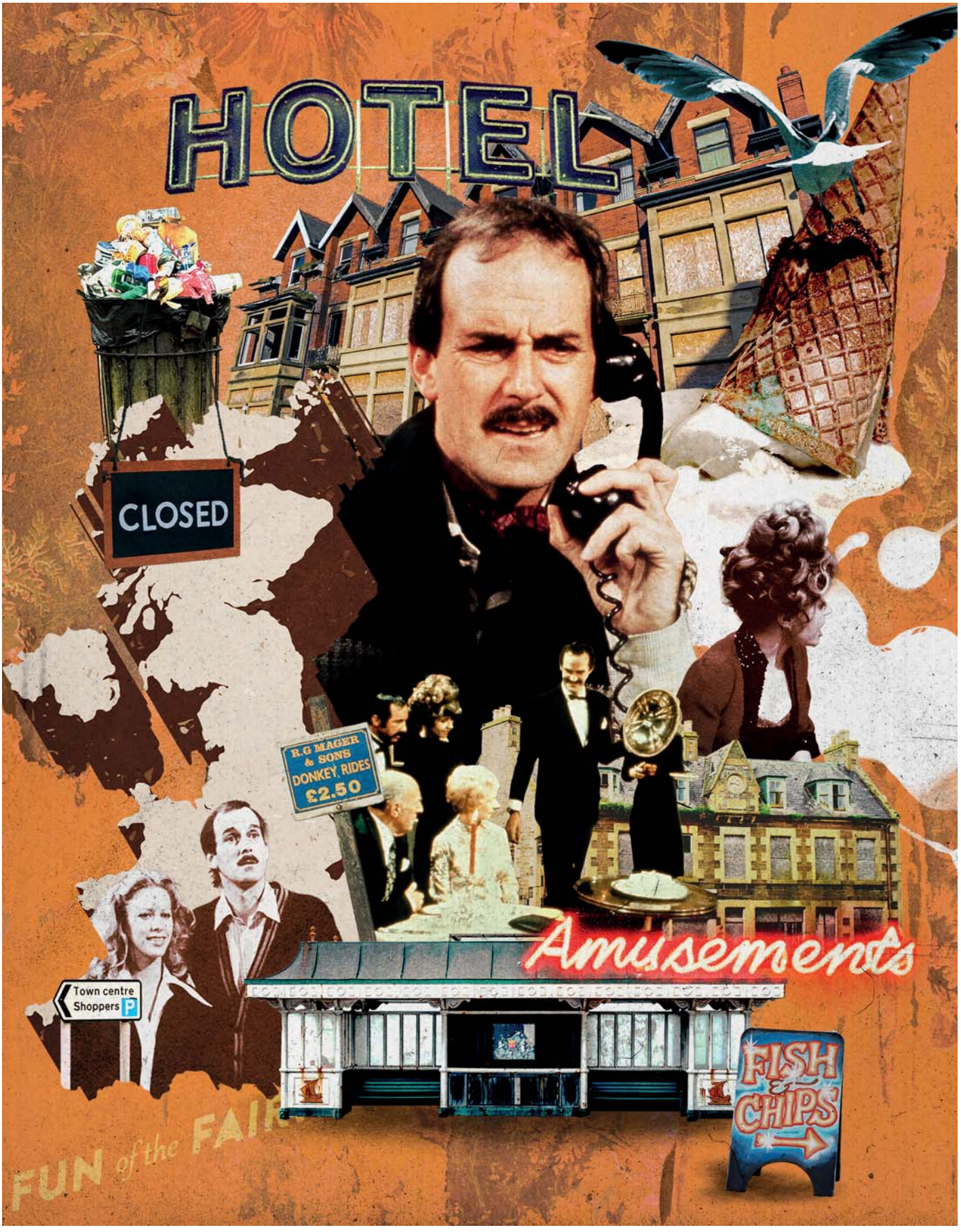
Fawlty Towers: Fawlts & All – My Favourite Moments
John Cleese
Headline, 224pp, £25



“Everyone knows how a hotel is supposed to work,” Cleese has always said of the show’s setting, and the conceit of a *Fawlty Towers* episode is always the same: the hotel simply doesn’t work. But this is to underestimate the labour of the farce, what Clive James – channelling Blake, and, via Blake, God Himself – called the “fearful symmetry” of the scriptwriting. Basil makes a mistake; then the narrative cat’s cradle begins to tighten, every attempt he makes to conceal the mistake bringing closer the bind of the final knot: the imminent collapse of a hotel wall, the goose-step, the thrashing of an Austin 1100.

Plot is the beat that *Fawlty Towers* stomps to, played at a remorseless *accelerando*, but deeper energies are at play. As Cleese writes in *Fawlts and All*, in a hotel there’s “a backstage, and a front stage”, with complex rules of engagement governing both. The oldest form of English comedy involves the violation of manners, while the vitality of the genre depends on the long persistence of class hierarchies. Basil – a reactionary and a lickspittle and a snob – is hyper-conscious of these rules and the class system they protect (“Have you seen the people in room six? They’ve never even *sat on chairs before*”), and therefore hyper-fearful of breaching them. He will always follow the instructions of the farce if he thinks they will save him face, going to the most extraordinary lengths to preserve the dignity of his hotel from, among other threats, pre-marital sex, the scorn of Torquay high society, and the potential incursion of “riff-raff”.

Basil cannot comprehend the nature and currency of his profession. He always introduces himself as the “owner” rather than the “manager”, and the details of his pretensions are obsessive. At various points in the series, Basil wears the ties of the Old Wykehamists and of Balliol College, Oxford, raising the hilarious prospect of his having journeyed from Devon to Ede & Ravenscroft to buy a job-lot. But “service” had another meaning in the earlier part of ▸



ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

◂ Basil's century. The truth is that for the duration of his guest's stay, a good hotelier is a domestic lackey: valet, butler, footman, maid. It's a demand that he, running his hotel on a principle of *caveat emptor*, cannot accept. As he rages to his assembled guests in an outburst of petit-bourgeois effrontery, lunging for a deeply conservative historiography of the Second World War in the process:

> You ponce in here expecting to be waited on hand and foot – well, I'm trying to run a hotel here. Have you any idea of how much there is to do? Do you ever think of that? Of course not! You're too busy sticking your noses into every corner, poking about for things to complain about, aren't you? Well, let me tell you something, this is exactly how Nazi Germany started: a lot of layabouts with nothing better to do than to cause trouble!

Basil then storms out of the hotel, and there's a risk, you feel, that he might march right off the end of Torquay's Princess Pier and sink raging into the sea. Of course, he comes back, and his pretensions of escape or ascent – a British empire coin collection, a tape recorder blasting Brahms – are phony. Basil is no intellectual. In the privacy of his bedroom, we see him reading Peter Benchley's *Jaws*.

The film version had only just come out at the time, but the joke is still funny in 2025. And for its age, the hiccups of anachronism in *Fawlty Towers* are remarkably rare. In a notorious moment in "The Germans" episode – probably better known now than the episode's Nazi jokes – the dippy veteran Major Gowen lapses into racial slurs. Foul language has its shock effects, but in this case the shock of offence is stronger than the gag. But the pace in a *Fawlty Towers* episode is so unrelenting that before you notice the kink, the rope has flown through your fingers. For its original viewers, the joke about the builder called Mr O'Reilly began with the name O'Reilly, and therefore with his nationality (Irish), his fee (cheap) and his standards (low). Now the joke simply begins when O'Reilly's men accidentally seal off the dining room door. Later, but by no means never.

But *Fawlty Towers* offers more than mere throwbacks; there are authentic shivers of the 1970s, now buried deep in the British nervous system. Ted Heath once admitted to "a hidden wish, a frustrated desire to run a hotel", and *Fawlty Towers* is run rather like Heath's Britain. The lead headlines in the newspapers read by the characters are, on each occasion: "More strikes, dustmen, Post Office", "Another car strike", "Another car strike" and, in the final episode, read by a guest, "Strike, strike, strike – why do we bother, Fawlty?" It's proof enough that the mediocrity and scrimshanking and decay of the time was no myth. The Longbridge British Leyland plant, which built Basil's busted Austin, had become the Verdun of a vicious national industrial dispute. The prime minister, whom Basil curses as "*bloody Wilson*", needed four brandies to get him through PMQs. At times, pages in Basil's newspaper would have appeared blank, the columns scrubbed by a print union who regarded its content as politically hostile. *Fawlty Towers* permits Basil one full digression on economics:

> Another car strike. Marvellous, isn't it? The taxpayers pay them millions each year so they can go on strike. It's called socialism. If they don't like making cars, why don't they get themselves another bloody job – designing cathedrals or composing violin concertos. That's it! The British Leyland Concerto – in four movements, all of them slow, with a four-hour teabreak in between.

Fawlty raised the standards of masculine self-abasement to an art form, at the moment that Britain became truly alive to its diminishment

The final broadcast of *Fawlty Towers* was delayed by seven months due to industrial action at the BBC. And if the 1970s was when British national decline became real, no one felt it worse than Basil Fawlty. But, thanks to him, it's when we also found a cure, or at least a palliative. Not Margaret Thatcher – though she does have a walk-on in Fawlty Towers in a hotel guest's quip about a very short book called *The Wit of Margaret Thatcher* (this receives a mirthless response from Basil, three months out from his – surely – voting for her in the 1979 election). No: *Fawlty Towers* was the first sublimation of a once imperial power's contraction into comedy.

The decade that broke British self-confidence was also the decade we chose to laugh rather than cry about the fact. Until the late 1960s, like a balding man combing forward his remaining locks, Britain could still imagine herself vestigially imperial. The sterling area was still intact and Qatar and Brunei still flew the Queen's colours. Indeed, the British flag had, thanks to bands like the Who, become in its dotage the unlikely symbol of a global youth pop phenomenon. Americans were still finding out new things about England, encountering Liverpudlian accents for presumably the very first time. But something in the water changed as Wilsonism flowed into Heathism. These events were not simultaneous – I don't think there was any snickering as the flag was lowered at Aden. And there had obviously been thwarted patriarchs before Fawlty. But now only Nigel Farage dares reference Alf Garnett, the proud bigot from *Till Death Do Us Part*, and even then only to describe rogue Reform activists. Fawlty raised the standards of masculine self-abasement to an art form, at exactly the moment that Britain became truly alive to its diminishment. The first of many – Victor Meldrew, Alan Partridge, David Brent – he's the one we all remember.

This is the irony of our much-vaunted national sense of humour – perhaps the only claim of chauvinist exceptionalism that crosses all political boundaries. As the satirist John Bird once said, reflecting on the culture his work had helped create by the 1990s: "Everything is a branch of comedy now. Everybody is a comedian." In a time of national humiliation, figurative humiliation is our soma. Now, we're all rolling on the floor with Fawlty. ●

MEHNER/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

Klaus Kinski's messiah complex

An infamous stage appearance reveals how the actor trailed both chaos and charisma

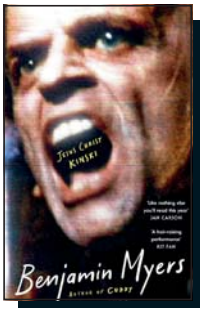
By Frank Lawton

When film directors talk about shooting, they tend to mean with a camera. When the actor Klaus Kinski was on set, they often meant with a gun. Kinski would start fights, ignore instructions, make absurd demands and, on occasion, turn a gun on cast members for being too noisy – he blew off an extra's fingertip during the filming of *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972). So violent and destabilising was he that, during the filming of *Crawlspace* (1986), the entire crew begged the director David Schmoeller to "please kill Mr Kinski". The film's producer was way ahead of them, telling Schmoeller that it was worth shooting Kinski dead to get the insurance pay-out and be rid of him. Kinski's children may well have agreed. His daughter Pola alleges he sexually abused her for more than a decade. Of his three children, only one attended his funeral in 1991.

Kinski is not, then, an obvious pick for ventriloquising the saviour of mankind. And yet, on one night in 1971, he did just that, taking to a Berlin stage to give a furious one-man show about Jesus Christ. It collapsed into anarchy, as Kinski harangued the audience and they hurled "fascist" back at him like rocks at a stoning. It was to be his last performance on the German stage – a performance that Benjamin Myers's latest novel, *Jesus Christ Kinski*, brilliantly recreates.

Wrath of God: Kinski on the Berlin stage

Jesus Christ Kinski
Benjamin Myers
Bloomsbury Circus, 208pp, £18.99



Myers's previous books can broadly be split into two camps: a warm, sometimes visionary pastoral (*Rare Singles*, *The Perfect Golden Circle*, parts of *Cuddy*), and a hard, vernacular lyricism, full of blood and spit (*Pig Iron*, *The Gallows Pole*). *Jesus Christ Kinski* straddles both, and showcases Myers's animating interest in male misfits, as well as extending his formal range.

The novel is written in alternating voices: the manic screed of Kinski, and that of the Myers-surrogate, simply called "the writer", who tells how during Covid "the writer" became obsessed with footage of the one-off *Jesus Christus Erlöser* performance.

Narrated largely in the second-person, Kinski stalks himself. His principal enemy is one Klaus Kinski, with dishonourable mentions for his agent, critics, journalists, Jews, women, doctors, audience members, the soft-headed liberals of the new Germany and, of course, Werner Herzog. He may have directed the films on which Kinski's artistic reputation rests, but according to Kinski, Herzog is a "worthless, simpering piece of rat shit", and a "cretinous... Bavarian hick". Those are the gentler quotes.

Myers's title speaks to the various echoes at play in the book: in *Jesus Christ Kinski* we hear Kinski berating himself and others berating Kinski; we hear, too, a hint of reluctant awe in the face of a monstrous man with monstrous talent. It also captures Kinski's fantasy: that in his one-man performance he resurrects Christ, such that Jesus Christ Kinski becomes one person, ready to preach at the flock and bed their wives.

The writer's sections are quieter, telling a story of the novel and offering up some fairly bland cultural diagnosis about the puritanism of youth, the collapse in "trusted narratives", and the idiocies of cancel culture.

The two narrators are given distinct shape on the page: the writer's words are always in two narrow columns running down the page like newspaper print, while Kinski's sections jump between internal monologue, dialogue, script lines and stage directions, with words scattered about like shrapnel. Interspersed are black and white photographs of the show, with ever-closer crops of his wild stares and gestures. This gives Kinski a terrific immediacy. But where the actor is full of destructive energy, swinging between the narcissist's poles of self-pity and self-aggrandisement, the writer is flat, defensive about his "widely disliked" subject, and rather too keen to congratulate himself for writing about him anyway. It can feel at times like a PR covering for their client's self-inflicted injury.

Much in these sections is superfluous. For example, having clearly shown the violent charisma of Kinski and suggested his sympathy for Hitler, nothing is added by the writer telling us that "Kinski raged with the hysterical conviction of the totalitarian egoist, [which] reminded him of Adolf Hitler".

The book's achievement lies in the throbbing life force of Kinski himself. His is a dark star, close to collapse. It offers no guiding light but continues to burn five decades on from that winter evening in Berlin.

Critic at Large

Crown fools

Gallery thiefs were once a figment of our imagination. Now, a lust for larceny haunts the world of art

By Michael Prodger

In 1907, Maurice Leblanc released a collection of short stories called *The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsène Lupin, Gentleman Burglar*. It focused on the adventures of Lupin, a thief with a good heart – the Rive Gauche equivalent of EW Hornung's Raffles. Both Lupin and Raffles stole property but didn't hurt people, unless it was to speed well-heeled malefactors towards a reckoning with justice.

One of the stories in Leblanc's book was "The Queen's Necklace", centred on the real jewels made for Louis XV's mistress, Madame du Barry, that were later the key prop in a celebrated scandal, the "Affair of the Diamond Necklace", which implicated, erroneously, Queen Marie Antoinette. The furore inflamed public opinion against her in the years immediately before the French Revolution.

Leblanc's tale was the inspiration for the Netflix series *Lupin*. In the first episode, the hero, played by Omar Sy, sets out to clear his unjustly disgraced father's name and revenge himself on the family that framed him. To do this, he works as a cleaner to scope out the Louvre, and on a gala night in the museum steals a royal necklace once owned by Marie Antoinette. The theft, enacted under the noses of a crowd, involves sleight of hand, strong nerves and quick thinking.

Strong nerves were in evidence at the real-life theft of historic jewellery from the Louvre on 19 October when a group of four thieves posing as workmen parked a lorry mounted with a cherry-picker ladder against the Seine-side façade of the museum where restoration work is being carried out. This side of the building has history: it was from here, during the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, that the king, Charles IX, leaned out of the Louvre's windows to shoot at wounded Protestants who "tarried in their drowning", having been thrown into the Seine by rampaging Catholics. He was, as one contemporary put it, "not a good king, but a good marksman". The range is now home to the Galerie d'Apollon, the Louvre's grandest gallery – gilded and frescoed with a ceiling painting by Eugène Delacroix, *Apollo Slays the Python*, at its centre – and home to the remaining French crown jewels.

At 9.30 in the morning, three of the thieves climbed to the first floor and forced the end window, then threatened the security guards before using an angle grinder to break into display cabinets and taking various pieces of jewellery. Empress Eugénie's crown (which comprises more than 1,300 diamonds and 56 emeralds, and sold for $13.5m in 1988) was dropped during the escape. The thieves climbed back down and, having failed to set fire to their lorry, disappeared on scooters. The whole incident took seven minutes.

Among the stolen items are an emerald necklace and a pair of emerald earrings that belonged to Napoleon I's second wife, Empress Marie Louise; a tiara and brooch belonging to Empress Eugénie de Montijo, wife of Napoleon III; and a tiara, necklace and earring from the sapphire set that belonged to the last queen of France, Marie-Amélie, wife of Louis Philippe I.

The jewels are pretty much unsellable in their current form, their most likely fate being the removal of the gemstones for individual dispersal and the melting down of the gold. The gemstones are 18th- and 19th-century cuts, which makes them both suspicious and worth less than stones with a modern provenance. Their best hope for remaining intact is as bargaining chips for ransom or insurance money, or as collateral between crime networks.

The idea of a *Thomas Crown Affair* collector having works stolen to order is the stuff of fiction, although in 2005 a French waiter called Stéphane Breitwieser was convicted of stealing 239 artworks from museums across Europe for his personal collection. His scissors-wielding mother cut up 60 of the paintings, including a Brueghel the Younger and a Watteau, in an attempt to destroy evidence. As each day passes, the probability is that the Louvre jewels, a slice of France's history, are likewise in the process of being destroyed.

"What is certain is that we have failed, since people were able to park a furniture hoist in the middle of Paris, get people up it in several minutes to grab priceless jewels and give France a terrible image," said the justice minister, Gérald Darmanin. He has a point.

This is not the first theft at the Louvre – museums are, after all, inherently vulnerable institutions. The most recent was in 1998 when a painting by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Le chemin de Sèvres*, was stolen: it has never been retrieved. The most famous, however, was in 1911 when an Italian named Vincenzo Peruggia, who had worked at the Louvre as a glazier, took Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* off the wall, removed its frame, wrapped the painting in his workman's smock and walked out of the building.

KIRAN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES

The director of the museum thought the theft was impossible: "Steal the *Mona Lisa*? That would be like thinking that someone could steal the towers of Notre Dame cathedral." Suspects included, for some reason, JP Morgan and Kaiser Wilhelm, and among those questioned about the crime were Pablo Picasso, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, and the passengers of an ocean liner that was about to head to sea.

Peruggia himself was eventually interrogated. But although he had twice bailed on appointments to present himself at the police station, had left a fingerprint on the painting's protective glass, and had his apartment – where the *Mona Lisa* was hidden – searched, he was dismissed as a suspect. After two years, he returned to Italy with the painting and was only unmasked when he contacted a gallery owner in Florence in the hope of a reward for returning a piece of Italy's cultural heritage. The painting, Peruggia said, was stolen from Italy by Napoleon (it wasn't; it was taken to France by Leonardo himself, although it did once hang in Napoleon's bedroom). Peruggia was sentenced to a year and 15 days in prison but, acclaimed as a patriot, served just seven months.

It was the theft, however, with its newspaper reports and photographs, that turned the *Mona Lisa* into a celebrity, so much so that crowds gathered at railway stations along the route as the train returning her to Paris rolled through.

It was theft, with its newspaper reports and photographs, that turned the *Mona Lisa* into a celebrity

The Louvre affair is just the latest museum burglary. One of the more celebrated examples is the 2019 robbery at the Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault) Museum in Dresden Castle in Germany, where four thieves with axes broke in and made off with 18th-century jewellery sets worth €113m. In 1990, 13 paintings – including works by Vermeer, Manet and Rembrandt – were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardener Museum in Boston and none has been seen since, despite a $10m reward being offered. In Norway, Edvard Munch's *The Scream* has been taken twice, in 1994 and 2004. That is nothing compared to Rembrandt's *Portrait of Jacob de Gheyn III*, stolen four times from Dulwich Picture Gallery, earning it the sobriquet the "takeaway Rembrandt". And in 2017, in a scene of near comedy, a 100kg, 24-carat gold coin was stolen from Berlin's Bode Museum. The coin, a specially-minted Canadian "Big Maple Leaf" – a gold version of the novelty cheques used for charity photo opportunities – was so heavy the thieves had to trundle it through the museum in a wheelbarrow.

Whatever the outcome, there's an opportunity here for the Louvre. When the *Mona Lisa* was taken, more visitors came to stare at the gap on the wall bearing the painting's ghostly outline than had ever gathered when it had hung there. If today's museum director, Laurence des Cars, leaves the smashed vitrines just as the thieves abandoned them, visitors will come flocking. ●

Stop overlooking a clear growth opportunity

The Chancellor must order a review on the impact of tax-free shopping

By Paul Barnes

When you tell people about the unique opportunity the Chancellor has to make Britain the best place for shopping, most say: "It's a no-brainer. Why on Earth doesn't she just do it? "

It's already one of the things Britain is known for around the world. Now, after leaving the EU, we have the opportunity to become the only place in Europe where 450 million EU consumers – right on our doorstep – can shop tax-free. No EU country can offer this.

This would be game-changing for Britain. International tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors. It already employs millions of people across the UK, both directly and indirectly. Moreover, shopping is the single largest area of spending for travellers.

Being able to offer tax-free shopping to all international visitors would make Britain stand out as the destination of choice. This would mean much more foreign money being spent in the UK – supporting our high streets, creating new jobs and funding vital infrastructure such as airports. As the Chancellor reminds us, this kind of economic growth is what generates the additional tax revenues needed to fund our public services.

It's not just about the additional spending by international visitors in our shops, hotels and restaurants. It's also about the expected surge in investment in our high streets, as businesses from around the world choose Manchester, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Leeds and London as the best places in Europe to build their next shop, hotel or restaurant.

So why doesn't the Chancellor simply reverse the Conservatives' 2021 decision to scrap tax-free shopping? Doing so would restore a level playing field with France, Spain, and Italy for non-EU shoppers, while giving us an incredible new advantage in attracting European visitors.

The main reason she hasn't yet revisited the issue is that the previous government's Treasury forecasts suggested that extending tax-free shopping to include EU residents would impose a significant cost on the Exchequer through deadweight VAT refunds, with no corresponding benefits. On the basis of that forecast, the Conservatives ended all tax-free shopping for international visitors – making Britain the only European country not to offer this small but significant incentive.

Five years on, things have changed: a new government, new growth priorities, and a wealth of new evidence from many different sources – including both

Shopping is the single biggest item of spending for travellers to the UK

governments and businesses.

That's why AIR's Budget submission this month contains one simple, cost-free request to the Chancellor: to commission a review of the Treasury's forecasts on the impact of tax-free shopping on both the economy and the Exchequer.

There are two good reasons for doing this. First, back in 2020 – in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdowns and in the absence of reliable data – the Treasury was right to be cautious and to assume worst-case scenarios.

But now, five years on, a wealth of new data enables the Treasury to forecast with far greater accuracy and confidence.

This time, the Chancellor could also invite the OBR to scrutinise every forecast – including the crucial assessment of the impact of offering tax-free shopping to EU residents, which the OBR has never previously reviewed.

Secondly, all the new evidence – not least the number of Brits now shopping tax-free in the EU – shows that, far from the Treasury's worst-case scenario (which assumed no additional visitors or spending), extending tax-free shopping to EU residents could create an entirely new, multibillion-pound, shopping-led short-haul tourism market. This market would generate hundreds of millions of pounds in additional VAT for the Exchequer and create jobs across every region of Britain.

There's even better news for the government: evidence from actual retailer sales figures shows that the Treasury's feared deadweight cost of lost VAT is not the £900m worst-case scenario, but has been proven to be just £34m.

What all this new evidence demonstrates is that a tax-free shopping scheme for all international visitors would not cost the Exchequer the £1.4bn originally feared by the Treasury. Instead, it could generate over £500m in net additional VAT for the Chancellor to invest in public services.

Tax-free shopping could net £5.65bn in additional foreign spending in the UK each year

With an estimated £5.65bn in additional foreign spending in the UK each year, this simple, tax-generating measure could create over 110,000 jobs. This would result in a total direct and indirect benefit to the Exchequer of more than £2bn annually.

And that's before accounting for all the long-term inward investment into our high streets.

So, if the Chancellor wants to demonstrate that she is serious about exploring every possible avenue for growth, announcing a cost-free Treasury review of this exciting new opportunity – without committing to any policy change – would be an effective way to do so.

So please Chancellor, order a review of the impact of tax-free shopping. You have nothing to lose. In fact, you have £2bn a year to gain. ●

Paul Barnes is CEO of the Association of International Retail

WILLIAM BARTON/SHUTTERSTOCK

Cambridge Literary Festival

22–23 November 2025

Astonishing writers, unmissable conversations

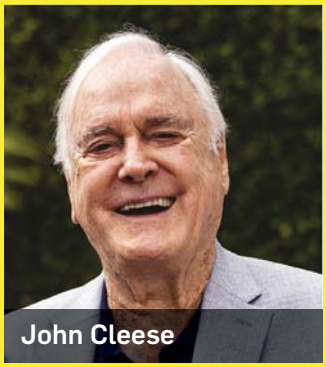

Philippe Sands


Zadie Smith


Mick Herron

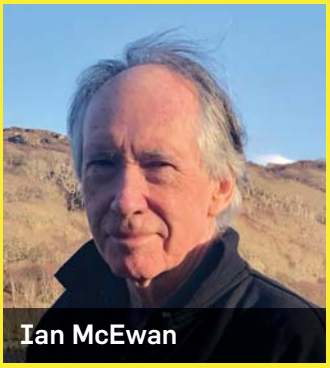

Lyse Doucet


Katie Piper


John Cleese


Saabira Chaudhuri


Juan Gabriel Vásquez


Ian McEwan


Nicola Sturgeon


John Suchet


Natalie Haynes

CAMBRIDGE LITERARY FESTIVAL

FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS

In partnership with

THE NEW STATESMAN

Thanks to our supporters

Hawthornden Foundation

Urban&Civic

heffers of Cambridge

UNIVERSITY ARMS CAMBRIDGE, ENG.

cambridgeliteraryfestival.com

Film

Like a Boss?

Jeremy Allen White pulls off the title role in *Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere*, but is let down by simplistic storytelling

By David Sexton

In last year's Bob Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown*, Timothée Chalamet portrayed the singer up to 1965, when he controversially produced an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival. It was an adaptation of a tightly focused book called *Dylan Goes Electric!* by Elijah Wald.

Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere, starring Jeremy Allen White (Carmie in *The Bear* and global ambassador for Calvin Klein underwear) does much the same for Springsteen, only the other way around: Springsteen Goes Acoustic! In 1981, Springsteen, riding high on the success of his fifth album, *The River*, and the 140-date tour that followed its release, retreated to write simpler music. In a rural house in Colts Neck, New Jersey, he recorded 17 new songs with a Gibson guitar on a basic, four-track Teac cassette tape recorder. These recordings were originally intended to be demos, but when Springsteen tried upscaling them with the E Street Band he found the results unsatisfactory.

With the help of his sympathetic manager and former music journalist Jon Landau, Springsteen resolved to release ten songs from the tape, exactly as they were, with the sound unimproved. That record of deep Americana, *Nebraska*, released in 1982, is today rated by many as not just Springsteen's darkest, most personal work but also his finest.

In 2023, Warren Zanes, in collaboration with ▸

KRISTIAN HAMMERSTAD

Prove it all night: Jeremy Allen White, star of *The Bear*, portrays Bruce during a darker spell between glory days

◂ Springsteen, published an exhaustive study, *Deliver Me from Nowhere: The Making of Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska*. That reverential book has now been faithfully adapted into a hagiographic film, again with Springsteen's participation.

In the afterword to its latest edition, Zanes reprints some text exchanges he had with Springsteen in developing the movie project. "I feel like a film that echoes the spirit of *Nebraska* could be made," Zanes suggested. A homespun, acoustic movie. "Let's do it sooner than later," Springsteen replied. *Deliver Me from Nowhere* (a line that concludes two songs from the album) is a faithful translation of the book to the screen – it's the antidote to the pomp of such music biopics as *Rocketman* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Scott Cooper (*Crazy Heart*, *Out of the Furnace*, *Hostiles*) directs and scripts, pretty baldly. We follow Springsteen from a thumping stadium performance of "Born to Run", which concludes *The River* tour, to the modest rented house in which he retreats to solitude, haunted by his past and unsolved issues from his upbringing.

On first sight, Jeremy Allen White seems painfully not like Springsteen, in facial features or voice. But White's own charisma soon eases us into acceptance, though his singing, even enhanced through technical trickery, never quite attains the Boss's commanding self-pity.

The storytelling is worthy of a Ladybird book in its illustrative clarity. We see Springsteen as a boy (played by Matthew Anthony Pellicano) bullied by his dad (Stephen Graham) in grainy black-and-white footage. We track all the influences on the writing of *Nebraska*: Springsteen reads Flannery O'Connor, he listens to "Frankie Teardrop" by Suicide, he catches Terrence Malick's *Badlands* on TV, he remembers going to see *Night of the Hunter* with his father and being frightened. For the song "Mansion on the Hill", we flash back to young Bruce and his sister being shown a mansion on a hill by their father. As he writes the title song, about the Starkweather murders depicted in *Badlands*, we see him change "he" to "I", to show how much he owns the story.

The dialogue is no less relentlessly obvious. Landau (Jeremy Strong) describes the *Nebraska* songs for us to his wife. They're deeply personal, and, you know, dark, he says. For dramatic interest, we follow Springsteen's abortive affair with a hometown, single-mum girlfriend, Faye (Odessa Young). "I'm lost here, I'm buried here," he tells her, breaking it off.

Much of the later part of the film is devoted earnestly to the problem of persuading the record company to release the tape in its simple, raw state. Though Springsteen spirals into breakdown, there's little sense of jeopardy: viewers will be well aware of his later success. In 1985, Bob Dylan said: "People say to me, 'When you gonna make a *Nebraska* album?' Well, I love that record, but I think I've made five or six *Nebraska* albums, you know." One of those would surely be 1967's *John Wesley Harding*, the originality of which was hailed by the young journalist, Jon Landau. ●

"Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere" is in cinemas now

Television

A Lazarus better off dead

By Pippa Bailey

Harlan Coben's Lazarus
Prime Video

By this point, Harlan Coben and Netflix are synonymous, symbiotic, two heads of the same beast. In 2018, the prolific American thriller writer, who has churned out 39 mystery novels since 1990, signed a multimillion-dollar, five-year deal with the streaming giant to adapt 14 of his novels. Last year, *Fool Me Once* was one of the platform's most watched shows, drawing 108 million views in its first six months.

So it is something of a departure that *Harlan Coben's Lazarus* (it's a mark of just how much of a Big Name Coben is that all his shows are billed this way) was made by Amazon. *Lazarus* is also unusual for being an original screenplay, created by Coben and his frequent collaborator Daniel Brocklehurst, rather than a book adaptation. But in every other way, this is business as usual. Which is to say: utterly implausible, absurdly pacy, with more twists and turns than Thorpe Park, and just as likely to make you feel a bit queasy.

Lazarus's eponymous Lazarus (Lazari?) is actually a father-son duo: the younger, Dr Joel "Laz" Lazarus (Sam Claflin), and the elder, Dr Jonathan Lazarus

PRIME VIDEO

Lazzy bones: Bill Nighy as a departed father haunting his son

(Bill Nighy), are both psychiatrists. We meet Laz at the impossibly beige secure psychiatric hospital where he works. There, he sits down with a new patient, who says he's just been speaking with God: "I asked him to punish you," he says, ominously. And what did God reply? "He would do that, just for me." As soon as their session is over, Laz receives a call from another of the Lazari, his slightly woo-woo, tarot-reading sister Jenna (Alexandra Roach), to tell him their father has died by suicide. He left behind a cryptic note – "It's not over" – above a drawing of what appears to be a three-legged table.

Laz pays repeated visits to the towering gothic building where his father had his private practice, a capacious, double-height office featuring a Freudian daybed and a drinks trolley in the shape of a globe. The whole thing could be straight out of a Christopher Nolan *Batman* movie. Whenever he sips from a tumbler of whisky and begins to zone out, his father's former clients appear before him, ready for their therapy session. They seem to believe Laz is his father. They are also – it turns out, when he consults the office filing system – long dead. Perhaps they are not hallucinations at all but ghosts, raised from the grave, like the biblical Lazarus. Soon, Laz's father appears, too, to tell him: "There will be others, son. They will come to you too." Laz is also bedevilled by flashbacks to the day, in 1998, he found his then teenage twin sister, Sutton, murdered; her killer, we learn, remains unidentified. The corporeal and incorporeal blur, and Laz's life – and mind – begins to collapse in on itself.

As if this wasn't enough to be getting on with, there's also Aidan, Laz's ex-wife's teenage son, who seems preternaturally connected to Laz; his police officer mate Seth, who – handily, for plot-developing reasons – has a rather lax approach to professional confidentiality; Billy, a comic-book mogul who was once Sutton's boyfriend; and a creepy guy called Olsen, one-time suspect for her murder, who spends a lot of time watching Laz from across the street. Three episodes in and we've already had several big reveals and jump scares, and, knowing Coben, it's only going to get sillier from here.

Claflin is about as convincing as it's possible to be amid such a plot: he spends at least half the time rubbing his eyes, holding his head in his hands and/or screaming into the abyss. Nighy, meanwhile, plays the dead dad with a kind of camp panache, eyebrows twitching behind heavy glasses as he delivers lines like: "You can't tell people you're seeing ghosts, son – they'll put you in the loony bin!" Sadly, being dead, he has so far had disappointingly little screen time.

In 2023, Netflix's then global head of television, Bela Bajaria, told the *New Yorker* that the streamer's ideal show is a "gourmet cheeseburger" – commercially appealing, addictive and perhaps not all that good for you. *Lazarus* is straight off the same menu. Let your mind wander for a few minutes and you've missed a reality-altering switchback, but it doesn't really matter because it will all change again before the end of the episode, and anyway, you'll have forgotten all about it ten minutes after the credits roll. ●

Music

Getting the band back together

By Zoë Huxford

Cymande
O2 Academy
Brixton,
London SW9

For a band you may well not have heard of, the influence of Cymande is extraordinary. They are considered by some to be the godfathers of hip-hop. Musical sampling from their eponymous 1972 debut album is the throughline that connects De La Soul, Wu-Tang Clan, the Fugees and MC Solaar's "Bouge de là", the standout track on one of France's first hip-hop albums. But when they disbanded in 1975 after failing to find commercial success in the UK, this would have seemed impossible. It took another 37 years for the diasporic musicians (who came to Britain from the Caribbean as part of the Windrush Generation) to regroup, and they have spent the last 13 cementing their reputation as the funk band history nearly forgot.

The nine-man line-up emerged on stage to thunderous applause at Brixton's 02 Academy, and embarked on a 90-minute show that blended their back catalogue with newer tracks. Among the old favourites were "Dove", a sprawling, immersive song that pulled the audience in with a hypnotic bass before enveloping us in its psychedelic melody, and the Caribbean-informed "Bra", which layered bongos over more conventional funk drums. A highlight from the group's more recent work was "Coltrane", a jazz-inflected track that is an explicit reference to one of their many creative influences. It's also a testament to the melange of styles that make up Cymande's discography: rock, funk, soul, calypso, reggae, jazz, all thrown out from the musical centrifuge having been fused with the band's unique sonic identity of pan-African psychedelic funk.

In a music business that insists on variation and distinction – Taylor Swift and her so-called eras; Dua Lipa changing her hair colour with each album – there is a refreshing steadfastness to the consistency of Cymande, and a certain timelessness to their music. They are a band who know the pain of being involved in a capricious industry, but they are now revelling in a moment of unfettered bliss. Cymande's story has been one of survival; it is glorious to see them, at long last, take centre stage. ●

They are a band who know the pain of being in a capricious industry, now revelling in a moment of unfettered bliss

onevillage.com

Craft made articles for the home.
Supporting artisans' cooperatives
NGOs, social organizations.
Shop online at **onevillage.com**

One Village: *For the unity of all. Since 1979.*

Duvet covers: Soft and cosy. 100% cotton with craft blockprinting. See more online.

Baskets: This one is A4 size for organizing.

Pottery: Arabesque crockery from Palestine. Mugs, jugs, bowls, plates.

Cushions: Quails gone from the Himalayas but remembered here in this hand embroidered cushion by the Kathiawadi of Gujarat.
Lots more cushions online.

ONEVILLAGE 01608 811811

Chemical free soap: Order **neem** soap to love your skin & hair.

Silver Spoon

Finn McRedmond

Every political movement has its scene – and I found Reform's in Belgravia

Here's a game. Close your eyes and transport yourself to the spiritual opposite of an east London natural wine bar – a place free from the clutches of crudo and za'atar yoghurt, where no one has even heard of yuzu. Too slow. It's called Boisdale of Belgravia. It has a walk-in humidor, a menu full of lobster and caviar, a smoking terrace, white tablecloths and a wine list printed on a menu larger than my torso. I look around: Claret, soda bread, venison. I am here for lunch – and to find out how Reform UK likes to kick back and network at the same time.

I arrive and am immediately struck with a vision of Boisdale's interior designer marching into a Farrow & ▸

DANIEL GRIZELJ

◂ Ball, slamming his fist on the counter and demanding all the red paint they have. And then some. This, in concert with the dark carpets and mahogany wood finishes, gives one the feeling that they are eating lunch in the womb of a large cow – or perhaps a pig. It is quite comfortable, actually.

Every political movement has its attendant scene (that word!) – a smattering of restaurants and bars, a postcode, a dress code and an origin story. New Labour was truly born in 1994 at Granita on Islington Green, over a dinner between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. We would have called it modern British cuisine back then. The Tory wets plotted their failed coup against Margaret Thatcher at the Gay Hussar in Soho, now a branch of Noble Rot. The same restaurant was long the HQ of the intellectual left. Nick Clegg and George Osborne dinner-partied in W11. If my movement ever gets off the ground, expect to hear a lot more about Terroni's deli on Clerkenwell Road.

And so, Boisdale is Reform's answer to that question. In doubt? I have proof in the form of Nigel Farage, who arrived just moments before me and was quickly whisked away to a private room. With a donor, perhaps? Or a possible Tory defector? Does David Frost like venison? Boisdale has been the office-away-from-office for Farage's ilk for years, my lunch companion – a senior Reform figure – tells me, brandishing a G&T. Farage's security guard walks past; they nod at each other. I am an interloper in the home of the right-wing renegade raconteurs. And then I inspect the Caledonian menu (the proprietor, Ranald Macdonald, is the son of the 24th chief of Clanranald): Orkney scallops, Dumfries haggis, cullen skink – a thick fish soup. You can almost taste the tartan.

Eating at Boisdale is at once an elitist activity – because it's in Belgravia – and déclassé, because American tourists like it here. I suppose this, in many ways, speaks to something deeper in the soul of Reform: a party for the so-called left-behinds, run from cigar-stained private rooms in west London; elite populists beloved by New World Republicans. And it isn't just Boisdale: 5 Hertford Street in Mayfair is the preferred club of the new old right of Great Britain; Scott's Seafood Bar – is the secret to Reform simply that they all love expensive fish? – is a favourite locale too. If you want to spot a more clandestine rendezvous, head south of the river to the Vauxhall Tea House.

But here I am, in their number-one destination, eating mussels and sharing a bottle of wimpy Cabernet Sauvignon (that's on me) on a Tuesday afternoon. I glance over to the private room – door still closed – and consider whether Farage is designing his next steps to total hegemony behind it. And then I wonder where the Tories are eating these days – does anyone know? If Kemi Badenoch Deliveroo-ing a steak to her office is the closest thing the party has to a manifest scene, then we need no further evidence of the death of that Conservative movement. Politics is supposed to be convivial.

After lunch, we hop on Lime bikes and cruise through the back streets of Westminster on our way to the Marquis of Granby just off Smith Square. This pub has long been a hangout for the righter-than-right – the wonks at the Adam Smith Institute, the TaxPayers' Alliance; once a Vote Leave haunt, with Farage's gang still keeping the lights on now. I'm drunk on fish and Cabernet Sauvignon and look around: is this all Reform Town now? ●

This England

Each printed entry receives a £5 book token. Entries to comp@newstatesman.co.uk or on a postcard to This England. This column – which, though named after a line in Shakespeare's "Richard II", refers to the whole of Britain – has run in the New Statesman since 1934.

How do you like them apples?
Britain's cider makers are enjoying one of their best harvests in years thanks to the long, hot summer – but the weather has produced drinks too strong to sell in pubs. The sunshine has led to record sugar levels in apples, which have fermented into ciders well above the typical strength demanded by publicans. "Pubs don't really want to have 8.5 per cent cider. I've got one coming out at 10.5 per cent this year. I'm going to keep that one for personal consumption," says Rob Clough of Charnwood Cider in Ulverscroft, Leicestershire.
The Times (David Lamming)

Performance anxiety
Two dozen men – and some women with drawn-on moustaches – strutted in a contest in Soho Square, London, to find the city's best "performative male". The online trope absorbs various fashion trends and aesthetic choices, but above all, the performative male is trying to send you a clear message – that he understands your struggles and is ready to listen to you, girl.
BBC (Catherine Dyer)

A clean sweep
A street cleaner who swapped the traditional wedding-car option for a new bin lorry said it was his wife's idea. Danny Fitzpatrick-Ailara, 58, swept April off her feet by turning up in the refuse vehicle for the wedding in Southend-on-Sea. He said he was surprised when the company Suez, agreed to the whacky suggestion. He said: "You get the usual jokes from colleagues such as, 'Did you wheelie get married?' – but it's been really positive."
Echo News (Amanda Welles)

MARTA SIGNORI

Health Matters

Dr Phil Whitaker

The Trump team's distrust of paracetamol is a symptom of its distrust of science

Last month, the Trump administration advised pregnant mothers and the parents of young children to avoid paracetamol – known as Tylenol or acetaminophen in the US – stating that its use is associated with the development of autism. Branded as Calpol in the UK, paracetamol is every parent's go-to when kids are unwell; it is also one of the only pain and fever medicines considered safe in pregnancy. Despite rebuttals by the US Food and Drug Administration, the World Health Organisation and the European Medicines Agency, the White House continues to cite multiple published studies that appear to vindicate its position. Unpicking this conundrum takes us to the heart of the scientific method – how it works, and how it can be misconstrued or misused.

Trump and his health secretary, Robert F Kennedy, are right: there does appear to be a small association between paracetamol use in pregnancy and rates of autism in children. Their error is to equate correlation with causation – to assume the association is a smoking gun. All such medical research is susceptible to confounding, where hidden factors affect both variables, making them appear causally connected. Consider the sales of sunglasses and cases of heatstroke. Both will rise at certain times of year: they are correlated. But we would be mightily surprised to be warned against wearing shades.

Autism is strongly genetic, so a child born to a mother with autistic traits is more likely than average to be diagnosed. Autistic traits are also associated with chronic pain syndromes such as fibromyalgia, so affected mothers may be more likely to use paracetamol as a painkiller in pregnancy. One way to resolve such issues is to analyse pairs of autistic and non-autistic siblings: being raised in the same family will level out many potential confounders. Over the past two years, large studies in Sweden and Japan have shown that the marginal association between paracetamol use and autism vanished when sibling pairs were matched.

Any half-decent scientist would have alerted Kennedy and Trump to the pitfall of confusing correlation with causation, so why the wilful ignorance? America, like the UK, has seen a recent surge in diagnoses of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). For politicians and voters of a certain persuasion, this has become something of a moral panic. Normalising neurodiversity is seen as a facet of the reviled "woke" agenda, and it feels as though cases of autism are spiralling upwards. In fact, were ASD becoming more common we would see increasing cases of every severity, but we don't. The surge in diagnoses is at the mildest end of the spectrum – a product of greater public awareness coupled with dramatically loosening diagnostic criteria.

In April, Kennedy pledged to identify the cause of what he termed the "autism epidemic" within five months. Bang on target, September saw paracetamol thrust squarely into the frame. Undaunted by the chorus of scientific criticism his initial assertion provoked, Kennedy has marshalled ever more tenuous research to shore up his position. An intriguing Danish study found a small correlation between male circumcision and autism. This almost certainly reflects genetic variations in some populations that favour circumcision for cultural reasons – one example: the rate of one ASD-related mutation is 250 times more common in Ashkenazi Jews. But for Kennedy, the correlation must be because paracetamol had been used for post-operative pain relief – an entirely unfounded assertion not evidenced by the study at all.

Kennedy is unwittingly demonstrating one of the greatest problems to affect the practice of science: confirmation bias – the tendency to search out and favour only information that confirms one's prior beliefs. The reality is that he is squandering an opportunity to examine and properly understand a significant social phenomenon because he doesn't like what the science is telling us. ●

CHARLOTTE TROUNCE

Sales of sunglasses and cases of heatstroke both rise at certain times of the year, but we would be surprised to be warned about shades

Down and Out

Nicholas Lezard

Few things test your inner resources quite like repeated trips to hospital

I called the surgery and said, "I think I might have to call an ambulance," and they said, "Hell yeah, go for it." So I did

Home is where your life happens, and London, where I have been cat-sitting (see last week) is no longer home. I still have more friends in London than I have in Brighton, but that's not the definition of home. I also have considerably more family in the Great Wen; zero family here, although the residence of my youngest in Sussex for the first two years of my life here softened that particular blow. But I missed, for one thing, the view from my window: shabby beautiful. Few people are thinking about resale value, for various reasons, so I see the unprettified backs of houses, which are honest. And then the sea, which is beyond honesty.

A sea view gives one perspective, not only in that it teaches you how to learn where the horizon is (on some streets going downhill you can think the sea is above you, but not, for some reason, in the Hove-l), but in the way that you appreciate that everything south of you is subject to radical change. Imagine, say, that you could live in a high-rise in North Finchley and look south to East Finchley (yes, I know), and think, on a windy night, that the streets down there would be buckling and twisting and perilous.

The night before I left the Hove-l for London again I did a deep clean of the kitchen – maybe not your idea of a deep clean, or anyone's, but it took me three hours of frenzied effort. And I am glad I did it, because when I got back to Brighton for my second weekend off I scarcely had time to appreciate my new relatively tidy kitchen before I felt a sudden cramp in my lower abdomen. It spread very rapidly to the place where it now resides: about halfway between shoulder-blade and hip, and it's the most painful thing I have experienced since my frozen shoulder a couple of years ago.

It happened at 8am, which is the perfect time to call the GP surgery to ask for an appointment, and they said, "Fine, 10.30 OK?" And I said, "Perfect." But it was not perfect, for the pain got worse, and two hours later I had only managed to get one leg of my trousers on. Not from idleness, but from extreme discomfort. I spent a little time with Dr Google and appendicitis looked promising, so I called the surgery again and said, "I think I might have to call an ambulance." And they said, "Hell yeah, go for it." So I did.

The ambulance people were lovely. They didn't even mind that I hobbled out to them wearing only one shoe. I'd got the other trouser leg on but the right sock and shoe were beyond me. They strapped me on to a gurney and inserted a cannula. I made a feeble joke to myself: "Cannula (*expr. coll.*) – what a Scouser says to another when asking a favour." One of the paramedics was called Nick. "One of the great names," I said.

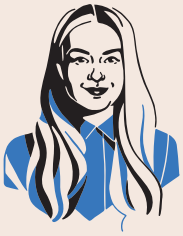
Then began the long wait in A&E. Now I might have said that I consider Brighton my home these days, but after a while I began to think that, while it is a lovely town for many reasons, one of its more regrettable elements is the Royal Sussex County Hospital – a vast, sprawling edifice staffed by the severely overworked. They squirted some morphine into me around 11am, which was most welcome. But they left me alone on a rudimentary cot among the non-walking wounded for another four hours before putting me through a CT scan, and it was then another six and a half hours before I was seen by anyone except the people handing out sandwiches.

Well, you know what it's like in hospital these days, so I shall spare you the details. Ben visited me, bringing a phone charger, and I also had a book to review with me, but what with one thing and another I found it difficult to concentrate on long-form prose. I was wheeled to a spot opposite the resus cupboard. "Look," I said on a social media platform, "I've found out where they keep the monkeys." (Yes, I know the monkeys are spelled rhesus, and "resus" is short for resuscitation, but you try getting a laugh out of an A&E ward.) By about 9pm I'd had enough, and wanted to go home; by 9.30 a doctor had pulled out my cannula and I was in the car park with my friend Mat, waiting for a taxi and hoping I'd get to Waitrose before it shut.

The next day I went back for an ultrasound, and that was six hours I had to spend using my rich inner resources to keep me going. I told my friend K— that I was being held in the Surgical Assessment Unit. "WTF is that?" she asked. "Taking a wild guess," I replied, "I think it's a unit where they assess you for surgery." Eventually they gave me a prescription for dihydrocodeine and I can tell you that, after the deep and pain-free sleep it gave me, if I ever have another child, it will be called Dihydrocodeine 30mg Lezard.

The pain still recurs with a vengeance if I cough, laugh, or try to clear mucus from my lower throat; blowing one's nose is a no-no. I am having to learn a whole new hydraulics of getting in and out of bed without howling. All I can say is I'm so glad I cleaned that kitchen. Hospital again tomorrow. ●

Deleted Scenes



Pippa Bailey

I might want children, but how do I know if I want them *enough*?

In the more than five years I have been writing this column, only one subject has generated anywhere near the level of correspondence as my father's death and, before it, The Break-Up: the question of whether to have children. It's a question that crosses my mind increasingly often – prompted by the knowledge that I am about a year off the age at which the NHS would consider me of "advanced maternal age" (supposedly a gentler term for what used to be called a "geriatric mother"), and by the increasingly prolific reproduction of my peers. In my childlessness, I am now very much in the minority among friends of the same age, a reversal that has occurred over the past couple of years with dizzying speed.

I found myself considering the question with more intensity than usual over a recent long weekend spent with one of my dearest childhood friends, B—, her husband and their beautiful four-month-old boy at their home in Norway. Our friendship is one of those golden ones that when we are reunited, immediately feels (to me, at least) easy, natural and close.

Over the course of the weekend, I found myself returning again and again to the subject, both in conversation and in private thought: how do you know you want to have children? How do you know when you're ready? How do you make it work, practically? How do you afford it? B— is open, pragmatic, and so I felt more able to talk in circles around these questions with her than I would with most. I truly believe that if B— was finding motherhood a terrible and deeply regretful experience, she would tell me as much. (Thankfully, she is not.)

The question of affordability is easier to answer if you live in Norway, where the state funds 49 weeks of parental leave at full pay. I, meanwhile, have done the maths, and it would be a struggle to pay my rent if I were to take more than six months off work. And quite who would look after the hypothetical baby after that point is a glaring TBC. Both these facts are decidedly suboptimal. Many friends have simply told me none of this matters: if you want it enough, you find a way to make it work. This is, I fear, a fantastically privileged position to take, and not all that helpful if you're not sure you do want it "enough", but you still might, maybe, theoretically, want it a bit. B—, by contrast, had reassuringly few answers.

During one of his many stays in hospital, my father reflected with unexpected sagacity that it must be strange for me to find myself suddenly on a different fork in the road to most of my friends. I remember what he said next quite clearly, because he rarely offered any comment on my life choices, whether positive or negative: "I don't know why anyone of your generation has kids before their mid-thirties."

Dad had his children in two distinct phases: first, in his early thirties, he had me and the eldest of my two brothers; then, in his late forties, he had my youngest brother. He went on to tell me that he'd had a far more positive experience with parenthood the second time around. I tried not to take this as a thinly veiled insult about what a nightmare child I had been. Instead, he meant – I think – that he felt he'd been a better father when he was older, established, surer of himself. And, by extension, sought to reassure me that there is still time to have children, if that's what I want, and that, in his experience, I might enjoy it more a little later in life. (Of course, this principle was, biologically speaking, more straightforward for him than it is for me.)

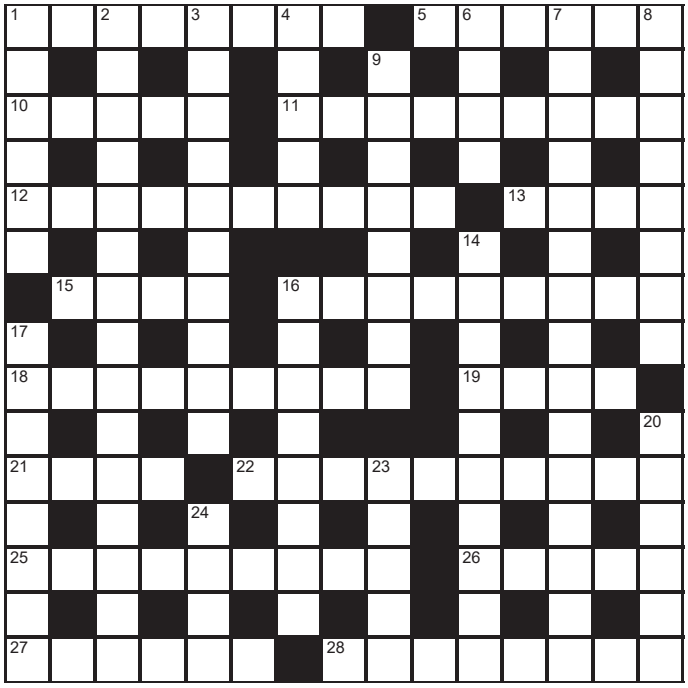
I have, over the course of the past year or so, come to realise – and perhaps this was obvious to everyone else – that part of the pain for me, in adjusting to this new reality in which all my friends have children and I don't, is that at least part of me wants what they have. That watching them get married and buy houses and have children only serves to remind me that I, too, once imagined all these things for myself, and that life hasn't quite yet worked out as I'd hoped it might.

Time to move to Norway, perhaps.

CHARLOTTE TROUNCE

Quite who would look after the hypothetical baby after I returned to work is a glaring TBC

Cryptic Crossword 736
by Anorak



Across

1 It's about time, note, for repeats (8)
5 Garden flowers suggested for these congregations (6)
10 Surveyed the joint and then packed up (5)
11 Precaution against Covid-19 from a tin rises (9)
12 She holds up a train (10)
13 Insinuation that Sri Lanka upset Richards, for starters (4)
15 Some semester mainly (4)
16 Passes over revolutionary paintings and poetry (9)
18 The stickability of company present by new church (9)
19 Perform some chorus in Gerontius? (4)
21 Local farmer accommodates young Friesian (4)
22 City's main Mr Big busted importing heroin (10)
25 English friend embracing bird all the time (9)
26 Major conqueror suggesting harsh sound (5)
27 Mass killer's confession: "Forget where" (6)
28 Intellectual bookworm initially gripped by Le Carré novel (8)

Down

1 A vixen may be one having nightmares (6)
2 *The Riddle of the Sands* author clinked sherries roughly (7,8)
3 Our columnist may wander around before wedding. Not half! (6,4)
4 Course records gaining award (5)
6 A great deal on offer? (4)
7 The sky full of rooks? Visionaries' ideals (7,2,3,3)
8 Heard knight got award for a Haydn symphony (8)
9 Point Tom found in online daily (8)
14 Rational, yet worthy of treachery, getting topped (10)
16 Piquant smell of bile, oddly perceptible by touch (8)
17 It's said I shout for dessert (3,5)
20 Unethical point of an Aesop fable (6)
23 PM extremely believable? Possibly (5)
24 Frozen princess turned over just the same (4)

Answers to crossword 735 of 17 October 2025
Across 1) Forecastle 6) Isis 10) Alpha 11) Indenture 12) Bridles 13) Sawbill 14) Falsetto 16) Bosch 19) Assai 20) Theocrat 22) Snorkel 24) Dowager 25) Polynesia 26) Raise 27) *Aida* 28) Greensward
Down 1) Flabby 2) Reprisals 3) Charles Dickens 4) Snips 5) Lodestone 7) Saudi) 8 Stealthy 9) Knows backwards 15) Totaliser 17) Shangri-la 18) Marsupia 21) Friend 23) Oiled 24) Drake

GEORGE LEIGH

The New Statesman caption competition

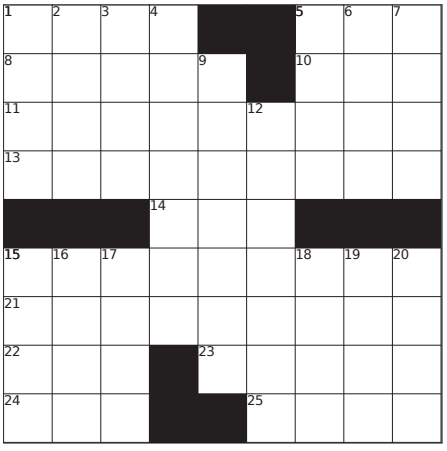
Winning caption
"This reign cannot last forever"
Paul Watkins

Second
"Pendant moi, le déluge"
Kevin Smith

Third
So much for the bright, sunlit uplands of Brexit!
Peter MacLeod

To enter this week's caption competition, turn to the cartoon on page 17

Crossword in Brief 188
by Miriam Estrin



Answers to crossword 187 of 17 October 2025
Across 1) Lows 5) Peak 9) Bran 10) Alta 11) Scroll bar 13) Moe 14) Ora 15) You know it 18) App 19) DUP 20) Headstart 24) Orca 25) Idea 26) Oats 27) ESPN
Down 1) Lbs 2) Orc 3) Warm-up act 4) Snook 5) Pal 6) Elbow pads 7) Atari 8) Karat 12) Lends 15) Yahoo 16) Opera 17) Outie 21) *Das* 22) Rep 23) Tan

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

Across

1 Some church donations
5 "Never heard of him!"
8 Gets together
10 Question that's an anagram of 5-Across
11 Diane Keaton title role
13 László Krasznahorkai, eg
14 Vinyl stat
15 "You'll need to wait awhile"
21 Advantage in a race
22 Screw up
23 On edge
24 As often as ___
25 Film spool

Down

1 Name meaning "hope" in Arabic
2 *Too Much* creator Dunham
3 "If you're not at the table, you're on the ___"
4 Unlike Bond's Martinis
5 "You ___?!"
6 You dig it?
7 Parliament birds
9 Overlook, as a fault
12 Pet with an exercise wheel
15 Subsequently
16 Prefix for "dynamic"
17 Bowser's racing vehicle
18 Slacken
19 Uffizi collezione
20 "Bye 4 now"

From the Archive

Why sucking up to China has failed

By Jonathan Mirsky, December 1998

In December 1998, the journalist and historian of China Jonathan Mirsky criticised Western leaders who only "murmured their dismay" while China stamped on the human rights of its citizens.

Tony Blair and Robin Cook keep bragging about their subtle manoeuvrings with Beijing over human rights – yet the number of Chinese dissidents being arrested increases. Set against this grim truth are Whitehall's reassuring references to the trip to China of the UN Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson – wholly unsuccessful; to Beijing's signing of the International Human Rights Covenant – not ratified and already flouted; and to discussions of political reform – some discussants are already in prison.

In October, during Tony Blair's visit to Beijing and his wife's production of a British-style mock trial (complete with a bewigged judge), the security organs arrested Xu Wenli, China's best-known remaining dissident still at large. Blair expressed his dismay and Xu was released. The Prime Minister gloated on television that this demonstrated his clout on human rights.

Xu was scooped up again last week during detentions and trials so numerous that I bet Amnesty's computers ran hot. Xu and his colleagues in the nascent Democratic Party, Wang Youcai and Qin Yongmin, now face charges of treason. The Foreign Ministry spokesman stated last week that Xu "is suspected of involvement in activities damaging to national security and has violated relevant criminal codes". This is a serious charge in China, where the criminal code stipulates that state security can be damaged by "violent or non-violent activities aimed at overthrowing government authorities".

Wang Youcai, who served two years after Tiananmen, was charged this week with "inciting the overthrow of the state", organising a meeting of the Democratic Party, and accepting $800 from abroad to buy a computer. The charge carries a sentence of ten years to life. Meanwhile, a professor whose son was killed during Tiananmen is under virtual house arrest for mobilising the mothers of other killed children. As for the hundreds arrested during Tiananmen, many remain in the gulag, and China stands first on Amnesty's global list of extrajudicial executioners.

The blunt reality, which Blair and Clinton will have to face if not swallow, is that sucking up to China has failed: in complete disregard of the International Human Rights Covenant, charges of sedition are flying freely, citizens are in custody or in prison for writing, e-mailing, speaking and meeting.

Foreign friends of China, like Jimmy Carter, point to occasional village elections as a sign of emerging political reform. Others note that political discussion is now common among some intellectuals. But most of the dozens of people arrested since the Clinton and Blair visits are members of Xu Wenli's Democratic Party, which calls for a constitutional democracy.

How big a threat can a tiny political movement be? Looked at from inside the Politburo, a big threat. Politics in China can be jolted by the unexpected. As Lenin said and Mao repeated, "A single spark can cause a prairie fire".

This explains why intellectuals have been muzzled since even before the 1949 victory, and afterwards harried in campaign after campaign; and why foreign reporters are treated as enemies and some reporters, including myself, are either expelled or asked to leave and denied re-entry. Above all, it explains why wholly non-violent critics are extinguished like sparks. On the day Chairman Mao came to power in Beijing he proclaimed in Tiananmen that "the Chinese people have stood up". As the joke goes in Beijing, Mao should then have sat down. Instead, his Orwellian successors are still stamping on people's faces while our own leaders murmur their "dismay". ●

This is an edited version of the original story. For the unabridged article visit newstatesman.com/archive

STEPHEN SHAVER / AFP

MACQUARIE

Fully invested in *Britain's* *growth*

Our investment in VIRTUS Data Centres is advancing Britain's **digital economy** and **accelerating innovation**.

We're invested in Britain's digital ecosystem, from data centres to AI cloud platforms and fibre networks, to **help Britain grow**.

Learn more at **macquarie.com**

VIRTUS Data Centre at Hayes Campus, Southall