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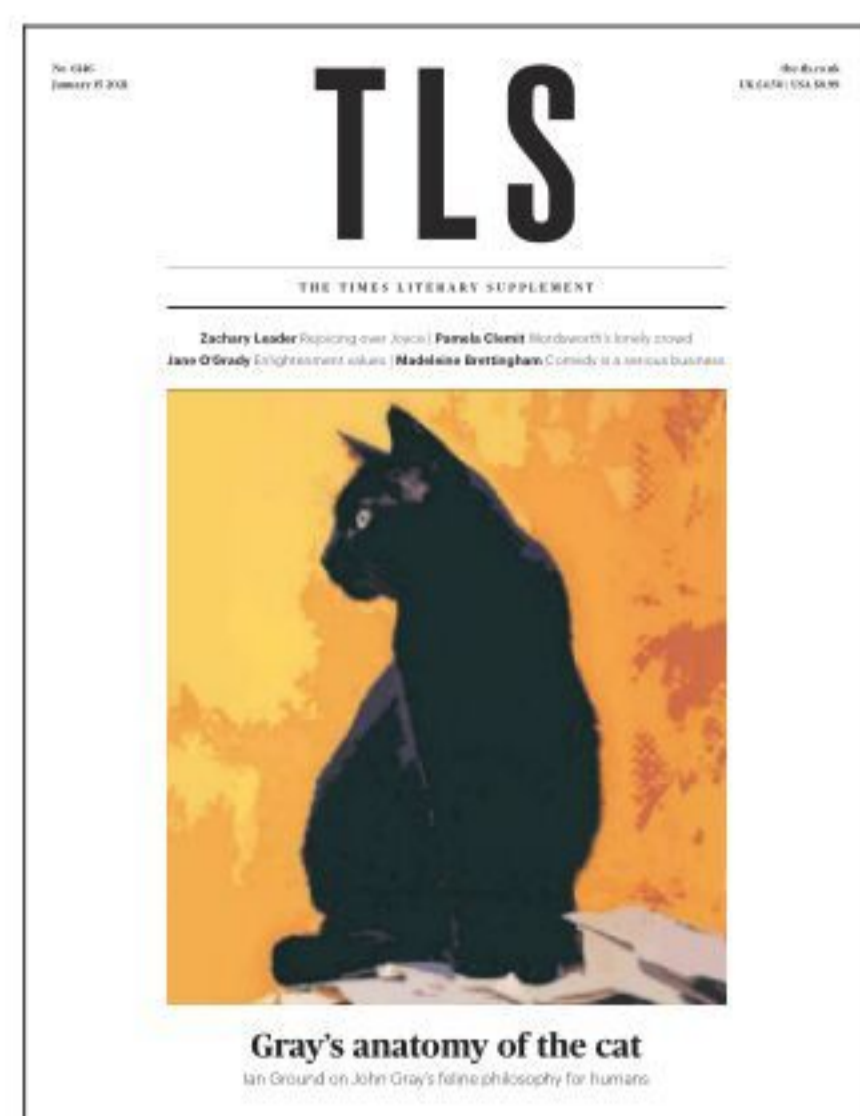
THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Zachary Leader Rejoicing over Joyce | **Pamela Clemit** Wordsworth's lonely crowd
Jane O'Grady Enlightenment values | **Madeleine Brettingham** Comedy is a serious business



Gray's anatomy of the cat

Ian Ground on John Gray's feline philosophy for humans



Cover image: From a poster for *Le Chat Noir* © Albatros/Alamy

In this issue

During the dreary months of this winter lockdown, the philosopher John Gray provides some cheer with a little book that tells us “how to lighten the load that comes with being human” by learning from the cat. Many scholars and writers before him have taken inspiration from their feline companions. One of my favourite accounts of such a relationship is the poem “Pangur Bán”, written in Old Irish by an anonymous ninth-century monk about his white cat. It charmed Auden, Heaney and Muldoon too. Here is Robin Flower’s translation of the first verse: “I and Pangur Bán my cat, / ‘Tis a like task we are at: / Hunting mice is his delight, / Hunting words I sit all night”.

Nor is Gray the only philosopher to take life classes from animals. Dogs, horses, wolves and even octopuses have all been hailed as moral (or more likely amoral) exemplars. In his cover review of Gray’s *Feline Philosophy*, Ian Ground explains why. “Lacking self-consciousness, non-human animals are present in the world more completely than we are. They inhabit nature fully whereas we are always dislocated, at a right angle, from it.” He adds a melancholy conclusion: “Indeed, we are destroying it”. But does a cat really reach “the Buddhist ideal of serenity”, achieved through an absolute fidelity to one’s nature? Perhaps not, if the caterwauling outside our windows some nights is taken into account.

The subversive Enlightenment philosopher David Hume asserted that “the beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men”. He gave dignity to animals and reminded us of our reliance on animal instinct too. Ritchie Robertson defends the Enlightenment – the subject of his new book – against its contemporary critics who, he argues, are guilty of “presentism”, judging the past by the standards of the present. In her review Jane O’Grady argues that “left and right have (broadly) swapped sides”. The right who once mourned the trouncing of tradition now embrace the Enlightenment; the left reject it for its alleged collusion in the slave trade and imperialism.

The Enlightenment project that is the United States has recently been assailed by insurrectionists who scorned the constitution and resisted an orderly transfer of power. Readers who engaged with scholarly and enlightening articles by Sarah Churchwell, Eric Foner and Lawrence Douglas on American history and politics, published in the *TLS* last year, will have had a presentiment of what was to come long before many politicians and professional commentators. This is not a newspaper about current affairs, but sometimes we dig deep behind the headlines.

MARTIN IVENS
Editor

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Clockwise from top left: Behind the scenes photograph of *Some Kind of Heaven*; Jenny Erpenbeck, 2015; Villagers in Ein Harod Kibbutz, Israel; James Joyce by Jacques-Émile Blanche, 1935; “A Philosopher Giving that Lecture on the Orrery, in which a Lamp is put in place of the Sun”, by Joseph Wright of Derby, c.1766; Comedy Cellar, Manhattan, New York



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Missing in inaction

The inscrutable, alluring, complex
William Wordsworth

PAMELA CLEMIT

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

A Life

STEPHEN GILL

Second edition

688pp. Oxford University Press. £25 (US \$32.95).

RADICAL WORDSWORTH

The poet who changed the world

JONATHAN BATE

608pp. William Collins. £25.

WELL-KEPT SECRETS

The story of William Wordsworth

ANDREW WORDSWORTH

480pp. Pallas Athene. £24.95.

VITAL STREAM

LUCY NEWLYN

184pp. Carcanet. Paperback, £12.99.



William Wordsworth by
Sir William Boxall,
1831

WORDSWORTH WROTE to Sir George Beaumont in 1805 that it was “a thing unprecedented in Literary history that a man should talk so much about himself”. He was referring to the poem first published after his death in 1850 as *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet’s Mind* (a title chosen by his family), which is now regarded as his masterpiece and one of the great long poems in English literature. He needn’t have worried. In composing and revising his autobiographical poem over many years, he wrote thousands of words about himself while giving very little away.

The Prelude was not the only work held back from publication during Wordsworth’s life. His contemporary reputation was established by *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800) – the first volume conceived in collaboration with Coleridge – and *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), and consolidated by his long philosophical poem *The Excursion* (1814). But the process by which he became a great poet was hidden from all but a small group of like-minded friends. *Salisbury Plain*, with its outspoken criticism of social inequalities, was written in 1793–4 and revised from 1794 to 1799, but only an extract, “The Female Vagrant”, was published in the 1790s. *The Borderers* (1796–7), his tragedy on the French Revolution, remained unpublished until 1842. *The Ruined Cottage* (1797–8), described by Coleridge as “the finest poem in our Language”, and *The Pedlar* (1802–4), which Wordsworth merged, then separated, became known only through the revised texts published in *The Excursion*. The poems of Wordsworth’s silent apprenticeship were first made available comprehensively in the Cornell Wordsworth Edition (1975–2007), which enabled modern readers to form a just estimate of his originality. Even so, there is still no consensus about which poems should be read and taught.

Wordsworth’s early reticence in publishing also concealed from view his radical politics. In 1794 he wrote privately to his friend William Mathews that he belonged to “that odious class of men called democrats”. But he did not publish the republican pamphlet “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff”, written on his return to England in December 1792 after a momentous year in revolutionary France. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, when his latent conservatism kicked in, he was lambasted by

the younger Romantics for what they perceived as a political U-turn. But he never had a public identity as a radical. Even the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, which extends poetic sympathy to social outcasts, the disabled and the dispossessed, was published anonymously. “Wordsworth’s name is nothing”, Coleridge wrote to its publisher Joseph Cottle, urging caution: “mine stinks”.

Wordsworth’s entry into life as a published poet was complicated by events in his private life. When he settled in Orléans in December 1791, ostensibly to improve his French, he met Annette Vallon, an ardent royalist. She bore him a daughter a year later. The child was baptized as “Anne Caroline Wordswodsth” (*sic*) and legally acknowledged by her father, who returned to England shortly before her birth. Whatever Wordsworth’s intentions towards Annette and Caroline, the outbreak of war between France and Britain in February 1793 intensified the need for concealment – he had been sleeping with the enemy – and kept them apart. (The Peace of Amiens made it possible for them to meet again in 1802.) Wordsworth’s relationship with Annette and the existence of their child were known only to his closest friends and family members throughout his lifetime, after which the secret was hidden by biographers until George McLean Harper disclosed it in 1916.

There are further conundrums in Wordsworth’s personality. He famously celebrated “the self-sufficing power of solitude” and his poetry brims with images of creative autonomy: the invisible “single wren” which sang “So sweetly ’mid the gloom” of Furness Abbey, the “Boy of Winander” who “Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls”, the “solitary Highland Lass” singing as she reaps (“Will no one tell me what she sings?”). But he was seldom alone. His first walking tour in the Alps, in 1790, was undertaken with a companion, Robert Jones, with whom he later climbed Snowdon (an episode revisited in the final book of *The Prelude*). After he settled in the Lake District in 1799, he created a household of women to look after him: his sister Dorothy (from whom he had been separated in childhood), his wife Mary Hutchinson and his unmarried sister-in-law Sarah Hutchinson, “having every the minutest Thing”, Coleridge wrote jealously, “almost his very Eating & Drinking, done for him by his Sister, or Wife”. In later life, after

Dorothy became ill, the Sage of Rydal Mount drew emotional sustenance from his “beloved Friend, and heart-sister”, Isabella Fenwick, to whom he dictated notes about his poems in an effort to shape his image for posterity.

Friends provided tantalizing glimpses of the exterior man. Catherine Clarkson, writing in 1798, admired his “firm commanding figure ... as if he were born to be a great Prince or a great General”. William Hazlitt, looking back to the same year, remembered him as “Don Quixote-like”, with “striped pantaloons” and “a lounge in his gait”, speaking with “a strong tincture of the northern burr, like the crust on wine”. Dorothy Wordsworth, in her private journals, conveyed a privileged view of the poet at work, writing “To a Butterfly” at breakfast, “his Basin of Broth before him untouched ... his shirt neck unbuttoned, & his waistcoat open”. Robert Southey described him at a bonfire party on Skiddaw to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, strolling around in a red cloak and “equipped like a Spanish Don”. In 1824 Benjamin Robert Haydon called him an “old satyr”, with something “lecherous, animal & devouring in his face” – though that did not deter him from painting several fine portraits of the poet. But there is little record of the interior man. Wordsworth kept no diary and his letters conceal as much as they reveal. What he felt, thought and did is knowable only in part.

How might a biographer best tackle the inscrutable Wordsworth? Stephen Gill established the gold standard for Wordsworth biography thirty-two years ago. His *William Wordsworth: A Life* (1989) turned out to be only the starting point for a critical exploration that has culminated in a magnificent second edition, which displays the same qualities of quiet authority, tact and resistance to speculation, and thus merits consideration as a work in its own right. It takes in not only Gill’s further scholarship, in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998) and *Wordsworth’s Revisitings* (2011), a study of the poet’s revisionary practices, but the work of many others through the intervening years. Gill is generous in his tribute to John Worthen’s innovative *The Life of William Wordsworth* (TLS, November 6, 2015), from which he has borrowed the cover image: Haydon’s 1815 pencil draft of the poet’s head, for “Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem” (1820), which conveys a sense of intense, brooding self-containment.

Gill beats steadily against the current of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth tells the story of his discovery of his poetic vocation through his boyhood and early adult years. He cautions against over-reliance on its “palpable design”, which he compares to the providential economy of loss and gain in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850). Against this he sets a historically informed narrative of dispossession: Wordsworth’s loss of both parents by the age of thirteen, and the simultaneous loss of his family inheritance. His father John Wordsworth, land steward and law agent to Sir James Lowther, died intestate with his employer owing him a large sum of money. Lowther refused to honour the debt, which was not settled until 1803, reducing the five scattered Wordsworth children to dependence on a succession of relatives. The poet’s quest for rootedness drove his creativity.

Wordsworth’s “emergence as a writer”, with the “contexts, domestic and professional, in which his writings were produced, published, and received”, is Gill’s stated focus – but the reach of the book is much wider. He gives detailed attention to the historical events which shaped the career of a poet who once said that he gave “twelve hours’ thought to the condition and prospects of society, for one to poetry”. Ordinary life, too, keeps breaking in. After Wordsworth settled with his sister Dorothy at Grasmere in the winter of 1799, cultivating the kitchen garden, which Gill describes with satisfying precision, was as important as composing verse. “A divine morning”, Dorothy wrote on March 27, 1802: “At Breakfast Wm wrote part of an ode – Mr Olliff sent the Dung & Wm went to work in the garden”.

Gill finds it impossible to retell the story of Wordsworth’s life without also telling the stories of the

women whose lives were entwined with his. Dorothy lived under the same roof as her brother for over fifty years. She occupies a special position as the companion of his labours, the keeper of his secrets and the chronicler of family fortunes. Wordsworth paid tribute to her inspirational sensibility in “The Sparrow’s Nest”:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.

Many of Wordsworth’s lyric poems on natural phenomena, such as this one, were derided by reviewers of *Poems* (1807). When read alongside Dorothy’s journals, some appear as recollections of their Grasmere days and others as reconstructions of childhood experiences that brother and sister had not shared. The full meaning of the poems is visible only to intimates.

The intensity of the Wordsworths’ desire for a place they could call home is brought out time and again by Gill. Wordsworth, who had included in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) five “Poems on the Naming of Places”, woos Mary Hutchinson in 1801 by asking her to claim a feature in the Grasmere landscape: “You will recollect that there is a gate just across the road, directly opposite the firgrove ... Sara carved her cypher upon one of its bars ... We will find out another place for your cypher, but you must come and fix upon the place yourself”. Dorothy is captured in 1802 repeating the poem “This is the Spot” to her brother, “over & over again”, to lull him to sleep. Dorothy, again, writes in 1804 to Sir George and Lady Beaumont, godparents to Wordsworth’s newborn daughter Dorothy (Dora), thanking them for a gift of £10: “We shall lay out the money in planting a small plot of ground, which is to be Dorothy’s Grove ... the trees are to be the Child’s, her own”.

Gill’s revisitings culminate in an extended treatment of Wordsworth’s late-career poetic activity. In *Poems* (1815), his first collected edition, Wordsworth rejected a chronological arrangement in favour of thematic headings, such as “Poems of the Imagination” and “Poems Referring to the Period of Old Age”. He continued to reshape his poetic identity in successive collected editions, dropping poems, adding new ones and modifying others to bring them into line with his later Tory, Anglican values. Revision was also an impulse to fresh composition, beginning with *The River Duddon* (1820). A visit in 1831 to his dying friend Sir Walter Scott – described in one of the most powerful sections of Gill’s book – got him writing the poems collected in *Yarrow Revisited* (1835). The death of “the shepherd-poet” James Hogg, Wordsworth’s exact contemporary, prompted the superb *Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg* (1835). Such works, buttressed by the reissue of *The Excursion* in 1820, spoke to a new generation who were untroubled by Wordsworth’s political changes of heart. For nineteenth-century readers, he was both the pre-eminent poet of unregarded, humble lives and the laureate of the High Church Oxford Movement.

When Jonathan Bate reviewed the first edition of Gill’s book in 1989, he praised the author’s treatment of Wordsworth’s later life. However, in *Radical Wordsworth: The poet who changed the world*, Bate reverts to the old orthodoxy that Wordsworth wrote his best poetry before the age of forty, after which he fell into “political apostasy” and poetic decline. If you try to read a comprehensive account of his fourscore years, Bate now says, “the chances are that you will lose the will to live somewhere around the halfway mark”. He proposes an alternative literary history in which little would have been lost if Wordsworth had died at the age of thirty-six (like Byron), after falling through the ice on a frozen pond, perhaps unaware of Dorothy’s boast in her brother’s sixtieth year: “He is still the crack skater on Rydal Lake”.

Faced with Wordsworth’s obstinacy in living to the age of eighty, Bate provides a “deliberately fragmentary, momentary, selective” account of what he considers to be the high points of the poet’s career and posthumous reputation. He is chiefly interested in what Matthew Arnold called Wordsworth’s “healing

power”: the emotionally therapeutic value of his poetic representation of the natural world. John Stuart Mill famously attributed his recovery from youthful depression to a reading of Wordsworth’s *Poems* (1815). But first Wordsworth had to heal himself. In this interpretation, the “spots of time” in *The Prelude* are Freudian “screen memories”, moments in which the adult poet reconfigures childhood experiences of loss or disorientation as sources of imaginative renewal, “to which / I often would repair, and thence would drink / As at a fountain”. Bate, whose previous books include *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the environmental tradition* (1991), is also taken by Wordsworth’s pioneering role in landscape conservation. The poet’s lovingly detailed topographical work, *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* (1835), was one of the first systematic geographical studies of a region in the Atlantic archipelago, and his only bestseller.

Bate writes with infectious enthusiasm on those aspects of Wordsworth which appeal to him. He quotes generously from Dorothy, Coleridge and Hazlitt (the poet’s best contemporary critic), as well as from Wordsworth himself, urging us: “Slow down and savour their words. Better still, read them aloud”. But in dividing the poet’s oeuvre into good and bad, and warning us off the poems he dislikes, he risks selling his readers short. “Do not on any account begin with ‘To the Spade of a Friend’”, he writes. Those who disobey this injunction will encounter a wonderfully audacious poem, addressed to the spade of Wordsworth’s Quaker friend Thomas Wilkinson, a Westmorland “statesman”, or yeoman farmer, whose gardening labours he shared in 1806:

Spade! with which Wilkinson hath till’d his Lands,
And shap’d these pleasant walks by Emont’s side
Thou art a tool of honour in my hands;
I press thee through the yielding soil with pride.

Rare Master has it been thy lot to know;
Long hast Thou serv’d a Man to reason true;
Whose life combines the best of high and low,
The toiling many and the resting few ...

Wordsworth never minded getting his hands dirty. To write off his celebration of the dignity of manual labour is to exclude vital dimensions of his life and art.

Andrew Wordsworth, by contrast, presents a Wordsworth who, to adapt Walt Whitman’s phrase, is large and contains multitudes. A painter and sculptor, Andrew Wordsworth is descended from William’s younger brother, Christopher. *Well-Kept Secrets: The story of William Wordsworth*, his first book, is the product of many years’ study of his restless ancestor. He describes it as “not a biography, nor ... a work of scholarship ... I prefer to think of it as a portrait – of both the man and his work”. Whatever its genre, the book is a remarkably dexterous achievement, written with tact, discrimination and unassuming authority. It will appeal to anyone new to Wordsworth or interested in thinking about him in fresh ways. The “well-kept secrets” of the title are the existence of Wordsworth’s illegitimate daughter by Annette Vallon, and his unusual closeness to his sister Dorothy. This is merely Andrew Wordsworth’s cover story. His main subject is the best-kept secret of all: the poet’s baffling personality.

In a series of interconnected, loosely chronological essays, Andrew Wordsworth offers a stimulating and sometimes provocative reassessment of critical junctures in Wordsworth’s story. He rejects the view that Wordsworth’s acceptance in 1813 of the post of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, through the agency of Sir William Lowther, the heir to his father’s employer, was a betrayal of his youthful political convictions. Wordsworth’s fortunes had always been bound up with the landed gentry by virtue of his father’s work. In 1803, when Sir George Beaumont met Wordsworth, he gifted him a parcel of land (and offered friendship on equal terms). In the same year, Wordsworth received £8,500 from Lowther in settlement of the family claim. In 1812 Lowther offered Wordsworth an annuity of £100. Wordsworth’s appointment to the post of Distributor of Stamps

“
Wordsworth never minded getting his hands dirty. To write off his celebration of the dignity of manual labour is to exclude vital dimensions of his life and art

(revenue, not postage) simply reaffirmed existing ties of patronage.

Andrew Wordsworth is also an astute reader of Wordsworth’s tangled relationships with his “sister-wives”, a term drawn from the loco-descriptive poem dedicated to Dorothy, *An Evening Walk* (1793). Things reached a crisis in 1802 when Wordsworth sought to disengage from Annette Vallon in order to marry Mary Hutchinson, while renegotiating his relationship with Dorothy, who shared his home. Andrew Wordsworth is sensitive to the elegiac undertow of Dorothy’s Grasmere journal, begun in May 1800 after William and his brother John set off for Gallow Hill, in Yorkshire, to court Mary Hutchinson. Dorothy was left behind knowing that her exclusive relationship with her brother was coming to an end. When, in 1802, Dorothy and William went to Calais (via Gallow Hill) to visit Annette and his daughter Caroline (William married Mary Hutchinson on the way home), the siblings’ customary mode of sharing their experiences through writing was disrupted. William, seeking to dissociate himself from the past (and from France), composed poems on the road. Dorothy recollected her emotions in tranquillity after they got back.

However deftly biographers deal with the intellectual and emotional reconfigurations of 1802, many questions remain. The scholar and poet Lucy Newlyn is well placed to tackle them. Her books include *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (1986) and *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: ‘All in Each Other’* (2013). In *Vital Stream*, an accomplished sequence of 135 sonnets, Newlyn takes a strikingly original approach to Wordsworth’s complex personality by forging imaginatively into this threshold year. Her choice of the sonnet form is entirely appropriate. The sonnet was Wordsworth’s chosen mode of personal and political expression during the ten-week trip to Calais which is at the heart of her sequence.

Newlyn reimagines Wordsworth through his impact on those around him, and through their roles in shaping him. She is interested in creative and domestic tensions rather than political realignments. She draws on letters, poems, notebooks and journals to give voice to members of his intimate circle, as well as to Wordsworth himself. Wordsworth frets over his competing obligations to three women – Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson and Annette Vallon – and unwittingly hurts them all. Dorothy fears the loss of her private relationship with William. Mary fears she will never have one. In Calais, Annette knows she will never see William without “his chaperone”. Wordsworth’s sister remains at the emotional heart of the group, as Charles Lamb, another of Newlyn’s speakers, discerns in “Observing Dorothy with her Brothers”: “I see now how this little Grasmere clan / Survives, and thrives”. This is a story with a happy ending, like “Shakespeare’s pastoral plays”, which Dorothy reads to William to calm him before the trip. It culminates in the wedding journey home to Grasmere, where William imagines “absolute possession”.

Yet there is a counter-pull in Newlyn’s narrative towards losses that cannot be repaired, and possibilities closed off. Sara Coleridge, left alone at Keswick while her husband is with the Wordsworths, wonders, “Am I to blame for want of sympathy?” Coleridge, after Wordsworth’s marriage, reacts like an abandoned lover: “He left me long ago and far behind / ... / My heart is broken. Nothing puts it right”. His sympathies are all with Wordsworth’s brother John (“Shut out, unrecompensed, still wandering on”), who, on learning of the marriage, wrote to Mary Hutchinson renouncing his own love for her. Annette’s words, in “After Parting”, signal a final abandonment:

He stood beside the door just as he stood
That day in Orléans ten years ago,

But this time knowing that he left for good.

Caroline, the daughter Wordsworth first met in Calais and the “Dear Child!” of his 1802 sonnet, “It is a beautiful Evening”, speaks of “Papa ... pacing up and down / The beach ... / And muttering. (He didn’t notice me.)” The unknowable Wordsworth has somewhere to get to and strides calmly on. ■

Pamela Clemit is Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London and a Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford

Ernest Bevin

The reviews of books about Ernest Bevin and Winston Churchill juxtaposed on two pages of the December 18 and 25 issue of the *TLS* prompt a question. Now that the re-evaluation of the record and reputation of Churchill is seemingly well along, why are accounts of the career of Bevin still hagiographic? His reputation as a great foreign secretary was created by the Conservative Foreign Office officers who guided him and whose policies - continued from those of Churchill - he implemented, often in direct opposition to the anti-colonialism of Attlee, his own prime minister. His virtues as a labour organizer and leader must be balanced against his role in helping to end the General Strike on the government's terms, terms that left the mining communities to be starved into submission. Revisionists need look no further than Alan Bullock's magisterial biography for the material from which to work.

■ **Michael Holzman**
Briarcliff Manor, New York

T. G. Otte provides an excellent summary of Andrew Adonis's new *Life of Bevin*. Missing from it, however, is reference to the somewhat unlikely, collaborative and frustrated relationship that Bevin had with Keynes. Bevin served with Keynes on the Macmillan Committee, created by the prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, in 1930 to offer a framework for understanding the Slump and devising relevant policy responses that might overcome the paralysis imposed by the Treasury. Keynes, backed by Bevin, won the intellectual debate but lost the policy war. The reciprocal respect of Bevin and Keynes, who came from polar ends of British society, is a tribute to each.

■ **William H. Janeway**
Cambridge

Spain and Latin America

In "Germ Warfare" (January 1), Ronald Wright ridicules the view that the Spanish conquests "have been unfairly damned by modern standards". With reference to the sixteenth-century Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas, he writes that "the same standards were being upheld in their own day". This inference could hardly be more mistaken. Of course, nobody denies the importance of Las Casas's works - I use them extensively and they are central to my argument - but Las Casas was very much a man of his time, and many of his polemical tracts contain gross exaggerations that should be read in context rather than accepted as facts.

Wright clearly prefers the latter approach, and on spurious grounds dismisses as "contorted" my opinion that early modern Spain "was not the cruel, backward, obscurantist and bigoted myth of legend". From there he proceeds to highlight various alleged errors, such as his attempt to rebut my "staggering claim" that the system established by the conquistadors and their successors survived for nearly 300 years without any major rebellions. He mistakenly assumes I am referring to "Spain's three-century empire" and this prompts the question: "William the Silent? Tupac Amaru II?" The first is clearly irrelevant; the second is part of a set of revolts that began to spread in the late eighteenth century as a direct response to the dismantling of that very system. At that time, Bourbon ministers enraged indigenous communities, alongside many other groups, with their concerted efforts to turn the Spanish American kingdoms into proper "colonies" along the lines of French mercantilism. In other words, Tupac Amaru II is a product, and a defender, of the very system that Wright is so keen to condemn.

Other alleged errors are plainly contrived, such as Wright's startling claim that I have "so little interest in indigenous culture that one seldom gets a sense of who or what the conquerors were conquering"; that when writing about indigenous civilizations I "can't resist highlighting their most shocking practices"; and that

when "at times" I mention "Spanish atrocities" I "skip many of the worst". Atrocities accompanied the conquistadors wherever they went and, as Matthew Restall, the doyen of Spanish conquest historiography, wrote in a recent review of my book, "Cervantes seldom shies away from detailing and condemning them".

It would be idle to dwell on the many other alleged errors Wright highlights, merely to attribute his own muddled thinking to me.

■ **Fernando Cervantes**
University of Bristol

I was interested to read the Editor's observations on the persistence of the "Black Legend" of Spanish bigotry and intolerance in traditional Anglo-American historiography. In this regard, I would say that the scant attention Ronald Wright gave to Fernando Cervantes's *Conquistadores* in his review of new books on the Spanish conquest of the Americas will have reinforced the biased perceptions that have dogged accounts of this phase of European expansion. Wright concentrated on the disasters caused by "germ warfare" and the destructive impact of the Spanish invasions on the indigenous peoples but, on the other hand, it is disappointing that he did not engage with Cervantes's endeavour to set the process of conquest, settlement and government more fully within the context of its times. Cervantes's book struck me as a fair-minded, scholarly attempt to analyse the mindset of these early-modern imperialists, as well as the political and religious culture of the Spanish monarchy, in order to understand how there could have emerged in such vast, far-flung territories, numerous hybrid societies which proved to be extraordinarily loyal, stable and resilient over some 300 years. It is unfortunate that this many-faceted question did not receive a far more considered and balanced review in the *TLS*.

■ **Edwin Williamson**
Exeter College, Oxford

Cultured Coventry

I enjoyed Jay Winter's review of *Prisoners of History: What monuments to the Second World War tell us about our history and ourselves* by Keith Lowe (November 27). However, I would query the description of Coventry's rebuild-

ing as "shabby urban renewal in the postwar decades". This hardly does justice to the remarkable regeneration that took place in the city from even before the war's end to the early 1970s as succinctly set out in *Coventry: The making of a modern city 1939-73* by Jeremy and Caroline Gould. During this time Coventry was seen nationally and internationally as a template for urban regeneration. I make no particular comment about the city's current state - "shabby" or otherwise - but I do believe that both local and national authorities should pay more regard to promoting the achievements of the post-war years. Coventry being the UK City of Culture for 2021 is the ideal opportunity to showcase those achievements.

■ **Nick Doyle**
Leamington Spa

Shakespeare and invention

Bart van Es on two apparently opposed theories of literary creativity (December 11) gives us an illuminating short history of invention and intertextuality from Cicero to Kristeva. I especially admired his apposite quotation from Sonnet 59. But his reading of that first quatrain seems problematic. The main clause in the second line, "how are our brains beguiled", is an asser-

tion, not a question, a basic proposition about how new ideas have always been created. The fourth line of the third quatrain, "whether revolution be the same", qualifies the matter by implying that neither the old original nor the new recreation is necessarily superior to the other. This rejection of invention *de novo* informs Shakespeare's plays, only one of which is not transformed from an earlier source (that we know of now). It also underlies the entire enterprise of English literature from *Beowulf* to *Ulysses* and beyond, as the "former child" gives birth continually to the new.

■ **Leigh Clark**
Granada Hills, CA

Mandelstam and Stalin

Gregory Freidin, in his review of Andrew Kahn's *Mandelstam's Worlds* (December 11), argues that a balanced view of the poet's politics would have required more attention to his "Stalin epigram" of 1933, in which he "defined Stalin for all time as a shiny-booted, cockroach-moustached, worm-fingered tyrant...". Freidin likens the encounter between Mandelstam and Stalin to the passing of two ships - one a canoe and the other a dreadnought. In the reputational sphere, the canoe swamps the

dreadnought (even though Mandelstam lost his life in the process). But Freidin has recounted only part, and perhaps the less interesting part, of how Mandelstam's words made Stalin a cockroach for all time. By invoking Stalin's cockroach whiskers, Mandelstam hitched his canoe to a much more robust vessel - Kornei Chukovsky's "The Monster Cockroach" (*Tarakanishche*). Published in 1923, this work was later suppressed under Stalin. It would nonetheless have been well known in intelligentsia families with children, and it came out of the closet as a classic during the Khrushchev Thaw. Chukovsky's cockroach tyrant reduces animals and bugs to abject servility until it is eaten by a bird. Sergei Chekhonin's illustrations show the dictator roach with exaggerated supersized antennae projecting whisker-like from its head.

Chukovsky may or may not have had Stalin in mind in 1923 (I argue in *The Firebird and the Fox: Russian culture under tsars and Bolsheviks* that he most likely did), but Mandelstam had only to conjure up the cockroach moustache for his readers to associate his Kremlin mountaineer fully with Chukovsky's roach-tyrant. Mandelstam also cites the mountaineer's "thin-necked" followers, evoking Chukovsky's earlier description of the roach's "thin legs". Had Mandelstam's "Stalin epigram" been a lone canoe, it is doubtful that it could have sailed on with such lasting impact. With assistance from Chukovsky's *Monster Cockroach*, however, the image of Stalin as "a shiny-booted, cockroach-moustached, worm-fingered, murderous tyrant" circulated and endured.

■ **Jeffrey Brooks**
Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MA

Keats's error

In his review of Erica McAlpine's *The Poet's Mistake* (January 1), Graeme Richardson states that it was not until forty-five years after publication that someone noticed Keats's error in placing "stout Cortez" on that mountain in Panama. Tennyson had mentioned the mistake to Francis Turner Palgrave, who placed the correction in a footnote to *The Golden Treasury* (1861). The mishap was not quite so long in being detected, however, as I pointed out in *Dickinson's Nerves, Frost's Woods* (2018). In 1845, only twenty-nine years after Keats published the poem, an anonymous reviewer of Leigh Hunt's new edition of *Imagination and Fancy* (*British Quarterly Review* 1, 576-7) spotted the error and suggested that it be corrected "in future editions of Keats".

■ **William Logan**
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MONEY FOR NOTHING

The South Sea Bubble and the invention of modern capitalism

THOMAS LEVENSON

480pp. Head of Zeus. £20.

US: Penguin Random House. \$30.



“The South Sea Bubble, a Scene in Change Alley in 1720” by Edward Matthew Ward, 1847

ALITTLE HISTORY is a dangerous thing. If you know something about the past, analogies with the present proliferate. Was 2020 like 1720? No, it was more like 1933! Maybe 1968? In financial and economic history - fields based on model building, with the goal of planning for the future on the basis of past results - the temptation to compare across time and space is especially strong. The yield on those comparisons is highly variable, however. One tradition - launched by the Scottish journalist Charles Mackay when he wrote about the South Sea Scheme of 1720 at the peak of the 1840s railway boom - treats stock-market bubbles as “extraordinary popular delusions”, episodes of crowd madness no more logical than witch hunts. A different, newer approach proposes that bubbles result when individuals make sound decisions on the basis of imperfect information; if only we all knew everything, there would be no bubbles.

William Quinn and John Turner’s brilliant *Boom and Bust: A global history of financial bubbles* plumps neither for irrational exuberance nor for rational markets. Instead it insists that bubbles are not all the same; studying how they differ reveals as much as modelling how they coincide. Distilling vast amounts of research with crystalline clarity, Quinn and Turner show that while certain structural factors - marketability of an asset, availability of money or credit, likelihood of speculative investment - are crucial for any bubble, their actual effects depend on context.

It matters who speculates, on what, with what means. A bubble in which large numbers of middle- and working-class people borrow in order to invest - such as the US stock market in the late 1920s, or sub-prime housing in the early 2000s - has devastating social and political consequences in a way that the dot-com and railway bubbles did not. The collapse of Australian land prices in the late 1880s, when property values in suburban Melbourne had increased twentyfold in three years, ruined tens of thousands and plunged the country into a long and deep depression. A few years later, British start-ups and investors rushed into the bicycle business: nearly 400 new firms were floated in 1896 alone. At a time when the stock market overall was flat, cycle shares more than doubled in value in less than six months. Yet when the “bicycle bubble did not so much burst as suffer a slow puncture” (this is a witty book, as well as a very good one), few were hurt. Buying into the bicycle craze had been cheap, banks and other financial intermediaries had not been involved and the resulting glut, then shortage, of bicycles had few negative knock-on effects. To the

contrary: by helping to lower bicycle prices, the bubble may have had beneficial effects for public health and environment.

Written with exquisite concision and packing a wealth of detail and citation into each chapter, *Boom and Bust* is an instant classic. Ranging from John Law’s Mississippi Company to the Japanese economy in the 1980s, and putting the past forty years of financialization in the context of developments before Thatcher and Reagan, its chief insights come from comparing all of these examples. Quinn and Turner rightly distinguish between technological bubbles and those that are fundamentally political in origin (the South Sea Scheme, which took long-term government debt in exchange for shares, and the rapid growth of Chinese equity markets are two examples of the latter), but they are also extremely sharp about how the consequences of both have changed across time and space. Increasingly easy incorporation (or, in the case of China, the privatization of formerly state-owned firms), and a widening market for shares or fractions thereof - seen in everything from American Liberty Bonds during the First World War to online day trading today - have made the booms and busts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries quantitatively and qualitatively different from earlier ones. What we have today is not the “popular” delusion mocked by Mackey, but a *mass* phenomenon, where mass refers - as it does in “mass manufacture” and “mass culture” - to something created under capitalism. As Quinn and Turner note, mass media have in fact played a crucial role in all the bubbles of the past century and a half, either by puffing and amplifying rumour, or by muckraking and bursting bubbles.

The UK edition of Thomas Levenson’s engaging *Money for Nothing* has *and the invention of modern capitalism* in its subtitle, but the word is not central to his analysis and the US edition carries a more accurate subtitle, *The scientists, fraudsters, and corrupt politicians who reinvented money, panicked a nation, and made the world rich*. Regardless of subtitle, Levenson’s subject is not modern capitalism, but western financial markets and public debt. Still, many authors throw the words “modern” and “capitalism” around more freely than they should and *Money for Nothing* offers as fine a “thick description” of the first bubble as exists for the non-specialist reader.

Levenson is very good on the deep history of the bubble, starting his story not in 1719 or 1720, but decades earlier, in 1665, when Isaac Newton fled Cambridge and the plague. Newton, a key figure in Levenson’s two previous books, famously spent his

quarantine year inventing calculus and developing the foundations of modern physics - breakthroughs usually seen as the very opposite of irrational exuberance or Newton’s own alchemical pursuits. Building on recent scholarship and especially the work of his MIT colleague William Deringer, Levenson proposes instead that we see the era’s scientific accomplishments and speculative bubbles as equal manifestations of a newly mathematical way of knowing and being. If the motion of planets and the flight of cannonballs obeyed “natural” laws - laws that human beings did not formulate, but *discovered* and described - then so too might (must!) the value of investments and the behaviour of crowds.

Combining histories of finance and science, Levenson’s book is also a political history. Factional competition made the South Sea Company a Tory counterweight to the (Whig) Bank of England. Private companies, both nonetheless had extremely close ties to public finance: the Bank’s charter gave it a monopoly on most kinds of note issue in exchange for lending to the Crown, while the South Sea Company became the South Sea “Scheme” when it promised to accept discounted government debt at face value for stock. With some creative bookkeeping, prominent supporters and a host of innovations increasing its marketability (including margin trading, derivatives, and just about everything we know today), stock in the Company rose tenfold in just six months.

Levenson tells a good story, which he peoples with many of the era’s best known figures. Samuel Pepys, Edmond Halley, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope, Robert Walpole, William Hogarth and, of course, Isaac Newton are all here, along with some less familiar figures (such as the wealthy deficit hawk John Pollexfen Bastard and the argumentative calculator Archibald Hutcheson). Despite the work of Amy Froide and Anne Laurence on early female investors, women are largely absent. Missing too is the broader international context - the biggest bubble economy of 1720-21 was in the Netherlands and the Company was called “South Sea” for a reason. As a rival to the East India Company, it was set up to trade enslaved Africans to the Spanish Empire.

Levenson and his publisher surely planned this book for the 300th anniversary of the South Sea Bubble; they cannot have intended for it to coincide with a global pandemic. Yet while the word “plague” does not figure in the book’s subtitle or even index, the phenomenon recurs repeatedly in the text: it occasions Newton’s retreat to Lincolnshire and prompts special interest in mortality figures (from which William Petty and Edmond Halley calculate life expectancies and develop early actuarial tables). Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year* (1721) is both a fictional diary of the epidemic of 1665-6 and a commentary on the previous year, showing how individual choices (buy or sell? isolate, or gather in groups?) have social consequences. And, sadly, plague was also the other big news story of 1720, killing half the people of Marseilles and taking a serious toll in other French cities as well. In the eighteenth century, France and Britain recovered from plague and bubble alike. Only time will tell if we will be so fortunate. ■

“What we have today is a mass phenomenon, where mass refers - as it does in ‘mass manufacture’ and ‘mass culture’ - to something created under capitalism

Rebecca L. Spang is Professor of History at Indiana University, where she directs the Liberal Arts and Management Program. Her most recent book is *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution*, 2015

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Pet theories

How we can lighten our load by learning from our cats

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FELINE PHILOSOPHY

Cats and the meaning of life

JOHN GRAY

128pp. Allen Lane. £20.

YEARS AGO, MY BROTHER, an ardent vegan, wrote to the Vegan Society for advice on a plant-only diet for his cat. We do not, they replied, approve of the keeping of cats.

John Gray opens his latest book by mocking a philosopher for attempting to keep his cat on a meat-free diet. Other philosophers have claimed that the natural world would be much improved if it contained only herbivores. For Gray, such ambitions are emblematic of human hubris, whose sources and consequences he has spent a career teasing out of our intellectual history. If his previous works have struck some as fulminating and misanthropic, this latest volume is gentler and a tad more constructive. Gray's object is to teach "how to lighten the load that comes with being human" by learning from the cat. There is a pleasing wit in the conception: pouncing from the author's *Straw Dogs* to land all fours on the crisis of confidence in the liberal consensus, the fashion for mindfulness and, of course, the reason for which human beings invented the internet: our obsession with cats.

Gray is not alone among contemporary philosophers in trying to learn lessons from other animals, understood as particular species and individuals. In the 1980s, Vicki Hearne's *Adam's Task: Calling animals by name* (1986) built on her professional experience as a horse and dog trainer. Later, Raymond Gaita's *The Philosopher's Dog* (2002) took lessons about what it is to know another creature from his dog Gypsy, and Mark Rowland's *The Philosopher and the Wolf* (2008) thought about ethics and time through his life with a wolf called Brenin. In lectures, published as *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), Jacques Derrida agonized about what it was to be the naked object of the unnamable gaze of his cat Logos. Recently, Peter Godfrey-Smith and Sy Montgomery have reflected on encounters with octopuses, captive and wild. What unites these works is that, rather than imposing some philosophical framework onto an abstract class of capital-A Animals, their philosophical investigations into the human animal - mind, meaning and morals - are conducted only through the particularities of their close lived experience with



Jacques Derrida and his cat, Logos

non-human creatures. It is salutary, or ought to be, to see how few philosophical shibboleths survive encounters with animals in the particular.

Gray's volume sits somewhat uneasily in this company. The book is clearly motivated by an abiding love of cats but Gray's own companionship is sidelined in favour of literary sources of feline encounters. Cats Saha, Ming, Lily, and others are drawn from Colette, Patricia Highsmith, Junichiro Tanizaki, Mary Gaitskill, Nicolai Berdyaev, Doris Lessing and more. The cat lovers Michel de Montaigne, Samuel Johnson and Arthur Schopenhauer and the Stoics, Epicureans, Taoists and Zen Buddhists put in illuminating appearances. But this rather adds to the sense of an already scripted drama of ideas being played out, rather than a genuine process of reflection on particular relationships with individual animals.

Still, the experience is brusquely entertaining. Gray offers well-timed scratches at tender bits of the human psyche and sinks some sharp teeth into a few of our most cherished self-conceptions - in particular, our conceptions of ourselves as rational, ethical, transcendent over nature. Yet for someone so grimly opposed to hubristic narratives and metaphysical fictions, Gray appears to be rather too given to them himself. His diagnosis of our ills, individually and as a species, trades heavily on the traditional distinction - one enshrined in the mirror-recognition test beloved of animal sciences - between the merely conscious non-human and the fully self-conscious human.

The story is this: all but the most positivistic hold-outs in the animal and ethological sciences contend that many other animals are conscious: they certainly have some kind of experience, perhaps much more complex than we think. All but the most die-hard supernaturalists hold that we too are animals. The more the still-new animal sciences have looked, the more we have discovered that the supposedly unique features of the human - tool-use, cultural transmission, meaning-rich communication - are evident in other species.

But, so the story goes, we humans are not just conscious but, uniquely, self-conscious. We can take as objects of our conscious states not just bits of the world, but our conscious states themselves. We generate a sense of ourselves as an enduring thing in the world: a Self. Animals we may be, but our kind of relation to the world represents something wholly original in nature. Human self-consciousness is now conceived not as a quirky outcome of natural processes but as a metaphysical innovation of cosmic significance.

Early on, Gray wants to undermine this narrative: he offers a sense of the diversity and contingency of living, experiencing beings that would make the contrast between "mere" consciousness and self-awareness look crudely drawn and empirically undersupported. But when he comes to the other side of the story - why self-awareness is our undoing - that full-blown contrast reasserts itself.

With that more traditional turn comes a familiar lapsarian story, this time with a Buddhist twist. With

“
Gray sees the domestic cat as a Buddhist ideal: serenity achieved through an absolute fidelity to one's nature

Ian Ground is a Research Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire and is Vice-President of the British Wittgenstein Society

self-consciousness - the original sin - comes awareness with its attendant anxieties of mortality and finitude. It is "reflexive self-consciousness that engenders the special wretchedness of the human animal". It divides us against ourselves and against the world. To assuage those anxieties we seek happiness and, through religion or philosophy, meaning. We harbour ambitions about escaping our own nature, dreaming fitfully of moral perfection, of individual immortality or scientific omniscience. But these recourses are, by Gray's lights, fantasies. We are advised to embrace anti-philosophies that remind us of our finitude, and ethical perspectives that make us as comfortable as we can be with being as uncomfortable as we must be. Even so, as a sceptic about reason, Gray thinks that we cannot be argued out of our fantasies. Instead, reflection on the lives of the beings who stand in contrast to us provides the necessary therapy. Cats, pre-eminently, teach us the noble truths we need.

Some of what Gray wants to say here could be said about any non-human animal. Lacking self-consciousness, non-human animals are present in the world more completely than we are. They inhabit nature fully whereas we are always dislocated, at a right angle, from it. Indeed, we are destroying it. It is tempting, seeing the documentary about blue whales cruising through the very oceans that we are poisoning, to think: "Would the world not be a better place without us?" The temptation rarely survives a glance at our children.

A familiar thought is that domestic cats are both intimately in our world and yet also of another. Their liminality hits us like a change of aspect: first, familiar, cuddly companion; then, visiting alien from a world - what the ethologist Jakob von Uexküll called an organism's Umwelt - beyond our ken. Dogs are different, less unknowable, except perhaps when they are engaged in their complex and subtle "play bow" rituals or fully immersed in a temporally extended, olfactory world.

Gray sees the domestic cat as a Buddhist ideal: serenity achieved through an absolute fidelity to one's nature. "Life as the cat they happen to be is meaning enough for them", he writes. "Humans, on the other hand, cannot help looking for meaning beyond their lives." This thought might indeed do one some good, as one sits worrying about people, politics and pandemic, idly tickling a feline ear. But one wonders if it is built on an equivocation. If, as Gray laments, we are meaning-hungry creatures but cats *don't need* this kind of meaning in their lives, the question of whether they have *meaning* from their mere being in the world simply should not arise. We might wonder too, if we are to be true to our natures, whether that should include embracing our anxiety-ridden, divided condition.

Perhaps Gray misjudges the comfortable being of cats, too. Aspects of the world that *do* bother cats and that *do* create salience, significance and stress in their worlds are invisible to us: olfactory upheaval when a new cat turns up, or leaves the territory; the subtleties of blinks, rubbings and the appropriate angling of ears. As we sit on our sofas, cat on mat or lap, we are ignorant of the cat's wider 280-degree view of the world, its perception structured not by the ponderous objects or enduring processes of the human Umwelt but by the permanent possibility of small things moving at speed, demanding response.

The lessons that Gray wants us to learn from the cat, as well as from other kinds of creature in all their multiplicity, are available in part because we remain blind to the internal dynamics of their lives. The endeavour to make that weft tangible in the case of cats and other species is not a philosophical absurdity but a matter of arduous and painstaking empirical work. It is only in the past sixty years or so that ethologists have begun to show us the kind of complex interactions and associated perceptual, cognitive and affective economies that structure the lives of the creatures with whom we share the world. It would be hubris indeed to think that we can already know what philosophical lessons we should learn. ■

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Not thinking but feeling

What the Enlightenment really meant, and how it undid itself

JANE O'GRADY

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The pursuit of happiness 1680–1790

RITCHIE ROBERTSON

1,008pp. Allen Lane. £40.

HISTORIANS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT have no need, at the moment, to plead their topic's relevance. What Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno asked in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944) is now far from academic. Was the Enlightenment a movement that sought, through sceptical enquiry, to break the chains of religious and political repression, exalt individual reasoning and advance scientific knowledge; or was the "Reason" it vaunted largely rationalization, its universalism a stalking-horse for racism, enslavement and colonization, with the Holocaust and eco-devastation its inevitable results?

These questions now extend far beyond the academy into the heart of the culture wars, which, in turn, have impacted the academy. Scholarly wrangles over when and where the Enlightenment happened, who its true luminaries were, what epitomizes it and how to apportion praise have always indicated the politics of their proponents. But, recently, the right and left have (broadly) swapped sides. The very people who tended to mourn its trouncing of tradition and its disenchantment of the world - and who surely would have been retrograde and oppositional during the Enlightenment itself - now embrace it. Those likely to have been, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its enthusiasts cannot reconcile talk of freedom, sensibility and reason with the slave trade and colonialism. For many, whether or not they have read Jonathan Israel's books, there isn't even a "Radical" and a "Moderate" Enlightenment. "Enlightenment" *tout court* is a misnomer.

Ritchie Robertson's encyclopedic account serves to rebut that slur. Critics of the Enlightenment, he argues, are guilty of "presentism" - judging the past by the standards of the present; which is all the more unfair since it is largely thanks to Enlighteners (as he calls them) that 200 years later we have the standards we accuse them of lacking. Admitting that there is some justice to anti-Enlightenment criticisms, he insists that these have nonetheless been exaggerated, partly due to "insufficient knowledge of what was really said, written and done". Thus, nineteenth-century imperialism is mistakenly projected backwards into the eighteenth century. In fact, Enlightenment writers "agree in denouncing colonialism and conquest"; and it was Abbé Raynal's indignant history of the East and West Indies that inspired Toussaint L'Ouverture to organize a slave revolt.

What is called "the age of reason" should properly be considered "the age of feeling, sympathy and sensibility", argues Robertson. The opposition between reason and tradition, which was crucial to the Enlightenment, has been conflated with an opposition between reason and emotion, which was not. These are fairly standard points, as is highlighting the role of "sensibility" in Enlightenment ethics, and how Francis Hutcheson, Lord Shaftesbury and



David Hume variously argued that emotion, rather than reason, was, and should be, both the spur to, and the foundation for, moral behaviour. More original is Robertson's fine-grained portrayal of how both reason and emotion were recalibrated in the Enlightenment. This readjustment was, he argues, effected less by philosophy than fiction - specifically the epistolary novel, which had more immediacy than novels with retrospective or detached narration. By presenting their characters' experience as it happened, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* fostered emotional insight, enabling what Shaftesbury called "the sense of fellowship" to bud out of philosophical theory into visceral actuality. In a case of life imitating art, real-life love letters of the time tended to be less spontaneous effusions of sentiment than a means of emotional training for both the writer and the written-to. Emotion thus educated was important both intrinsically and instrumentally. It became "felt thought", fuelling advocacy for the abolition of slavery and of public executions. Robert Burns's lines addressing a "wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie" as a "fellow-mortal" express, claims Robertson, "a difficult moral insight, which needed a century of sentimental reflection and emotion in order to be formed".

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see ourselves as ithers see us!" exclaimed Burns. He owned a copy of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (says Robertson), and was probably echoing his fellow Scot's notion of the "impartial spectator" that we should imagine overlooking and arbitrating our behaviour. Impartial spectatorship of human interactions may sound cold and calculating to us now, but Smith envisaged it as the outgrowth of "sympathy". Not that "sympathy" (an eighteenth-century term of art, differently used by different thinkers) quite referred to a feeling, or to something like empathy (a term only coined in the nineteenth century). For Smith, who invoked it in both his ethics and economics, "sympathy" was, rather, an apprehension of other people's feelings, which, in turn, promoted a more objective, dispassionate assessment of their dues and an adjustment of one's own emotions and self-importance accordingly - a two-way bridge between emotion and reason.

As "emotion" became more reasonable, "reason" was used less often for rarefied, impersonal, Platonic logical operations than for "common sense" - an activity, both subjective and intersubjective, employed in the joint enterprise of seeking truth; and, in Cicero's quoted words, "consonant with nature". Hume's *Treatise* is "a central Enlightenment work", says Robertson, partly because "it plays off these two versions of reason against each other: a narrowly cerebral pursuit of truth, which can lead one into strange deserts of abstraction; and a social conception of reason and judgement that

"The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth Monsters" by Francisco Goya, 1799

“It is largely thanks to Enlighteners (as Robertson calls them) that 200 years later we have the standards we accuse them of lacking

Jane O'Grady has written a book on Enlightenment philosophy, 2019, and is the co-editor, with A. J. Ayer, of *Blackwell's Dictionary of Philosophical Quotations*, 1994. She teaches philosophy and writes philosophers' obituaries for the *Guardian*

reunites one with ordinary human living".

The "pursuit of happiness" that Thomas Jefferson declared to be the right of everyone (except women and slaves, of course) was also championed by the revolutionary Louis Antoine de Saint-Just. "Happiness", to Enlighteners, was less a luxury, an individual, subjective, ephemeral feeling, than (in the Aristotelian eudaimonic sense) a condition of flourishing extended over a lifetime. Intellectuals and administrators dovetailed in pursuing "public happiness". The practical Enlightenment sought to improve laws, agriculture, medicine, child-rearing, education and social amenities for all. We remember the comprehensive *Encyclopédie* for its coverage of philosophy and history; but it also included long sections on the "mechanical arts", foundries, machinery, instrument-making, guilds, astronomy and navigation.

In all this material improvement, Enlighteners were not, argues Robertson, dedicated to abolishing religion but to transforming it, eliminating fear, superstition and bigotry. As humans became more rational and tolerant, so did God. Most human souls were not, after all, likely to end up in Hell; Heaven, apparently, had room for more than had been previously expected; the "elect" was not so exclusive. Thunder, lightning and comets dwindled from divine punishments into natural phenomena; the existence of witches became questionable. Robertson's account deftly illustrates, however, that religion's destruction was inherent in its transformation. The Reformation, in suggesting alternative interpretations of doctrine, had fragmented Christianity and thereby weakened faith. Erasmus had already declared that many religious matters were *adiaphora* ("things indifferent"). But this was the thin end of the wedge. As religious niceties came to seem arbitrary and dispensable, so did religion itself. By fostering the "innerness of devotion", Protestantism made religion "an inner disposition that could be maintained by anyone anywhere". Toleration, as the bishop of Worcester Edward Stillingfleet objected, was "a Trojan Horse". Talk of the sanctity of the individual conscience was the first step to William Temple's pronouncement that "belief is no more in a man's power than his stature or his feature".

"As soon as religion seeks help from philosophy, its doom is inevitable", wrote Heinrich Heine in 1834. Philosophy, in postulating an innate moral sense and natural moral sentiments, rendered divine revelation superfluous - and not just for discovering morality, but even for uncovering truth, which was itself becoming increasingly uncertain. For Enlighteners, humanity's lodestar is reason, not faith. Yet sensibility is also central. Far from being "just another faculty", it, rather than reason, is what underlies and determines all the others:

We do not just contemplate the world, think about it, acquire knowledge of it; we relate to it also through our feelings, our hopes, our fears. As the capacity to feel, sensibility is where all our faculties come together. It makes it possible to understand humanity as a whole being, no longer divided between body and soul.

Though the existence of the "soul", of course, would soon be thought dubious.

The Enlightenment was, as Ritchie Robertson argues, "the seedbed in which many of [our current] values germinated". Our very tendency to critique and condemn ourselves is its legacy. But what Robertson perhaps insufficiently emphasizes is how much the Enlightenment contained the seeds of its own demise. "Sensibility" is both civilizing and naturalizing; it cuts both ways. In asserting that "the beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men", Hume was not just conferring dignity onto animals; he was also exposing humans' unacknowledged reliance on instinct and their essential animality - an exposure that would generate Darwinism and Freudianism in the nineteenth century, and the denial of the mind in the twentieth. In the Enlightenment, we seemed to reach the apex of Reason, and, as a result, realized that we aren't as rational, or as capable of dispassionate judgement, as we had thought. ■

Epiphanies and kidneys

The origins and preoccupations of the Joyce Industry

ZACHARY LEADER

JAMES JOYCE AND THE MATTER OF PARIS
CATHERINE FLYNN

252pp. Cambridge University Press. £25 (US \$34.99).

JAMES JOYCE AND THE JESUITS
MICHAEL MAYO

234pp. Cambridge University Press. £75 (US \$99.99).

PANEPIPHANAL WORLD

James Joyce's epiphanies
SANGAM MACDUFF

312pp. University Press of Florida. \$75.

ALMOST EIGHTY YEARS after Joyce's death, the Joyce Industry is as active as ever. Joyce would have approved. In 1932, in a letter to his friend Frank Budgen, he bragged: "Nine persons seem to be doing books on me". The Industry was born in America, and was largely a creation of the postwar period. In 1950, Oliver St John Gogarty, the model for Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, called the United States "the chief infirmary for Joyceans", the locus of "that unique class who think that the unravelling of an enigma or a puzzle

is the height of poetry". That this class was academic, in Frank Kermode's words, Joyce "foresaw ... when he kept adding to his puzzles, saying that he would ensure his fame by keeping the professors happy".

The American origins of the Joyce Industry have been variously explained. The expansion of American higher education was a key factor (rising from 14 per cent of the population in 1940 to 40 per cent in 1964). So, too, the wealth of American universities, enabling the acquisition of important Joyce manuscripts (by Cornell University, Buffalo, Harvard and Yale). The hostility or indifference of English critics has also been cited, often in relation to the influence of F. R. Leavis, for whom Joyce lacked "deeply serious purpose". *Ulysses* might be the work of a "genius", Leavis admitted, but it was riddled with "inorganic elaborations and pedantries"; *Finnegans Wake* was "not worth the labour of reading".

In Martin Amis's recently published *Inside Story*, in one of its "How to Write" sections, the Leavis view, very much out of favour in English Departments, is given a comic turn. "If you ever paid a call on Anthony Trollope", Amis writes, of the "master social realist" and most English of novelists, "I'm sure you'd be suavely received ... he would greet you with an alert and inquisitive eye,

and would want to stimulate you into vividness." Amis is talking metaphorically here, likening Trollope's fiction to a property or estate ("the house, the grounds, the dining room, the cellar"). He then imagines paying a similar call on Joyce, presumably the Joyce of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*:

The cryptic directions you were given lead to a house that does not exist, or, rather, to a vast and gusty demolition site through whose soot and grit you can glimpse, in the middle distance, one unrazed building. And so you slither and hurdle your way down there and squelch through the mud and somehow activate the elaborate gong, and after a lengthy and soundless wait the door is wrenched open to reveal a figure who is angrily arguing with himself in several languages at once - before he again slips away, to be found an hour later in a distant scullery, where he gives you a jamjar of brown whey and a bowlful of turnips and eels.

To William Carlos Williams, writing in 1929, this "English" view "is the opportunity of America! To see large, larger than England can". Larger than Ireland can, too, Williams might have added. In his excellent history of Joyce criticism, Joseph Brooker quotes the American Joyce scholars Richard M. Kain and Marvin Magalaner, reporting in 1956: "The Irish invariably find esoteric interpretations absurd. They prefer to regard their Jimmy as a somewhat annoying variant of the local bad boy, disrespectful, mocking, and yet withal sentimental".

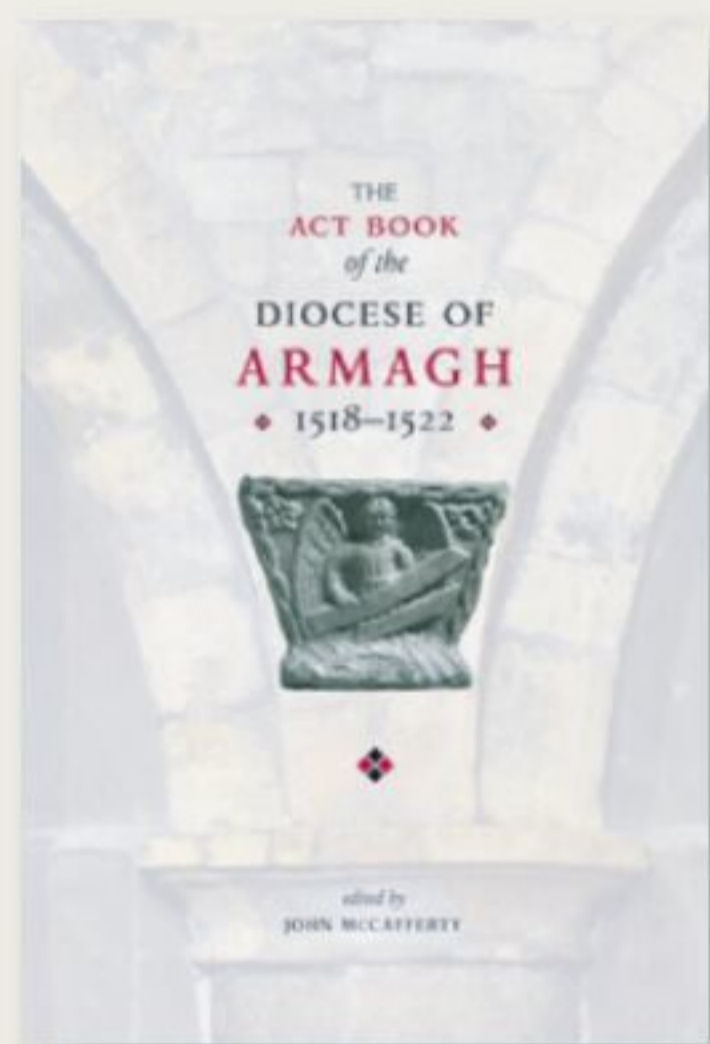
Today the Joyce Industry is almost as energetic and established in the UK and Ireland as in the United States. Amis's joke caricature, like Gogarty's, is not so much refuted as embraced by contemporary Joyceans, who love difficulty. Among the most eloquent and influential of today's Joyce scholars is Derek Attridge, a South African-born critic who has taught for many years in England. For Attridge, being a Joycean involves not merely "an academic interest in the writing and life of James Joyce, but a certain attitude to literature and to experience, a certain capacity to relish, without feeling threatened or becoming defensive, the imperfect world in all its multiplicity and messiness". Instead of eels and whey, Joyceans savour grilled mutton kidneys, with a "fine tang of faintly scented urine". Not to everyone's taste, perhaps, but perfect for Bloom, and served in a fiction not only rich in Dublin particulars but thought to be truer to experience than any social realism.

One measure of the industrial strength of Joyce studies is the number of its journals: *James Joyce Quarterly*, *Dublin James Joyce Journal*, *James Joyce Broadsheet*, *James Joyce Literary Supplement*, *Joyce Studies Annual*, *Genetic Joyce Studies* and *European Joyce Studies*. There are also interlinking websites, personal and institutional, and proliferating colloquia, reading groups and conferences. Chief among the last is the biennial International James Joyce Symposium, held since 1967 in different European cities, Dublin, Paris, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Monaco and Geneva. Last year's Covid-cancelled Symposium was to be held in Trieste. The talks given at such venues become journal or website articles and are collected in edited volumes or reworked as chapters in monographs. Many today are concerned with questions of gender, sexuality, post-colonialism, or the genesis of Joyce's texts. Others continue to reflect a wider concern in literary studies with problems of language and representation, the indeterminacy or multiplicity of meanings. Joyceans have a particular penchant for critical theory, the complications of which can rival those of Joyce himself.

Here are three representative examples, first books in the form of reworked dissertations. Deeply researched, persuasive in argument and mostly comprehensible, all three, like the works they discuss, were written in foreign locations. Catherine Flynn's *James Joyce and the Matter of Paris* begins with Baudelaire on "poetic prose", a form, also a challenge, to which he felt unequal. Joyce, Flynn argues, "took up Baudelaire's challenge at the beginning of his career ... and devised

“

The epiphanies in *Dubliners* reveal what all Joyce's epiphanies reveal: 'an unbridgeable abyss', or the impossibility of interpretative certainty



The Act Book of the diocese of Armagh, 1518-22
John McCafferty, editor

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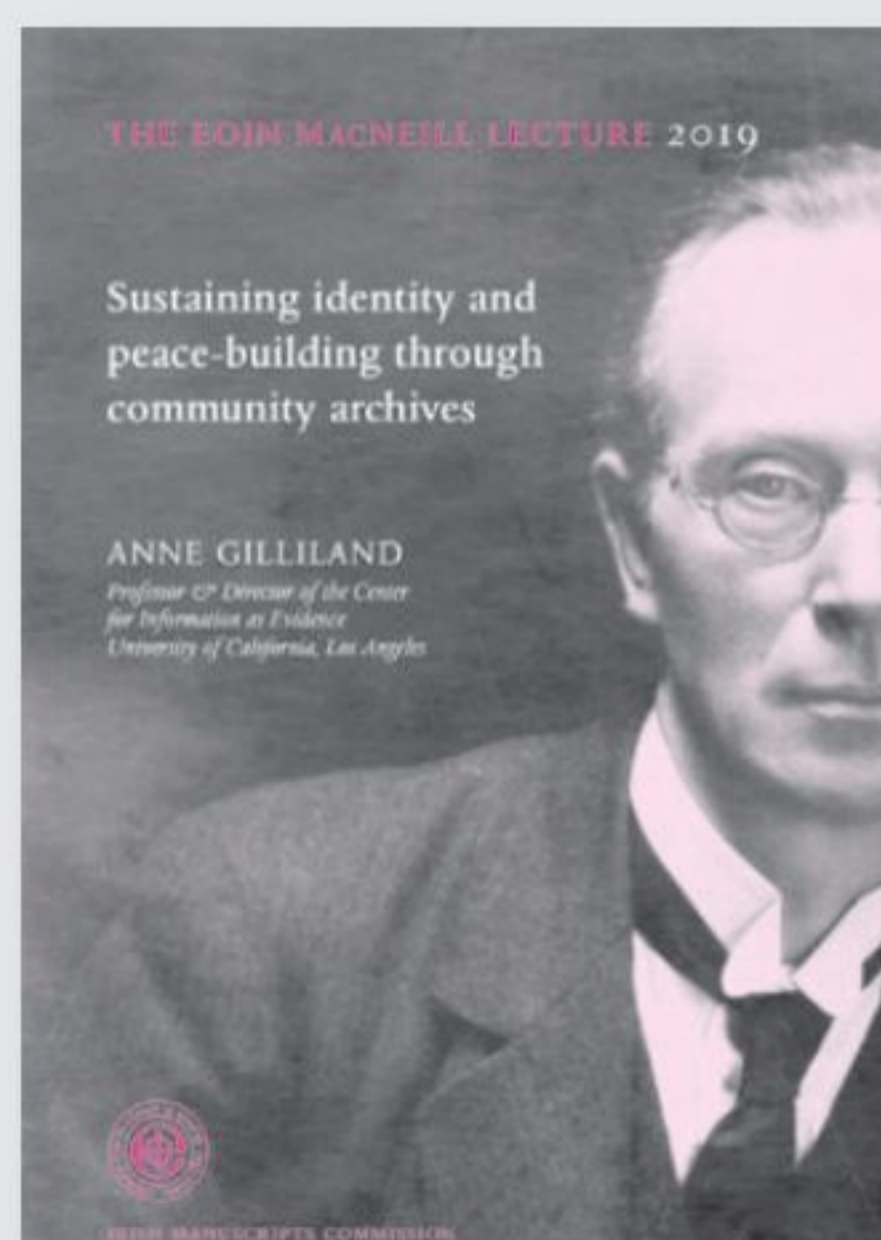
Analecta Hibernica, No. 51
James Kelly, editor

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Anne Gilliland (UCLA)

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Zachary Leader is at work on a book titled Ellmann's *Joyce*: A biography



James Joyce, Zurich, 1915

a series of responses to it over the course of his work, drawing not only on Baudelaire's poetic prose but also on a host of innovative forms of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French writers". Flynn's close readings of these writers and of their influence on Joyce, particularly in their depiction of the material pressures and pleasures of Paris, are the book's great strength.

Joyce first came to Paris in December 1902, aged twenty. Dissatisfied with medical school in Dublin, he decided to try medical school in Paris. "Whether a Paris degree would be of any use to him in Ireland", writes his biographer Richard Ellmann, "he did not investigate, and he did not bother his head over other questions he might have asked himself, such as how he could hope to pass chemistry in French when he could not do so in English."

The true reasons for the Paris move were that Joyce was a writer and Paris was "a hothouse of literary innovation", an escape from what he saw as the cultural nationalism of Irish literary life, from "nets of language, nation and religion". Flynn likens Joyce to the young aspiring heroes of nineteenth-century French fiction, turning "a novelistic trope into an artistic one: reimagining the conquest of a city as the conquest of an urban form ... *prose poétique*".

The qualities of this prose, Flynn argues, derive principally from Paris's status at the beginning of the twentieth century as the epicentre of consumer capitalism. The long broad boulevards and vistas brought in by Haussmann opened the city up to light and showcased a "new overwhelming abundance", turning Paris into "a theatre of goods and

people", "a locus of vivid sensory and sensual experiences", especially those of "the 'lower' senses of smell, taste, and touch". Flynn makes much of the prevalence of prostitution in the city, and of the connection between "erotic desire" and commerce or exchange. The effect of this desire, as of sensory overload more generally, was to break down boundaries, weakening not only distinctions between subject and object, but illusions of agency, control and certainty, precisely what contemporary Joyceans applaud his writing for calling into question. Over the months of his first stay in Paris, cut short in April 1903 by his mother's terminal illness, Joyce moved "from an art that would assert the autonomy of perceiving consciousness to an art that identifies with the powerful physical sensations of the modern urban environment".

Nowhere is the effect of Paris on Joyce's writing clearer than in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, to which Flynn devotes over forty pages. A year after his return to Dublin, Joyce set out again for the Continent, staying first in Pola (now Pula, in Croatia), then Trieste, Rome and Zurich, mostly supporting himself by giving English lessons and teaching in Berlitz language schools. In 1920 he returned to Paris "in order" to begin "Circe", he wrote to his patron Harriet Shaw Weaver. This second stay lasted for twenty years, during which time he finished *Ulysses*, published in 1922, and wrote *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939.

"Circe" is set in Dublin, mostly in Belle Cohen's Nighttown brothel, and takes the form of a dramatic farce, farce being, in Flynn's words, "a mode of humour that relies upon the base realities of the body ... in defiance of norms, meanings, and rational expectations". In a series of shifting hallucinations, some drawn directly from practices and performances in the brothels and nightclubs of Pigalle, characters become pig-like, as in the Homeric source, switch genders, rise from the dead, Stephen becomes a puppet, Bloom gives birth to octuplets, and "deviant" desires, listed by Flynn as "voyeurism, masturbation, transvestism, coprophilia", take on "a liberating power". The French literary influences Joyce draws on in the episode, artfully traced by Flynn, include Flaubert, Nerval, Rimbaud and Apollinaire.

Other chapters in which what Flynn calls "the matter of Paris" is shown to be "projected onto Dublin" concern themselves with Joyce's "epiphanies", the name given to his early paragraph-length attempts at poetic prose; with the evolution of Joyce's aesthetic theories, in the unpublished *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Tristram Fane Saunders lives in London. His poems appear in *New Poetries VIII*, 2021

on our anniversary we go

to Catford Lorry Park
where a child is playing
with a brick. A white truck
for the troops is squeezed in
by a white range-ro
ver and a van the white
of the bored commando's
skinny plastic bib. We wait

between: broken and whole
breezeblocks, bottles, the sobs
of a child pinned down while
his mother tries to touch
his tonsils without touch-
ing his tongue, tins, dropped swabs.

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Man; with the “Lestrygonians” episode in *Ulysses*; and with *Finnegans Wake*. A notable absence of *Dubliners*, referred to only once in a footnote. Flynn has mixed feelings about the urban modernity she believes Joyce’s works reflect and depict. On the one hand, she deplores the “erosion of human relations” wrought by consumer capitalism. On the other hand, like Joyce, she is drawn to capitalism’s “permeating, undefinable corporeality”, an object of unembarrassed fascination. Even in its “lowest” forms (smell, for instance, as in “fine tang of faintly scented urine”), such corporeality is said to inspire resistance to those who would police and regulate desire.

Flynn is Irish, but her book began life in the United States, as a dissertation in Comparative Literature at Yale. She now teaches at the University of California, Berkeley. Although she makes passing reference to Foucault, an important influence at Berkeley, where he lived for some years, the theorist who takes pride of place in her book is Walter Benjamin, to whom she devotes a chapter. The connections between the Paris of Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk (Arcades Project)* (1927–40) and Joyce’s Paris are intriguing, but the chapter feels extraneous, especially in moments when Joyce’s works are invoked to explain Benjamin’s rather than the other way around.

Michael Mayo’s *James Joyce and the Jesuits* aims to identify the origins of what he sees as the central feature of Joyce’s writing, one that forces readers “into carefully structured situations of ambivalence, frustration and loss”. “Time and again”, when Joyce’s readers are faced with alternate interpretations, “neither option satisfies, and yet to

answer ‘both’ or ‘neither’ never quite works”. The source of this “hermeneutic bewilderment”, Mayo argues, can be traced to Joyce’s Jesuit school education, in particular to the habits of mind bred in his Jesuit teachers by Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* (1522–4). “You have the jesuit strain in you, only it’s injected the wrong way”, Buck tells Stephen. To Mayo, “if Joyce did have an influence, it was Loyola, more than Aristotle or Aquinas, who was bred, if not ‘injected,’ into him”.

The influence of the *Spiritual Exercises* is, for Mayo, a matter of form rather than content. The *Exercises* enjoin “exercitants” to seek “both complete devotion and subtle distance”, “to believe and not believe at the same time”. A similar doubleness or ambivalence, Mayo argues, marks Joyce’s works “in nearly every scene and every sentence”. For the Jesuit, the desired result of the *Exercises* is what Mayo calls “a direct encounter with God in God’s impossible truth”. For Joyce’s readers, the result is an impossible truth about interpretation: that meaning in his work is never single or fixed, a view Mayo would extend to “any narrative at all”.

The examples Mayo offers of Joycean doubleness or unfixedness come from *Dubliners*, *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. The surprising omission here is *Finnegans Wake*, given its current standing among Joyceans. If, in the past, the trajectory of Joyce’s career was thought to be one of decline (into Leavis’s “inorganic elaborations and pedantries”), today the early works are seen as steps or “staging posts” on the route to *Finnegans Wake*, which alone offers, in Brooker’s words, a “full realization of the materiality of language, the instability of the subject, and the foregrounding of narrativity”, precisely the fea-

tures Mayo seeks out in his readings of the earlier works.

Mayo is an American but his book began life as a dissertation in English at Oxford, where he now teaches. Chief among the many theorists he draws on is Melanie Klein, the British-Austrian psychoanalyst whose teachings he maps onto those of Loyola and in turn onto Joyce. His readings also draw in detail on the theories of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, all of whom have written on Joyce. The resulting terminological logjam asks much of readers, certainly more than most non-specialists will find hospitable.

Sangam MacDuff’s *Panepiphany World: James Joyce’s epiphanies* is the first full-length study of Joyce’s epiphanies to be published in forty years. MacDuff is British, but his book began life as a dissertation at the University of Geneva, and he now teaches at Royal Holloway, University of London. The book opens with Stephen Daedalus’s definition of “epiphany” in *Stephen Hero*: “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He [Stephen] believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments”.

A brief history of the term then follows, focusing on biblical, classical and Romantic examples. Biblical and classical epiphanies share “an absolute claim to truth through the manifestation of divine being”. Romantic epiphanies make more questionable claims, since “the trigger of revelation suggests that the truth of the epiphany is to be sought in the individual who perceives it or in everyday events themselves”. Joyce’s epiphanies provide neither divine manifestations nor sudden flashes of insight, “rather they offer mundane snapshots of ordinary life, voicing a fundamental skepticism towards the notion of truth” (though not the notion of truth’s impossibility, presumably). That Joyce’s epiphanies “put language itself into question”, means that “they pose the central problem he investigates”, the problem Mayo’s book also identifies as central.

The book moves chapter by chapter through Joyce’s main works from *Dubliners* to *Finnegans Wake*. Although it discusses epiphany in a wider sense (a common if “harmless” practice among earlier critics, according to Robert Scholes, “like symbol-hunting, archetype-hunting, Scrabble, and other intellectual recreations”), its account of the afterlife of the forty surviving pieces that Joyce himself labelled “epiphanies”, written between 1901 and 1904 (and co-edited by Scholes), is its major contribution. Mysterious in themselves, in part because so seemingly inconsequential, the lifelong hold these short passages had on Joyce, who recycled them in all his main works after *Dubliners*, is more mysterious still. MacDuff provides a useful appendix listing the recyclings (seventeen in *Stephen Hero*, twelve in *Portrait*, twenty-one in *Ulysses* and seven in *Finnegans Wake*) and offers detailed, sometimes over-detailed, accounts of their use in shaping the later writings.

MacDuff’s discussion of epiphany in *Dubliners*, in which none of the forty early epiphanies appears, is justified in part by Joyce himself having described its stories as “tranches de vie” and “epicleti” (a neologism from *epiclesis*: to call upon or invoke), in part by a long tradition of criticism which sees each story as leading to an epiphany. Where MacDuff differs from this tradition, is in his account of what is revealed or invoked. “In hinting at something profound whose significance evades the reader”, he declares, the epiphanies in *Dubliners* reveal what all Joyce’s epiphanies reveal: “an unbridgeable abyss”, which is to say, the impossibility of interpretative certainty.

This revelation, inhospitable to some, is welcomed by Joyceans as liberating as well as true, a licence for further interpretation. As Joyce himself foresaw, a puzzling absence of any one or right reading keeps the professors happy. ■



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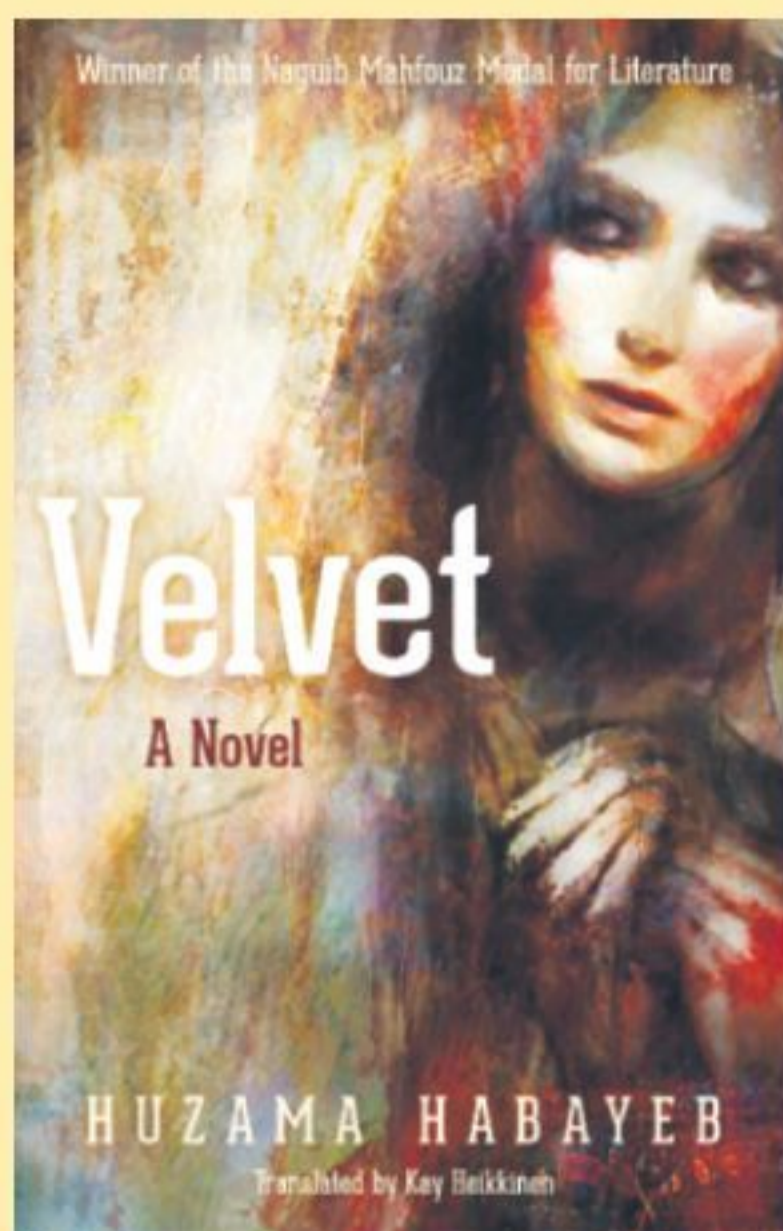
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Every picture tells a story

When Joyce and Svevo played bowls

RICCARDO CEPACH

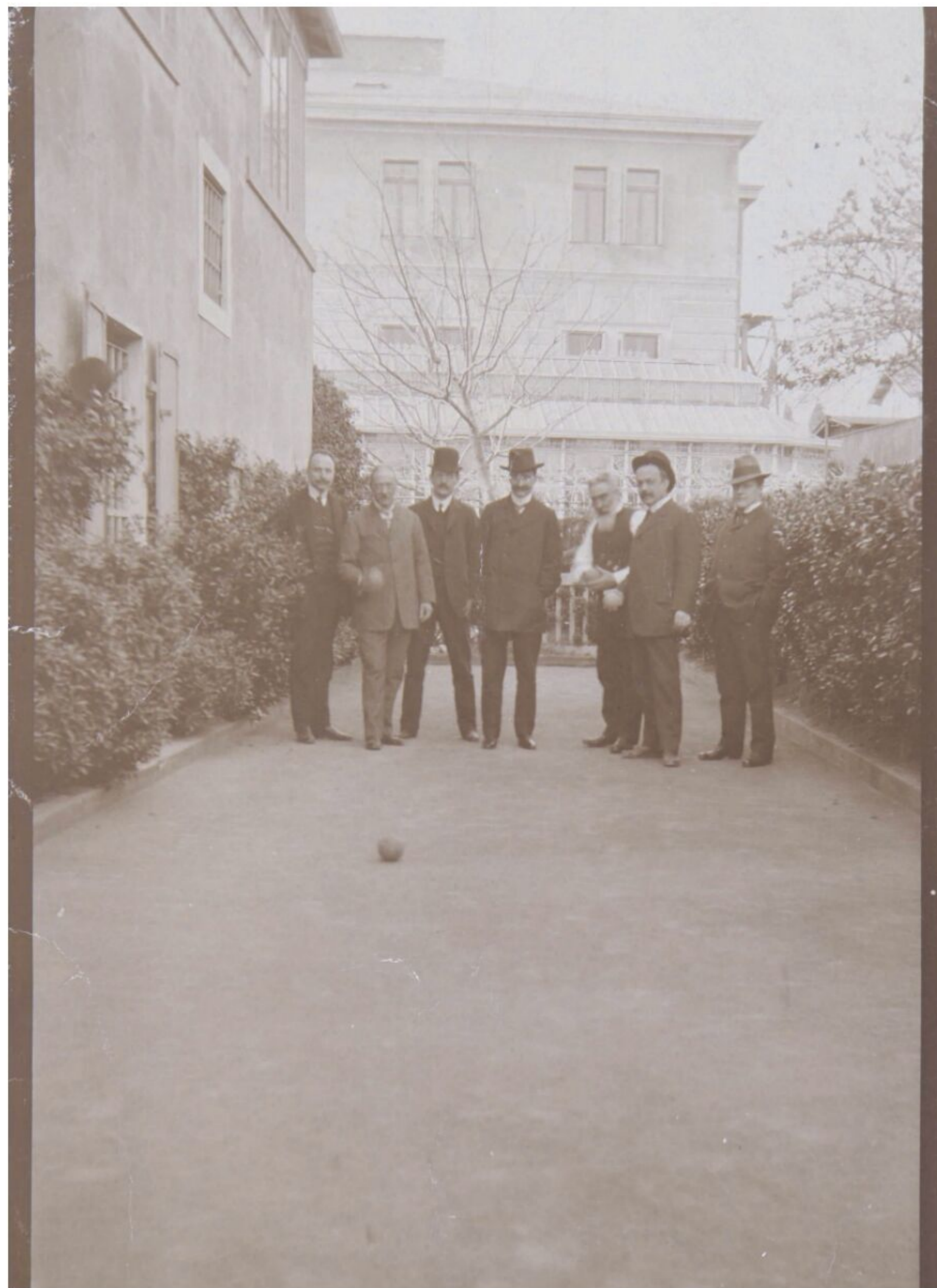
JAMES JOYCE MET ITALO SVEVO in Svevo's home city Trieste in 1907. The two men soon became friends. Joyce was working at the city's Berlitz language school. At the outbreak of the First World War, Joyce moved his family to Zurich. There are two museums in Trieste dedicated to the writers and I work for them. I have often been asked by visitors to the museums if there are any photographs of the two writers together. I have always responded that, alas, there aren't any. And that was the answer that I also gave to Serena Grassi, the sister of my colleague Sandra, regarding a photograph of a group of men playing *bocce*, or bowls, behind Svevo's house. Serena asked me if one unidentified figure might be Joyce. And because I thought I knew that photo well - it forms part of the Museo Svevo archives - I merely glanced at it.

It should be said that it is a decidedly bad snapshot. The photographer captured, perhaps hastily, an ample portion of the bare, empty foreground, while the players are in the background, small and hardly recognizable. On the right, closer than the others, is Svevo himself, his hat tilted back to reveal his forehead. Behind him, the man with the long white beard is his father-in-law Gioachino Veneziani. To the right and left of Svevo are his brothers-in-law, respectively Giuseppe Oberti di Valnera and Marco Bliznakoff, a Bulgarian engineer. The archival description of this print, which assigns it uncertainly to the year 1908, does not identify the three other men, on the left, who were present that day on the bowling court behind the Veneziani manor and factory, where Svevo both lived and worked.

What prompted me recently to reconsider this photograph is our new project to renovate both the Museo Svevo and the Museo Joyce, and to unite them in one site that will recount in a richer and more inclusive way the extraordinary story of literary production in Trieste, one of the cradles of European modernism. This little print, which measures barely 9 centimetres by 14, prompted me to listen again to the voice of Serena Grassi, who had asked me if the third figure from the left, half hidden by the man wearing a lighter suit and holding a ball in his hand, might be James Joyce. This time I listened, and I began a series of attempts to enlarge and to analyse this image.

There are several elements in this silhouette that could point to Joyce. If we consider what is perhaps the most famous picture of him as a young man - that taken by C. P. Curran in 1904 in Dublin, shortly before the writer's departure for Trieste - and compare it with the figure on the bowling court, we are immediately struck by the identical posture and attitude of the two bodies. The legs are spread apart, the toes pointed outwards expressing poise, rootedness and stubbornness. So similar are the two images that to superimpose one over the other seems natural, even though, in the earlier photo, the writer is not yet wearing the glasses or the moustache that became iconic.

But in all of the pictures that show Joyce in Trieste - in his apartment in via Bramante, in front of his bookshelves, or with his son Giorgio in 1912 - the moustache and the glasses are present. The mous-



Trieste, c.1908

tache was perhaps thicker then and broader, the ends stretching beyond the edges of his upper lip, as in the Triestine photos and also in the ones taken in Zurich between 1915 and 1919. In later photos, the moustache is smaller and thinner. And those glasses, which in the photo with Svevo are barely noticeable, could be the pince-nez that we recognize not only in the pictures I have already mentioned but in some of the most famous ones as well: of Joyce wearing a wide-brimmed hat in 1915, or, during the same year, plucking the strings of a guitar, or posing in profile in 1919, with a sparse, uncharacteristic beard. These photos were also taken in Zurich.

In addition, in this poorly composed picture, we can make out the wide jaw and high cheekbones, the sturdy and vaguely protruding chin. A group photo of 1902, which captures Joyce in Dublin with teachers and fellow students at their graduation, is instructive: we can discern again that same confident and somewhat boastful pose, even if a figure in front of him hinders our view. We find that very same pose, however, in another group photo with his wife Nora and two other people taken at Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1931: here, even the position of the hands is similar to that in the Triestine photo. We know that, during the period when this picture was taken, Joyce visited the manor in the capacity of English teacher to Ettore Schmitz - Svevo's real name - and his wife, Livia Veneziani.

Distorted perceptions, invisible evidence, information that is too well known: the only person to have avoided these pitfalls seems to be Serena Grassi, who deserves the credit for this discovery. Serena had a good reason to examine the group with care. The figure on the extreme left is her great-grandfather, Giulio Cesare Romano (that makes the identification of the group almost complete, leaving only the man in the light-coloured suit who is partially hiding Joyce). Giulio Cesare was the son of Pietro Romano, an ardent Irredentist and dealer in English textiles, who gave his offspring

names that were inspired by Italian history: Catone, Mario, Duilio, Clelia and, of course, Giulio Cesare, who would become known for inventing a new flotation technique and illustrating it in a manual which he published. With his new technique, Romano was able to teach swimming even to those who were afflicted with a fear of water, such as the daughters of the Duke Amedeo d'Aosta. In 1931, Romano gave them swimming lessons in the waters at the base of the famous Miramare Castle, which had been the old residence of Maximilian of Habsburg, Emperor of Mexico, and was now occupied by the Duke, who would later become Viceroy of Ethiopia. In 1908, however, when Giulio Cesare Romano was photographed playing bowls with two other future celebrities, he was visiting Svevo's house as a musician who played his viola next to Ettore Schmitz's violin along with the other instruments played in the musical Sundays which the Veneziani hosted. And according to Signora Margherita Zanelli - the mother of Serena and Sandra Grassi and daughter of Giulio Cesare Romano - those concerts would also include at times the voice of James Joyce, which his contemporaries describe as full and warm.

Does this discovery tell us anything about James Joyce's relationship with his English language student, the Triestine writer Italo Svevo, a matter which has been analysed in such great detail by biographers? It could. It seems to reopen a debate about the real relationship between the two. We know that, after Svevo's death, Joyce expressed a certain annoyance over the treatment that he and his wife Nora had received at the Veneziani manor. He wrote to his brother Stanislaus that he had never crossed the threshold of that house "except as a paid teacher" and that Svevo's wife Livia, so as to avoid having to greet Nora when the two of them happened to meet in the street, would suddenly "grow long-sighted". Joyce refused therefore to write an introduction to the English translation of Svevo's second novel, *Senilità* (for which he had, nonetheless, suggested the title, *As a Man Grows Older*). It was Stanislaus who would write that introduction and, among other observations, point out how much Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of *Ulysses*, owes to the historical figure of Italo Svevo.

This thorny question has also been examined in a recent study, *Friends in Exile: Italo Svevo and James Joyce* (2018) by Brian Moloney, who says that Joyce was often welcomed at Sunday entertainments in the homes of his other students, such as the Poppers, a merchant family. Not so at the Villa Veneziani entertainments, we have been led to believe, from which Joyce would have been excluded. The photograph of the bowling match, however, which does seem to include Joyce, brings this matter into question again. We learn from Svevo's own letters that at his manor the "giuoco delle sbocce", as he called the game, was played mainly on Sundays or on major holidays such as the Feast of Corpus Christi. It would seem, then, that the Irish writer, at least in some cases, was invited to entertainments at the Veneziani and did take part in social activities as a guest. Moloney suggests that perhaps we have been too concerned about precisely what Joyce and Svevo may have felt towards each other, and that as a result we have overlooked the theme that should most interest literary scholars: how these two writers exchanged artistic and poetic influences, a theme which, before Moloney's study, had been approached with too much trepidation and reserve. The core aesthetic beliefs of these two mature, original artists had already been formed before they met, and neither one was a master or an apprentice to the other. But their encounter, on a deeper level, was most fertile, and as a consequence it influenced the development of European fiction. We should like to think it possible that such an encounter, such an exchange of ideas and of literary projects, may even have taken place on the *bocce* court at Svevo's home. ■

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The core aesthetic beliefs of these two mature, original artists had already been formed before they met, and neither one was a master to the other

Riccardo Cepach is director of the Museo Sveviano and Museo James Joyce in Trieste

Translated by Carmine Di Biase



Art just out of this world

The expressive, enigmatic figures of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

COLIN GRANT

FLY IN LEAGUE WITH THE NIGHT
LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE

Tate Britain, currently closed but exhibition open until May 9

THE STRANGE ALLURE of the oil paintings of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye is in part explained by the wonder of her idiosyncratic practice, a modern take on a traditional art form. The portraits that make up the exhibition *Fly in League with the Night* are of fictional characters, drawn, she has said, not from models but from various other sources, including notes, sketches and artefacts. Her characters are composites; a single painting may also be informed by Yiadom-Boakye's remembrance of events, friends and acquaintances. The results are uncanny and affecting, particularly in their ability to conjure mood.

This exuberant show (which I saw at Tate Britain before Covid-19 restrictions forced its closure) builds on the excitement Yiadom-Boakye's work has generated in recent years as a Turner prize nominee (2013), at the Serpentine Gallery (2015) and at the Ghana pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2019) with seventy mostly large-scale pieces spanning almost two decades. Often in dialogue with the work of Manet, Degas and Sickert, among others, her paintings show a pared-back simplicity, with the foregrounded subjects placed in mostly neutral backgrounds (usually painted in the same colours and warm tones used for the figures). The subjects don't appear to be superimposed but emerge, as do Manet's, from the darkness into the light; broad brushstrokes give way to finer ones

closer to the surface, and there is invariably a glint of light piercing the darkness, from unblinking eyes, bared teeth and the collars of shirts. Mostly set inside, with few clues to location, purposefully obscuring time and place - they could be any place or time, ranging across centuries - they have an otherworldly feel.

Yiadom-Boakye's work is most rewarding when exploring a tension between the enigmatic and the confessional (even revelatory). The earliest painting here is from 2003 and shows a macabre eye-masked reveller, demonic and defiant in a red robe naughtily pulled apart to reveal him bare chested and in underpants, as if to say, "Yeah this is me! You got a problem with that?" Unusually the title for this piece, "First", is one of the few that seem immaterial to the painting.

Yiadom-Boakye has said: "The things I can't paint, I write, and the things I can't write, I paint." But the usually witty titles she gives her paintings suggest otherwise. At their best, her titles are a window to the image but they also tease; they have a wispy, ephemeral quality, like a message carved by a plane through clouds. A forlorn lover's sad, defeated eyes are echoed in the title "Few Reasons Left to Like You". With no suggested narrative from the artist, the temptation is for viewers to construct their own. Surely the lover is weighed down by the realization of an unequal relationship and endless disappointments? The painting "No Such Luxury" is harder to read. A young woman sits alone in front of a cup and saucer. Both elbows on the table, a hand covers her mouth. She is bashful and reflective; she could be suppressing a smile or chewing the inside of her cheeks. Staring straight ahead she defies the viewer to form any judgement, and discourages pity. Whatever state she is in might well be her default position. Drilling into the interior

"No Need Of Speech",
2018

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Her titles are a window to the image but they also tease; they have a wispy, ephemeral quality, like a message carved by a plane through clouds

Colin Grant is the author of *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush generation, 2019*

lives of her subjects, Yiadom-Boakye has the ability to convey a profoundly felt emotion. Though her fictional characters live in the present with no back story, you invest in them just as you might in the sympathetic protagonist of a novel or short story.

But as in all her work, it is the careful rendering of gesture that anchors the truth of the experience. In "Geranium Love Sonnet", an awkwardly balanced, wary-looking woman with sagging shoulders has her hands placed firmly on a table: the hands offer support that might not immediately be required but may well become essential in propping her up in the future. The gesture amplifies the expression. Away from the exhibition you may forget the details of the faces of these characters, but as with the Cheshire cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, you will always recall the vestige of the expression.

Fly in League with the Night is arranged according to themes that have been consistent throughout Yiadom-Boakye's career. Among the most captivating are the dialogues between young men and their mentors. In "The High Mind and Disrepute", a man in light-framed glasses lounges on a wicker chair (conjuring the image of the enthroned Black Panther leader, Huey P. Newton) watching, appraisingly, another man play the guitar. They share a footstool; the older man, one leg extended, is barefooted, the younger, in boots, has one foot up; their feet nearly touch. In another painting "No Need Of Speech", a pair of intergenerational dancers in leotards crouch down in consultation; their hands hanging close together. There's weight, power and energy coiled in their stance; they appear like great birds soon to take flight.

Groups of dancers are a favourite and recurring trope of Yiadom-Boakye; she revels in their intimacy as they warm up or take a break from dance routines. The tenderness and romance of these works is echoed in the many images of jesters here, painted with ruffs around the neck or an occasional sly fox draped over shoulders. The jesters serve as points of punctuation throughout the show - allowing for pause from the room-after-room of highly distilled works.

She's also consistent over the seventeen years of work on display in her use of very few - and muted - colours. Towards the end of the exhibition, the paintings become blacker, yet still the subjects are luminous. The darkness forces greater scrutiny on the part of the viewer; many admirers have recounted how especially connected they feel to these dark works. In the final room of the gallery, I was pulled up sharp by "Highriser": the shy and diffident character so reminded me of my brother who died a decade ago. Here the subject is vulnerable and ghostly, tentatively making his way through the frame to some world other than the one he presently inhabits. "When I think of the figure," says Yiadom-Boakye, "I think of immortality or an otherness that is just out of this world, representing an endless possibility."

What is so welcome and intriguing are the endless possibilities she allows simply by her choice of characters. They are all Black, but she's not making a special case for Black subjects; their colour does not define them. Though she's particularly expert at rendering Black skin tones in dark backgrounds, her concern is not so much about Black bodies but about "Black thought". Throughout the show she signals the very ordinariness of Black lives, highlighting our shared humanity and discounting the myth of difference. Her paintings illuminate that which for many non-Black people has lain beneath the surface. It is as if her characters are versions of the unnamed and ethereal protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, who challenges readers at the book's end with the notion: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you". That sentiment, along with the expressions, gaze and gestures that inhabit Yiadom-Boakye's canvases, will haunt you when, having broken bread as it were with her subjects, you take your reluctant leave of their enchanting world. ■

A candy-coloured paradise

Florida's fantasies and nightmares

ERIK MORSE

SOME KIND OF HEAVEN

iTunes, Amazon video, Google Play
and on demand

SOME FORTY YEARS after the founding of the first mass-produced suburbs in Levittown, New York, and Lakewood, California, began redefining the community fabric for the baby boomer generation, Florida's The Villages established a new suburban order for the gerontocracy. The exclusive senior enclave was founded on the remains of a mobile home park near the Emerald Marsh and it now stretches over three counties and contains around 130,000 people, making it the largest retirement community in the world. Because of its master-planned housing and activities, which emphasize a nostalgic, theme park-like atmosphere of golf, sunbathing and partying, it is often referred to as "Disney World for Retirees", a nod to another Floridian institution only a few miles south.

Some Kind of Heaven, an imaginative first documentary film from Lance Oppenheim, is a portrait - or rather a landscape - of The Villages, capturing both its sun-dappled exteriors and its rough-hewn edges, including a cast of local characters who have yet to find their piece of paradise. Among them are the retired couple Anne and Reggie, whose marriage is strained by the latter's chronic drug addiction; the bachelor and octogenarian hustler Dennis, who lives out of a van while trawling the clubs, churches and pools for a wealthy dowager; and, most poignantly, the newly widowed Barbara, who endeavours to rediscover companionship and love in a world that is not her own.

Set against the backdrop of grinning sun-worshippers living out their ideas of the American dream ("You come here to live, not to pass away!") and "There is no place like this - this is nirvana", are but a few of the filmed testimonials), Oppenheim's four characters appear as alienated from their environment as Richard Yates's April and Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road*. Barbara confides, "I think when you're living in The Villages, you're acting the part", and Reggie similarly remarks about those around him, including his wife, that, "They've been workaholics to keep from thinking about their problems in life ... They're in a box with their time", both echoing perennial critiques of suburban cultism.

Some Kind of Heaven's intriguing account of The Villages is a result of Oppenheim's deft movement between landscape and character study, which may or may not consist of pre-scripted reenactments by its central cast - the sort of hybrid docufiction that recalls Roberto Minervini's Gulf Coast films *The Other Side* (2015) and *What You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire?* (2018) or William Eggleston's Southern Gothic classic, *Stranded in Canton* (1974). This is accentuated by the cinematographer David Bolen's ingenious camerawork, which makes abundant use of slow-motion and close-ups while bathing the viewer in a saturated palette of stucco tract homes, candy-coloured interiors and ominous thunderstorms. The result is a nostalgic sensorium remi-



niscent of Douglas Sirk's melodramas and the hyperreal, suburban daydreams of David Lynch and Tim Burton.

Oppenheim's images also trade in the instantly recognizable vernacular of Florida's regional cinema, a mixture of beach-blanket fantasy and sunshine noir that reflects the state's mishmash of identities. "There are so many different versions of Florida - it's practically three different states crammed into one", the director observes. "I'm always fascinated by the people who moved here for reasons of escaping something else in their life: maybe it's the cold weather, an estranged family member, taxes. Who you were, where you lived, all of that is irrelevant to who you are once you're melting under the Floridian sun." His sentiments closely resemble the classic promotions for Hollywood tourism and have long posed Florida as a more accessible, and vulgar, alternative to California's Pacific paradise.

Florida's relationship with moviemaking, however, has been more ambivalent than California's. The state's initial brush with the film industry began in 1908 with the founding of Kalem Studios in Jacksonville, followed by the first reported Florida-based film *A Florida Feud: Or, Love in the Everglades*. Dozens of other "winter" studios followed by the 1910s. Like those in Hollywood, many early Florida films doubled as advertisements to lure potential home-owners south with the promises of sun, sand and frolic. According to Shawn Bean's history *The First Hollywood: Florida and the golden age of silent filmmaking* (2008), nearly 300 films were made in Jacksonville alone by 1928, featuring stars such as Oliver Hardy, Mary Pickford and the Barrymores. But like the producers and actors flocking to California from the Northeast, industry workers in Jacksonville faced bristling excoriations from the conservative locals. By the end of the decade, most of the studios had been run out of town and subsequently relocated to Hollywood.

Other cities like Ocala and Fort Lauderdale served as locations for popular genre movies like the aquatic-themed musical *Jupiter's Darling* (1955) and *Where the Boys Are* (1960), whose images of beach playgrounds in garish Technicolor would boost the state's spring break fad by the early 1960s. Alternatively, John Huston's classic noir *Key Largo* (1948) and the Wakulla Springs-filmed *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), and its sequel in 1955, suggest

A scene from *Some Kind of Heaven*

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These images trade in the instantly recognizable vernacular of Florida's regional cinema, a mixture of beach-blanket fantasy and sunshine noir

Erik Morse's most recent book is Bluff City Underground: A roman noir of the deep south, 2012

a place far more primeval and sinister. It was this oscillation between depictions of a tourist's paradise and a sinister underworld that would increasingly characterize (and villainize) Florida in the public imagination throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

This was no more evident than in the commercial popularity of the South Florida gangster film *Scarface* (1983) and Michael Mann's long-running crime serial *Miami Vice* (1984-90), both of which glamorized the state's then-notorious drug war with images of beachfront mansions, fast cars and bikini-clad women. Mann's depictions of the drug- and sex-trade also coincided with the explosion of Florida's so-called gentlemen's clubs, posher strip joints catering to wealthy elites and tourists, throughout Miami and Fort Lauderdale. Many films about Florida's underworld were directly adapted from or spiritually inspired by upmarket, dime-store novelists Charles Willeford (the Hoke Moseley series), Elmore Leonard (*Get Shorty*, 1990; *Rum Punch*, 1992) and Carl Hiaasen (*Strip Tease*, 1993), who popularized the state's noir sub-genre with its South Beach gangsters and Panhandle rednecks. Among the most enduring of these neo-noirs are *Body Heat* (1981) and *Wild Things* (1998), both set around South Florida. Their erotic stories of sex, double-crosses and murder pivot on the collision of the worlds of the idle rich and the desperate underclass in the aphrodisiacal heat of the sun and swamp. As Adam Gopnik writes in a *New Yorker* essay, "In the Back Cabana: The rise and rise of Florida crime fiction": "Where in the noir tradition crimes took place, melodramatically, at night, [in Florida] they take place, matter-of-factly, in the middle of the day."

Noir's stock characters, the redneck, sex worker and conman, continued to feature heavily in subsequent indie films, from Larry Clark's teenploitation noir *Bully* (2001) to Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* (2012) and *The Beach Bum* (2019). Struggling families and secret cabals concealed beneath Disney World's polished facade were the subjects of Sean Baker's *The Florida Project* (2017) and Randy Moore's amateur masterpiece *Escape from Tomorrow* (2013), a guerrilla-surrealist experiment shot mostly inside the park without the company's knowledge or permission. All these films succeed in deconstructing the state's tourist fantasies, exposing the resorts, celebrity nightlife and theme parks as consumerist simulacra beneath which lie darker dreams of violence.

Some Kind of Heaven suggests similarly unsavoury themes, albeit with a warmer, geriatric gloss - less Tony Montana and more *Cocoon* (1985), another Florida-set classic about retirees seeking out remedies of youth and vitality. Oppenheim documents how Reggie's increasing drug habit leads to an arrest for cocaine possession, and his retreat from reality is on painful display when he appears before the judge to his plead his case. Overwhelmed, Anne visits a therapist and considers divorce from Reggie. Barbara becomes smitten with a local golf cart salesman, and possible alcoholic, known as the "Margarita Man", whose passion for partying clashes with her repressed lifestyle. Dennis is also pursued by the police for parking his van illegally throughout The Villages and is often filmed calling old friends with a hard luck story and a loan request. He openly contemplates suicide if he does not find a partner to take him in soon. When he begins dating a former lover, Nancy, his intentions for their relationship remain dubious. Will he finally settle down in The Villages or use her and lose her as part of his customary grift?

Through Oppenheim's lens, these stories of discontent are of a piece with The Villages' duplicitous racket, the solicitation of a suburban life free of "death, murder ... [and] children", and walled off from the outside world. Like much of Florida's tourist imaginary, The Villages offers little more than a stucco and sand fantasy. But there remains extraordinary beauty in this delusion of a bilious, candy-coloured paradise, like a theme park built on a swamp. ■



Predicting the next mistake

Passion and its consequences in the tales of Shirley Hazzard

DINAH BIRCH

**COLLECTED STORIES
SHIRLEY HAZZARD**

Edited by Brigitta Olubas
368pp. Virago. £16.99.

THE DISTINCTIVE AND EXACTING fiction of Shirley Hazzard (1931–2016) has not lacked advocates. Her output wasn't large – just four novels and two volumes of short stories, together with non-fiction including memoirs, essays and travel writing – but her two finest novels, *The Transit of Venus* (1980) and *The Great Fire* (2003), won major prizes and have not been forgotten. Yet she has never achieved the currency of, say, Muriel Spark, or Alice Munro, or Anita Brookner – women who worked in comparable literary territory. This definitive collection of Hazzard's short stories is a welcome reminder of her remarkable talent.

One reason, perhaps, for Hazzard's lingering on the margins was her reluctance to claim a national identity, which has made it harder for her to acquire a battalion of loyal fans. Born in Sydney, she found Australian culture stifling. As a sixteen-year-old, she moved with her family to Hong Kong, and in later years lived in France, England, New Zealand, New York and Italy. Eventually she divided her time between Capri and Manhattan, while maintaining a critical distance from both places. Ten years spent working for the United Nations might suggest a committed internationalism. But Hazzard became disillusioned with the oppressive bureaucracies she encountered as a junior administrator (she described her work as “virtually meaningless and cruelly underpaid”). The stories of *People in Glass Houses* (1967), her second collection, are excoriating in their dissection of the “Organization” (as she called the UN), with its pervasive moral paralysis. Glimmers of idealism are soon deflected by self-interest, glancing off the establishment “like calf-love off a courtesan”. Few have written more tellingly of the frustrations of life in an institution that has lost its way.

Hazzard wrote two non-fictional attacks on the

failures of the UN. *Defeat of an Ideal* (1973) is a title that could be applied to much of Hazzard's writing, where the suffocation of high principles is a central theme. Its follow-up was *Countenance of Truth*, (1990), which focused on the Nazi past of Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim. Happy endings are in short supply in her fiction, which may be another reason for the limits of her popularity. She was always interested in the compromises that haunt working life, but her primary concern was the defeat of the transformative power of love. For all her settled scepticism, however, Hazzard is the least cynical of writers. The women in her stories, often (though not always) the victims of the obtuse machinations of the Organization, are in her stories painfully vulnerable to the grip of passion and its consequences, which rarely work in their favour. Some learn from their suffering; most do not. “One doesn't really profit from experience; one merely learns to predict the next mistake”, Minna remarks in “The Party” (1960), the opening story of *Cliffs of Fall* (1963), Hazzard's first collection. Minna is one of Hazzard's many examples of a woman who is attached to an unworthy man. She is, and here too she is characteristic, wholly conscious of her predicament, and may yet escape. “There's no sense in this.”

Hazzard's women are unrelentingly self-aware. Her approach to dialogue and the inner voice, always essential to these tales, endows her characters with a level of articulacy that belongs only in books. In “A Place in the Country” (1963), Nettie has fallen for Clem, an older man who is married to her cousin. She muses on their affair: “Love is so much written and talked about, you might expect it to feel quite different; but no, it does correspond to the descriptions – it isn't commonplace. More like a concentration of all one's energies”. His infidelity discovered, Clem hastily abandons Nettie. He tells her: “Let's hope we can see things more clearly tomorrow.”

She gave a small regretful smile, her eyes still shut.

“I think I must hope to see them less clearly.”

Hazzard returns to the story of Clem and Nettie in “The Picnic” (1962). They meet again, after several years have passed, and have nothing to say to each other. Clem tries to persuade himself that his transgression had made no difference to his life, but

Shirley Hazzard, the Pantheon, Rome, 2005.

“**Precisely measured glimpses of understanding, delivered with sardonic lightness, are among the pleasures of Hazzard's stories**”

Dinah Birch is Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Cultural Engagement and Professor of English Literature at the University of Liverpool

seeing Nettie (“she was beautiful”) leads him to understand that the brief encounter had changed him irrevocably: “it was true, he realised now; he thought of her every day”. Nettie's reflections are similarly rueful:

one couldn't cope with love. (In her experience, at any rate, it had always got out of hand.) But, after all, it was the only state in which one could consider oneself normal; which engaged all one's capabilities, rather than just those developed by necessity – or shipwreck.

Precisely measured glimpses of understanding, delivered with sardonic lightness, are among the pleasures of Hazzard's stories. In “Vittorio” (1961) the modest existence of an Italian classicist is disturbed by the arrival of lodgers, “and by an agreeable echo of what he presumed must be excitement”. A sympathetic woman finds him attractive: “it was with astonishment, more than anything else, that he saw her eyes enlarge with tears before she turned from him toward the house – an unbearable astonishment that called upon all his capacities for comprehension”. Such nuanced reflections are balanced by an open appreciation of beauty. In “Sir Cecil's Ride” (1974), Constantin, a man bruised by war, takes a hillside walk in Hong Kong. He is accompanied by a girl who loves him, and as they reach their destination she recognizes that she will not become his wife.

She saw the sky emptied of hills at last, vertiginous, and the great sea. The valley at their feet swelling with colours and fertility, scalloped with crops, with the cream-green gardens of the hotel and the curve of white sand. She looked out to promontories, inlets, and the turreted folly of a billionaire.

The beauty of landscape, and the significance of art, are never wholly separate in Hazzard's work. Her insistence on the weight of the Western tradition in which she locates her work belongs to a shared literary code now receding into the past. Poetry, persistently quoted and always revered, is the bedrock of her writing. As Zoë Heller notes in her perceptive foreword to this collection, for Hazzard “caring about and quoting poetry is a reliable indicator of virtue – the equivalent of riding into town wearing a white cowboy hat”. Hazzard's sober acknowledgement of the shadow that war laid over the lives of her generation, men and women alike, is also a mark of the history that shaped her. Constantin believes that “the truth can only be told, like poetry, to a carefully selected audience; that was part of the indecency of war, of peace”.

No one could now write in those terms with any degree of confidence. And yet Hazzard's work does not feel outmoded. She defined the constraints that hemmed in the lives of her characters with a generosity of feeling that lends warmth to her wit. She writes of a cultivated society, but every life that falls under her gaze, no matter its origins, has individual substance. Her Australian upbringing left her with a lifelong scorn for the European snobbery that disfigures the work of some of her literary contemporaries, and her elegantly framed denunciation of the equally toxic personal and professional injustices of gender continues to resonate. She speaks for a vanished world, but with a surprisingly modern accent.

Hazzard's stories, almost exclusively published in the *New Yorker*, built her early reputation. This impressive collection confirms their enduring stature. It is not in these tales, however, that Hazzard's most compelling writing is to be found. She began to write novels in the late 1960s, mostly abandoning the shorter form, and it is in these that her razor-edged narrative skills are fully realized. *The Great Fire*, her final novel, is an unforgettable testament to the desolations of war, and to those who survived. But it is in *The Transit of Venus*, where passion contends with the unrelenting demands of politics and history, that Hazzard produced her tragic masterpiece. With a scale of ambition unlike anything else in her work, the novel stitches threads of reference across the sweep of decades into a searing denouement. Enjoy the preparation provided by these tales – then turn to *The Transit of Venus*. ■

Bringing up the bodies

A clear-eyed account of forbidden love on a US slave plantation

DESIRÉE BAPTISTE

THE PROPHETS
ROBERT JONES JR

400p. riverrun. £18.99.

SET IN THE CRUEL LANDSCAPE of the US antebellum South, *The Prophets*, Robert Jones Jr's debut novel, explores the tender, often tense, romantic union between two young Black men in a world where matters of the heart, like everything else, are dangerous: "who wants to lose a foot, or their soul, chasing behind the wagon dragging your love deeper into the wilderness?"

The setting is the Halifax family plantation in Mississippi known by "perceptive folks" as "Empty" (for the same reasons, no doubt, that the journalist Isabel Wilkerson prefers the term "forced labour camp" to "plantation"). Fenced in by a river, booby-trapped woods, a patrolling overseer and a handful of poor white families settled on the far fringes (providing "nigger barriers"), Empty is "the perfect place to hoard captive peoples". It bears the semantic weight of a system that, as the author and activist Randall Robinson has put it, "hulled empty a whole race of people with inter-generational efficiency".

The barn, however, at the site's (and novel's) centre, where Samuel and Isaiah, still in their teens, tend to the animals by day and sleep at night, is a kind of American pastoral. There, a lifelong friendship blossoms into love: "one hand not so accidentally placed on top of the other while at the river bank ... was all it took for their evening shadows to later dance". This love has its corollary in the healing plant that two enslaved women, Maggie and Puah, find just past the horse pens:



There, in the darkest spot, yarrow bloomed bright red.

"I ain't never seen no flower bloom in the dark," Puah said.

"Not many can. Specially not this one."

This one, of course, cannot survive. Yet harm, when it approaches, comes from within the lovers' own ranks. Amos, a slave elder, sets out to exploit their secret the moment "he opened his own eyes [to] what Samuel and Isaiah's peculiar closeness meant". The human capacity for evil is not black and white in *The Prophets*. Sarah, another elder, learns this as the story reaches its dramatic and devastating climax: "Even more frightening was the truth ... [that] every person had it in them".

Jones taps into a tragic trope, that among oppressed people there is "some kind of happiness to be found in someone else being humiliated". This

Red yarrow flowers

Desirée Baptiste is a writer and researcher based in London

is explained as a "failure of memory" which "prevented the empathy that should have been natural". "Failure of memory", and its various harms, is a recurring concern in *The Prophets*. Strategic forgetting, we are shown, is a tool of psychic survival for the enslaved. An innocent question by Isaiah to his beloved ("You ever wonder - where your mam?) is explosive. "No-one asked each other about the scars, missing limbs, tremors, or night terrors" because thinking about the past "could conjure it up". Samuel had thought it was agreed: "Leave the bodies where they fucking lay".

In a sense, *The Prophets* is Jones's refusal to leave the bodies where they have lain for so long. Offered no detail to anchor the story to a specific moment, the reader is required to remember that living, loving Black queer bodies, all but airbrushed from accounts of African American history, existed at every point across slavery's *longue durée*. Samuel and Isaiah, having "the nerve to become one", effectively steal their bodies back from where they once lay, marked as property, reclaiming their confiscated humanity. They also derail the Massa's plan: "to multiply them through the strategic use of their own seed". By loving each other, while pretending to participate in Empty's degrading studding, they subvert the plantation economy's requirement that they replenish its stocks of the enslaved.

Maggie, the Halifaxes' house slave, also takes her body back. Instructed to "act as a cow" to the family's new-born girl, she rubs poisonous nightshade petals on her nipple, causing baby Adeline's death "for what appeared to be inexplicable reasons". Simultaneously, the author also reclaims the bodies (and souls) lost to the world of racist caricature. Maggie is no Mammy. In a darkly funny moment, Timothy, the Halifaxes' adult son, paints Isaiah's portrait while Empty's other slaves keep away, "as if fearful that they would get sucked into the painting and, perhaps, have to contend with two places from which they couldn't escape".

Robert Jones Jr brings Empty's enslaved into the frame: Maggie, Essie, Amos, Beulah, Puah, Sarah, Adam, Isaiah and Samuel, imagined versions of the voiceless generations, whose strangled memories and complex selfhoods could not be shared among themselves, are shared with us. Though "not everything that is faced can be changed", as James Baldwin wrote, "nothing can be changed until it is faced". By reminding us of the grim foundations of a nation, the legacies of which are still playing out today, *The Prophets* serves up a timely antidote to what Randall Robinson calls "the memory-emptying salve of contemporaneity". ■

A rigged system

A novel of rampant capitalism - and lost love - aboard an oil platform

JANE YAGER

HIGH AS THE WATERS RISE
ANJA KAMPMANN

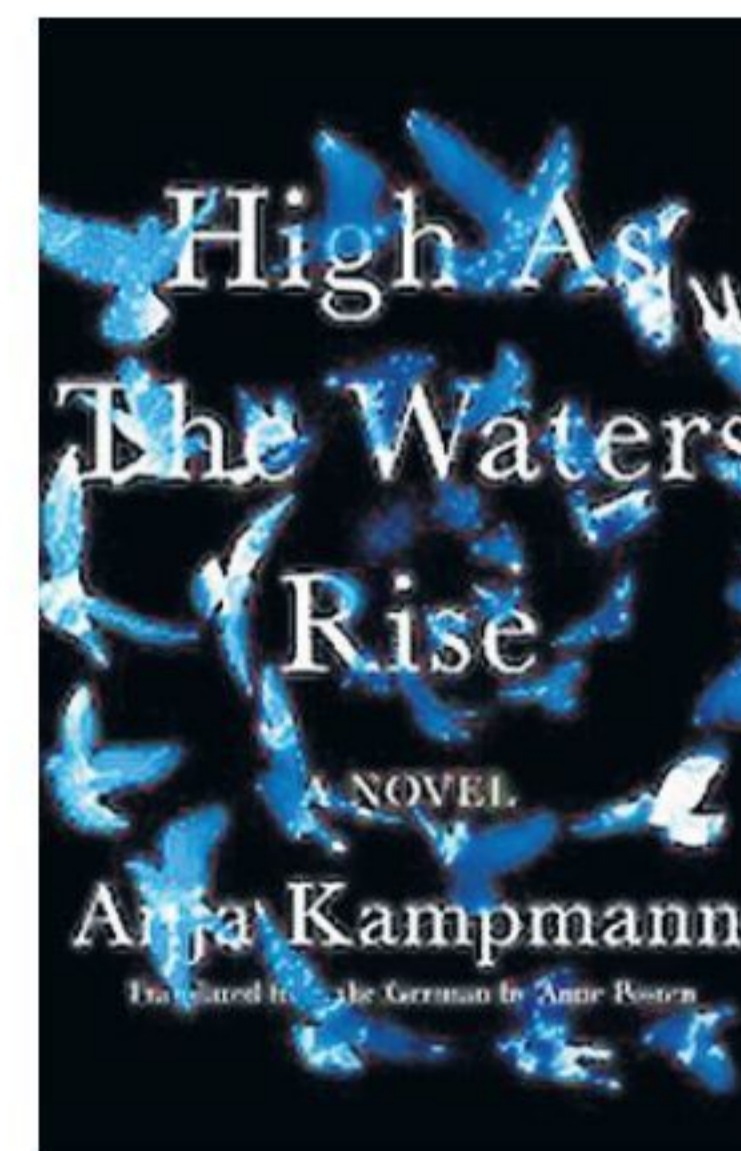
Translated by Anne Posten
320pp. Catapult. £21.99.

ON AN OIL PLATFORM off the coast of Morocco, a worker named Waclaw loses the most important person in his life when his bunkmate, best friend and possible lover Matyás vanishes in a storm, all but certain to have fallen to his death. The grief-stricken Waclaw leaves the platform and sets off with a duffel bag of Matyás's worldly possessions, on a journey among the places of his and Matyás's shared and separate pasts: to a hotel room in Tangiers where they spent their shore leave; to Matyás's family village in Hungary; to the

German coal-mining region where Waclaw grew up; and to the Polish home of Waclaw's ex-wife. This is the plot of the German poet Anja Kampmann's debut novel, *High as the Waters Rise* (*Wie hoch die Wasser steigen*, 2018), which won the Lessing Promotion Prize in the German original and was nominated for 2020's National Book Award in Anne Posten's English translation.

The book is relentlessly lyrical. Kampmann and Posten write gorgeous sentences, lavishing descriptive attention on the light cast on bird feathers, the brass balustrades of a Budapest hotel, "a sea bright as a blast furnace". Beyond these details of the physical world, however, much remains vague and elusive: the reader learns little about Matyás or his relationship to Waclaw, and even less about Milena - the ex-wife who haunts Waclaw - and the minor characters our wanderer encounters on his journey.

Waclaw's meandering travels, forever evading the heart of his relationship with Matyás, feel emotion-



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ally true to the way grief circles its objects, but they are frustrating for readers who cherish forward motion or dramatic tension. The stops along the journey seem flat and placeless, fitting both Waclaw's rootless life ("He turned fifty-two that night. There was no lawn he had to mow, surrounding no house filled with voices or familiar smells") and the book's pervading sense of the shadows cast by global capitalism. Halfway in, the plot picks up pace and takes a sharp turn to focus on homing pigeons - a rather heavy-handed metaphorical counterpoint to Waclaw's own lack of home.

The most vivid and memorable character is the oil platform itself. Kampmann has an astonishing command of the details of life on an oil rig, and *High as the Waters Rise* can be read as oblique climate fiction: Matyás dies working in dangerous conditions because the oil company would "sooner let them drown than interrupt the drilling", and the fossil fuel industry also took the life of Waclaw's father, a coal miner with black lung. Kampmann brilliantly conveys the industry's reckless disregard for human life. The relationships she portrays best are not of friendship, love or family, but those between abusive systems and the people whose lives they extract, consume and wantonly discard. ■



Parallel worlds

Losses and gains from the fall of the Berlin Wall

PETER FREDERICK MATTHEWS

NOT A NOVEL

Collected writings and reflections

JENNY ERPENBECK

Translated by Kurt Beals

186pp. Granta. £14.99.

HOW DOES IT FEEL to live at the end of the world? Jenny Erpenbeck's framing of this question in her new collection of essays, *Not a Novel*, is not temporal but physical. Growing up on Leipziger Strasse in East Berlin, metres away from the Berlin Wall, she would walk to the end of her street to find a terminus. Learning to rollerskate on the asphalt in the middle of the road, she had no fear of being struck by a passing car: there were none.

Not A Novel is a collection of the sort of pieces - some profound, others incidental - that naturally arise as part of a professional writing career. Here are prize-acceptance speeches, introductions to other writers' works, lectures to various academies. Many are concerned with growing up in the GDR and the experience of having the society that formed your worldview disappear. With evident affection, Erpenbeck recreates the singularity of her East Berlin childhood. As she points out in "Home-sick for Sadness", her city was never split in two: she was born in 1967 and things had always been that way. It was normal to hear the U-Bahn trains of West Berlin pass underground without stopping, just as it was a shock after reunification to discover that the Haus der Schweiz on the central boulevard of Unter den Linden hadn't always been a ramshackle grocery shop. It had once been a bank and would re-emerge as such after the fall of the wall.

As a child, Erpenbeck received "care packages" from an aunt who lived in West Berlin. After reunification, when she was finally able to visit her aunt's house, she discovered that the imagined realm of plenty "wasn't beautiful and fragrant at all, but loud and dirty, and my aunt's apartment was in a modest postwar building from the 1950s. ... Peeking out from between the curtains, I saw the *Employment Office* sign on the building across the street, and saw the many sad-looking men standing in front of it".

The loss of the East Berlin of Erpenbeck's childhood meant the loss of its attendant fantasy: a better world next door.

Erpenbeck is adept at using the child's perspective to cast new light on the adult world. The school bake sales in the name of international solidarity for the release of the American Marxist activist Angela Davis or the Chilean political prisoner Luis Corvalán were nothing strange; the odd thing, for her, is that people don't do things like that any more. Children would assemble for flag-raising ceremonies and responded to the command "For peace and socialism - be prepared!" by calling out in unison "Always prepared!" As it turned out, neither Erpenbeck nor the GDR were prepared for what the future would bring.

In "Blind Spots", this book's final entry, the author recounts an incident shortly after the wall had fallen. She noticed a truck with a West Berlin licence plate parked near the border crossing. It was early December and its owner was distributing shiny wrapping paper to the passersby. The benefactor, apparently the owner of a paper shop, had come to the East to give charity to his neighbours. Seeing this, Erpenbeck - now in her early twenties - was offended. She did not want his shiny paper and felt ashamed by those taking it. Rather than generosity, she saw arrogance; the self-involved blindness of a conquering force:

For me, his gesture as he handed down those rolls of paper from the tailgate embodied the whole misery of our inequality ... it carried the message: I am above and you are below. ... The present time that I live in is beautiful, shiny; it is already the future. Whereas the present time that these people live in, the needy people reaching for the wonderful wrapping paper, is just now turning into a "past present," that is to say, a past, which might best be left behind in that winter darkness, trampled into the mud.

The loss Erpenbeck feels here is twofold: it isn't just the flawed system of the GDR that is being demolished but also the future it was building towards. In the GDR of Erpenbeck's description, the people believed they were living in the before-time of the true socialism to come. In the West, on the other hand, there was no such goal to strive for. The utopia was here, like it or not.

Erpenbeck's most recent novel *Go, Went, Gone* (TLS, November 13, 2017), told the story of a retired

Jenny Erpenbeck in her Berlin apartment

“Children would assemble for flag-raising ceremonies and responded to the command 'For peace and socialism - be prepared!' by calling out in unison 'Always prepared!'”

Peter Frederick Matthews is a writer living in Berlin. He is an editor of POLLEN Magazine

academic who attempts to help a group of African refugees threatened with deportation. These efforts could be said either to end in success or failure - "147 of the 476 men now have a place to sleep". "Blind Spots" explicitly compares the reunification of Germany with today's refugee crisis, asking why today's images of migrants scaling the barbed-wire fences of refugee camps, or crossing the Mediterranean Sea, are not celebrated with the same enthusiasm reserved for the images of Germans sitting astride the Berlin wall. What distinction are we making when we see these events as belonging to different moral categories? The German constitution guarantees the right of asylum to political refugees but excludes, as Erpenbeck outlines, "those who are classified as 'merely' economic refugees". Does this stand up to scrutiny? Erpenbeck gives the example of the nomadic Tuareg people in Niger, where the French state-owned company Areva mines uranium:

The extraction of uranium from the cliffs requires a great deal of water, which causes the water level to drop. Areva has even cut off Tuareg access to some watering holes entirely. Radioactive waste pollutes the ground. This has consequences for the camel herds on which the Tuareg depend for their livelihood; but it has even greater consequences for the Tuareg themselves. The rate of cancer and premature death for people in these regions is strikingly high. The energy produced in French atomic power plants from uranium mined in Niger continues to flow in France and Germany. But where is the freedom for one of these nomads to leave his country and seek his livelihood somewhere else, like France or Germany?

If the book's earlier essays looked at growing up in the GDR from the innocent perspective of a child, "Blind Spots" marks a change in attitude. Were it not for the experience of seeing that old world come to an end, the vanishing of the country in which she grew up, Erpenbeck claims she would never have become a writer. *Not a Novel* traces the development of that perspective of a child on the physical margins of one society to an adult able to shed light on the "blind spots" of another.

Quite a few essays have been cut in translation - the significantly bigger German edition has six sections where the English edition only has three - and the thinking behind these exclusions is not always clear. Erpenbeck admits in her introduction that many of these pieces were responses to requests from journalists and publishers, ideas "conceived by other people". And if there is a flaw with this collection, it is that there are too many prize acceptances, too many remarks pitched at an intelligent, sympathetic audience which end before they are able to explore the outer reaches of the ideas they raise. In this regard the German edition holds the advantage: much of the excised material sees Erpenbeck in different moods than those of the English book, writing about photography, travel or opera. The English edition would benefit in either direction: greater focus or greater range.

Erpenbeck notes that reviews of her work have often claimed her to be particularly concerned with childhood. She corrects this, pointing out that her first two novels, *The Old Child* (1999) and *The Book of Words* (2004), were in fact interested in the tension between one truth and another, between past and present, innocence and experience. "One wonderful aspect of literature is that merely by naming this unresolvable tension, it casts a sort of spell, and while it may not give us the one, irrefutable truth, it does provide us with a structure that allows us to observe the many truths that exist parallel to one another, to consider them precisely *in parallel*." Erpenbeck's writing is at its best precisely when she is able to provide us with this structure. At a time when former East German states vote in increasing numbers for the right-wing party *Alternativ für Deutschland*, Erpenbeck's voice is all the more important for its ability to draw attention to a parallel world, one that sought to call a new future into being, rather than harking back to a darker past. ■

Places to go, places to stay

The uncomfortable questions of migration and movement

NOO SARO-WIWA

TRAVELLING WHILE BLACK

Essays inspired by a life on the move

NANJALA NYABOLA

264pp. Hurst. £14.99.



Nanjala Nyabola, 2019

“THIS IS NOT A TRAVEL MEMOIR”, says Nanjala Nyabola in the opening line of *Travelling While Black*. The analyst and former human rights lawyer is keen to emphasize that this collection of essays, inspired by travels to seventy countries, is not a chronicle of jaunts across four continents but rather a polemic on migration and identity: “Race, age and gender are the lenses through which other people see you and measure your ability to navigate a space”. Reactions to her as a female Kenyan solo traveller range from enthusiasm to suspicion. One moment she might be viewed with indifference, and the next be propositioned by a man who thinks that travelling alone is “a declaration of sexual availability”.

The pain of being a middle-class, mobile, Black African female is routine for Nyabola. Educated at the universities of Oxford and Harvard yet treated with mistrust at European borders, she is at once privileged and oppressed. This puts her in an ideal

position to ask (among other things) how it feels to move through a world designed to limit and exclude you. Various locations in her travels serve as points of departure for a wide-ranging discourse covering the politics of mobility, racism, tourism, news photography and literature. Nyabola’s strength lies in an ability to join the dots and analyse what she sees before her, in fiercely articulate and erudite prose. Of the Schengen Convention, for example, she points out how, while it allowed free movement within Europe, it did so on condition that the drawbridge at Europe’s perimeter be pulled up, cutting off humane migration routes to the region. Refugees subsequently resorted to the treacherous Mediterranean Sea crossings, a route made easier by the power vacuum in post-Gaddafi Libya. In Sicily, she witnesses the apparent contradiction of police guards watching over cargo ships full of inbound refugees while Italian volunteers assist the traumatized incomers and try to make them feel welcome. “This is not

Noo Saro-Wiwa is the author of Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria, 2012

an African migration issue but a European one”, she says, “borne out of a structure struggling to reconcile its illusions about what it is and the reality of what it does.” As she stands on the dock in Palermo, Nyabola (who had to jump through hoops to obtain a European visa) hopes the police do not mistake her for a refugee. By contrast, Europeans can easily volunteer in her native Kenya on tourist visas. There is a subjectivity and inconsistency around who is considered “desirable” and allowed to move freely.

Behind much anti-immigrant sentiment, Nyabola points out, is the idea that Africa is to blame for its economic woes. But Europe owes its peace and prosperity partly to the outsourcing of its wars to developing-world proxies. Is it any wonder that the global South is fleeing north? In Africa de facto decolonization never fully happened. The colonial instruments of control are still perpetuated – the same border controls and the same ID card systems deployed to marginalize and weaponize minority identities (such as ethnic Somalis in Kenya). In South Africa, xenophobic attacks on sub-Saharan immigrants make a mockery of popular pan-Africanist rhetoric. “We are just as un-homed and othered here – as migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons – as we are anywhere else”, Nyabola laments. In uncertain times, “religion and ethnicity become the North Star for communities all over the world”.

Yet migration, she reminds us, feeds progress: much of Western philosophy arose from the movement of people and ideas around the Mediterranean. Nyabola recalls backpacking in Burkina Faso, where she was welcomed by people who regarded her as a benefit rather than a threat or burden. It was a mutual interaction refreshingly contingent on kindness, not money. She calls for the Global South not to emulate the East and West’s fortress mentality simply because “progress” appears to demand it. At the same time, she acknowledges the difficulty of extricating ourselves from the financial system and hi-tech lifestyle that undergird such protectionism. *Travelling While Black* is not a book that seeks to provide answers. Nanjala Nyabola exhorts us to “lean into the discomfort of these questions”, to look at the bigger picture and rethink the status quo. ■

A paler shade of white

The ‘conflicted introspection’ of Eula Biss

JENNIFER HOWARD

HAVING AND BEING HAD
EULA BISS

336pp. Faber. £15.99.

CAN AN ARTIST RECONCILE the need to make art with the fact that her art earns her a decent living? In *Having and Being Had*, a self-portrait of the writer as reluctant consumer, Eula Biss finds too many reasons to be ambivalent about what by all appearances is a thoughtful and thoughtfully observed life.

This book wouldn’t exist without the warping pressures of late-stage capitalism. Biss’s comforts discomfit her. Her writing has landed her a tenured teaching job, the income from which has helped make it possible to buy the house she and her family live in. It’s all too much and yet not enough. The house requires *things* – furniture, debt in the form of a mortgage, the perfect colour for the walls. Biss wonders whether it has room for art, and if she’ll have enough time to make that art now that she has so much else to tend to. “My mind is on paint now more often than poetry”, she writes in a chapter called “The Right White”. “I’ve found a new literature: Crisp linen, Collector’s Item, White Zinfandel, Pashmina, Fine China, Ivory Tower, Mirage White,

American White.” This neatly observed catalogue of colours, typical of Biss’s ability to call attention to the tiny but telling detail, stands in for another variety of “right white” – the unearned privilege that comes with white skin. In 2015, *New York Times Magazine* published an essay by Biss, “White Debt”, in which “good” debt (like a mortgage) is set alongside bad (the human cost of systemic racism). Some debts will never be paid off.

Having and Being Had dwells on Biss’s unease about her participation in a system whose values she does not embrace, even as she savours its rewards. No pleasure can be simple. She evokes the never-satisfied hunger that characterizes life as a consumer under late-stage capitalism: “In the furniture stores we visit, I’m filled with a strange unspecific desire. I want everything and nothing”. She gets tangled up in the contemplation of what “work” means. Is it her teaching, her art or the time she gives to her house and family? She would like to quit her job to write, but writing is her job. “Work is, in fact, interfering with my work, and I want to work less so that I can have more time to work”, she writes. “I need another word.” She wonders about the distinction between “work” and “labor”, their definitions slippery in history as well as in her own life. “There is a blurring of meanings now, in many languages, between the words for arduous toil and satisfying work”, she writes. She sells the idea for this book in order to buy more time to write ... this book.



Jennifer Howard is the author of *Clutter: An untidy history, 2020*

I didn’t notice until after I finished reading *Having and Being Had* that Jenny Offill wrote a blurb for it. Offill’s novels, which unspool not in unbroken narrative threads but stand-alone paragraphs, came to mind repeatedly as I read Biss, whose vignettes and arguments only take up a page or two. Each entry records a brief scene or conversation, interspersed with glosses on relevant work by Elizabeth Chin (*My Life with Things*), John Kenneth Galbraith (*The Affluent Society*), David Graeber (“Consumption”), Thomas Piketty (*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*) and others. This approach, Biss explains late in the book, derives from “a new kind of diary” begun after she moved into the house. “I recorded moments of discomfort from my life, usually moments in which I was also enjoying some sort of comfort or pleasure”, she writes.

Self-awareness works well as a point of departure for what Biss has to say, but conflicted introspection – another privilege to feel guilty about – keeps her travelling in circles. I often wanted Biss to keep her considerable powers of observation trained on things beyond herself and push outward rather than indulging another inward turn. *Having and Being Had* might have begun as a diary, but at its best, and too rarely, it calls on the controlled rush of poetry and turns experience into art. Here’s Biss at a lecture, foot bleeding after a fall off her bike: “Precarity is not the price of riding a bicycle, I think, so much as what it has to offer. Wind, a rush of blood, fissures and pits in the asphalt, an errant animal, eyes in a mirror, glint of sunlight on chrome, scent of lake water, catcalls, a soaring feeling. But that is not to say that liberation doesn’t have a price”. Maybe so, but not every transaction, artistic or otherwise, has to be complicated. Better a bloody foot than the perfect white. ■



The Comedy Cellar, New York

Poison in jest

Offence and free speech on the comedy circuit

MADELEINE BRETtingham

DON'T APPLAUD. EITHER LAUGH OR DON'T.

(At the Comedy Cellar.)

ANDREW HANKINSON

400pp. Scribner. £14.99.

IN 2002, LOUIS C.K. invited two female comedians to his room for a nightcap after a show, and asked if he could take out his penis. They thought it was a joke. “And then he really did it”, one of them, Dana Min Goodman, told the *New York Times*. C.K. then took off his clothes and started masturbating.

After admitting to the incident, and four other allegations of sexual misconduct made in the *New York Times* in 2017, C.K. was dropped by his network and his agent; the cinema release of his film *I Love You, Daddy* – about a seventeen-year-old being seduced by a much older director – was cancelled. A year later, he was back trying new material at New York’s most prestigious club, The Comedy Cellar. “I’m scared”, C.K. told the audience. “I’d rather be in Auschwitz right now, in a weird way.” Whether the Cellar was right to allow C.K. back onstage, and how its decision plays into a broader debate about freedom of speech (and freedom from consequence) in comedy, is the subject of Andrew Hankinson’s thought-provoking *Don’t Applaud. Either Laugh or Don’t*.

Over almost 400 pages, the author takes the history of the nearly-forty-year-old club as a microcosm of the comedy industry; Hankinson sees its values, its unspoken rules and attitude to acceptable speech, onstage and off, as a useful reflection of American culture as a whole. Told in reverse chronological order, through interviews with staff and comedians – including, most interestingly, the club’s founder Manny Dworman and his son Noam – the book begins with the disgrace of C.K. and moves backwards through its glory days, when Jon Stewart hung out at the comedians’ table and Jerry Seinfeld parked his Porsche out front, to its unpromising beginnings in the 1980s when then-unknowns like C.K. would regularly play to an empty room and, in the words of its current owner Noam Dworman, New York “was just crack addicts all over the place”.

Hankinson is a generous interviewer who presents transcripts of his interviewees’ largely unaltered thoughts to avoid “hanging [them] out to

dry ... by publishing their words out of context” (as he notes himself, “a book is different from a room”). He gives plenty of space to the Dwormans’ vision of their club as a haven for free speech, a sort of Agora with comically cramped toilets. In a letter to a friend, sparked by the fallout from the C.K. scandal, Noam rails against the “indignigasm” enjoyed by the club’s outraged critics. “The habit today is to attack the bottleneck of distribution”, he writes.

The network, the newspaper, Facebook, Twitter. They are expected to fire people, censor them, ban them ... As an employer I don’t want to be judge and jury of peoples’ private lives. I can’t compel testimony, I can’t punish perjury, I don’t have a forensics lab ... We have a civil and criminal justice system to punish people ... People always ask if Louis will be able to perform at the Cellar again. My answer is yes ... I’m not endorsing or even tolerating anything Louis did. But what’s the standard I’m being asked to follow? ... I know of no crime that is punished with career capital punishment. The Comedy Cellar is just not the institution for such decisions. Buy a ticket or don’t.

Dworman’s arguments are forcefully put and it is difficult to dispute his belief that a club-owner should not automatically bend to mob outrage. Yet it is also difficult not to feel that he is eliding freedom of speech with the freedom to masturbate in front of your colleagues without consequence. Likewise, his critics aren’t asking him to act as a surrogate criminal justice system, merely as a business owner with discretion over whom he hires and fires – a decision that doesn’t require compelled testimony or a forensics lab, both in general and specifically in this case because Louis C.K. has admitted to everything of which he was accused.

Still, Dworman is sincere in his convictions, and supporters will see him as a defender of free speech in the face of moral panic. On the other hand, critics will see Dworman’s loyalty to C.K. as symptomatic of a culture where powerful men are allowed to get away with anything as long as they make money. The book provides several other amusing examples of the club’s owners bending the rules to placate the big names that have helped to build its reputation: Dave Chapelle being allowed to smoke in the restaurant upstairs (the comedian Dan Soder recalls being told “you can [smoke] if Dave Chapelle lights your cigarette”) and Jerry Seinfeld getting angry because he thought he got the light – signalling for him to finish his set – while in full flow. “There was no light”, Noam insists. “Everybody’s scared of Seinfeld.”

The notion of a culture where a minority of powerful people enjoy freedom of speech while everyone else knows perfectly well when to shut up is reinforced by the stand-up Guy Branum’s *Vulture* article, reproduced here, about the comedians’ table – the legendary Cellar back table reserved for comics: “There are rarely women or gay men at that table”, he wrote – a claim disputed by Noam. “We understand that if we question the rules of the table, if we say there aren’t enough women getting stage time, or that maybe they shouldn’t use that word, or even just that Kesha is more talented than Springsteen, we’ll be expelled ... Louis, of course, sexually harassed numerous comics. He was not expelled.” Branum concluded: “The table is the problem. Burn the table down”.

Branum’s article illustrates the difficulty of approaching any kind of debate on freedom of speech when participants have such different levels of freedom to begin with. The interviews with female comedians are some of the wryest in *Don’t Laugh*, coming as they do from comics who have been attracted by the Cellar’s no-holds-barred atmosphere while also being aware of its hypocrisies.

One of the recurring threads in the book is the Dwormans’ insistence that the audience should be the final judge of what’s acceptable. In the words of the club’s booker, Estee Adoram: “I have the option not to book you if I feel you are alienating more than you are entertaining”. This is Manny’s defence when, in the club’s early days, three female comedians accuse him of sexism for not hiring them. “[They said], ‘You don’t book us because we’re women’”, Adoram’s predecessor Bill Grundfest recalls. “And Manny said, ‘No’, very calmly, ‘we don’t book you because you’re not funny’”. The implication of this argument is that “funny” is a stable quality, like height, unaltered by broader social changes or the atmosphere in the room. “Men tend to think that if they think it’s funny, it’s funny”, observes the comedian Bonnie McFarlane. “And if they don’t think it’s funny, it’s not funny”. As the Cellar books more female comedians these days, it also invites the question: did women get funnier? McFarlane acknowledges the cultural forces in play, when she says of C.K.’s comeback: “Maybe that’s his penance? Now Louis gets to feel like what it is to be a female comic ... It’s like, ‘Oh look at you not having the easiest ... just get up there and be funny Louis.’ That’s what comics love to say. ‘Just get up there and be funny.’ Well now you know what it’s like to have baggage”.

The freedom of the comic to get onstage and share their weirdest and most unpalatable thoughts and feelings without fear of censorship is celebrated throughout, even if it is romanticized (after all, the few who ever attained such status have always had to negotiate outraged audience members and the subtle taboos of the industry itself). Hankinson does a particularly excellent job of examining the various new ways this freedom is under threat. Social media, for example, can preserve the formerly cramped, sweaty and transient experience of a club set for posterity and bring it to a wider – and much more sober – audience. And it has the commensurate ability to bring that audience’s feedback to the comic. Hankinson’s interviewees share several stories that illustrate this phenomenon in all its morally thorny glory. In one, a customer’s disgust at a joke about a real-life alligator attack on a child escalates, via an email to the club (“I have posted about this on every social media account I own and asked people to share it ... [The comedian] doesn’t deserve to breathe the same air or live on the same planet as that precious little boy’s family”), to a call on Twitter for the comedian to be boycotted, to the complainer being told by self-styled defenders of free speech that they hope her children are also attacked by an alligator. Before 2000 the whole incident would probably have concluded with the unhappy audience member finishing her drink and leaving early (and possibly, if she was feeling brave, shouting a heckle). Hankinson lets the comedians’ table serve as a metaphor for these changes: initially

Madeleine Brettingham is a comedy writer

it was a semi-private space at the back of the club where comics could indulge in philosophical debates and volleys of insults; it was then moved to a more public space so that comics were cheek-by-jowl with the paying customers (“everyone is on top of us”, complains C.K. in an email to Noam, “There is no safe place”), before being moved back, after a complaint from Chris Rock. And like the comedic freedom they have come to embody, the glory days of the table – when it was frequented by Ray Romano and Robin Williams – are partly myth. “When those guys worked the Cellar there was no fucking table”, comments the stand-up Colin Quinn.

There is no question that the amplifying space of social media, where words are preserved in perpetuity, is affecting peoples’ decisions about what to say and who to hire. For his part, Dworman is staunch in his defence of the absolute freedom of comics to say what they like on his stage, as long as they make their audience laugh. “To be very clear, no, we don’t approve of any comedians’ material before they take the stage”, he writes to the outraged customer. “What one person considers thought-provoking, another considers irreverently funny and another considers unacceptably offensive. It’s simply impossible to lay down an objective standard that everyone could agree on.” By contrast, it is easy to agree that a club owner has no duty to censor on grounds of taste, or that stand-up comedy committed to tiptoeing around the sensitiv-

ities of everyone in the audience would barely be worth paying for. Adoram is clear that because of her family history she dislikes Holocaust jokes. But does she ever say anything to the comedians? “No.”

Calling for a comic to be sacked, blacklisted – or worse – simply for saying something you dislike seems like an obvious overreaction. But if social media has allowed formerly silent audience members to express their discomfort with certain material, the book asks, should comedians be protected from hearing that too? Hankinson relates the story of one audience member protesting on Twitter after hearing a white comedian use the last words of George Floyd in a punchline. In some ways, a critical tweet or an angry email seems like an extension of heckling. Andy De La Tour celebrates this: “I think a comic should be allowed to say what he or she wants to say onstage ... But their right to say that doesn’t take away the right of an audience to respond to that if they don’t like it”. So why do so many of the debates described here so quickly seem to descend into bad-tempered attempts to shut the other side down? Even Noam, angered by Branum’s *Vulture* piece, seeing in it implications that he is sexist and homophobic, threatens to sue. “Take it down”, he wrote in the comments section. “Or lawyer up.”

Behind Dworman’s impassioned defence of free speech lurks the question: freedom for whom? It is harder to celebrate the freedom of an individual to

“**Social media can preserve the formerly cramped, sweaty and transient experience of a club set for posterity and bring it to a wider – and much more sober – audience**”

get onstage and voice their most idiosyncratic, challenging and subversive thoughts if it is obvious that such freedom is reserved for a certain type of person, and rarely afforded to others. Add to this the current highly charged political atmosphere in the US which means that audiences are less inclined to treat the stage like, to quote Hankinson, “giant inverted commas”, and it has unsurprisingly become a vexed issue. But just because the rambunctious free speech cultivated at places like the Comedy Cellar hasn’t been as free as advertised, Hankinson suggests, that is no good reason to abandon or demean it completely.

Despite his shaky defence of continuing to hire C.K. and apparent blind spots about some of the power dynamics at play, Dworman’s views on comic freedom are compelling. You might not long for a world where a female Louis C.K. can expose herself to colleagues, but you probably do want to protect one in which she can make her own version of the alligator joke. Even if he could have at times challenged his interviewees more, Hankinson has provided a fascinating tour through the history of a comedy club in a constant state of flux caused by the political and technological upheavals outside its walls. While the Dwormans’ defiance sometimes leads them to defend dubious positions, it also forces the reader to grapple with the question at the heart of this book: who should be allowed to say what, and why? ■

Never on the sausage

Memoirs of a working poet

JOE STRETCH

**I WANNA BE YOURS
JOHN COOPER CLARKE**

480pp. Picador. £20.

JOHAN COOPER CLARKE is a poet whose cult status can sometimes look like overexposure. As the comedian Bill Bailey puts it, “you’ve either never heard of him, or you love him”. His poetry is studied in schools and has soundtracked *The Sopranos*. Now, at the age of seventy-one, he channels his past with rare potency in his autobiography, *I Wanna Be Yours*.

Normally a pop autobiography breaks down thus: Before Success, Success, After Success; or, Bit Boring, Grimly Entertaining, Bit Depressing. Clarke evades this trap. Although initially the hysterical quantities of cultural detail threaten to doom the project, gradually the extraneous becomes the essential, creating a dazzling collage. It all comes singing back: adverts, pop songs, B-movie subplots, bits of Baudelaire, TV jingles, cowboy catchphrases, endless haircuts and pharmaceutical drugs. At times his recollections feel like a swearer echo of Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (1950): “It became cliché among the usual doom-mongers of the social improvement industry that television ‘destroys the art of conversation’, as if every pre-TV family had been a hotbed of informed debate. If anything, owning a television promoted conversation: at last we had something to talk about.”

Clarke grew up in postwar Salford. His father was an electrical engineer in Trafford Park; his mother, having worked in a munitions factory during the war, was a housewife (“my Dad was on good money, and it was a badge of honour to have your wife at home”). The relative availability of jobs and apprenticeships in industrial Manchester in the 1960s



John Cooper Clarke, 2010

made it vital to Clarke that poetry pay – he needed a riposte to the parental command “Get a job” – and even now Clarke’s is an artistic mode that would smirk at an Arts Council grant, or a university fellowship, or the idea of a poet “on the sausage” (roll – dole). He was and is not so much the Romantic ideal of the impoverished artist as the modern, more commercial ideal of the canny one, inspired by the advertisements of Toulouse-Lautrec, the pop art of Andy Warhol and, for Clarke particularly, the success of the Pam Ayres’s poetry on ITV’s *Opportunity Knocks* (“at last here was a successful contemporary”). Clarke’s keen sense of economic imperative soon found an additional catalyst: for most of his career his days were shaped by his heroin addiction. “If anything [heroin addiction] made me more reliable; when it came to money or dope, the catchphrase was always the same: ‘I need it, man.’”

Like most great late capitalists, Clarke is at ease with his brand. Or at least, he feels no need to bankrupt it with petty grievance or revive it with strained confession. The true horrors of his drug addiction are only glimpsed. And yet, beyond his bravado and self-styled misanthropy, a nuanced self-portrait emerges, not via searching self-reflection, but via careful, affectionate descriptions of clothes, film, food, music and place. Here he is writing about a wasteland in Higher Broughton in the early 1960s, where the body of a local brute called Lemonhead is found:

The road had collapsed, leaving a one-sided parade of uncharacteristically middle-class semis perched

Joe Stretch is the author of three novels. His most recent, The Adult, 2012, received a Somerset Maugham Award. He is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University

perilously close to its vertiginous edge. You could still see the partially submerged tramlines, mangled, twisted, and knotted like steel spaghetti. Below was a pestilential tangle of semi-uprooted trees, out-of-control weeds, and poisonous foliage, girders, rubble, mudslides, and at the bottom, that “melancholy stream”, the River Irwell.

Clarke, like the musician and comedian Graham Fellows, his contemporary, delights in wryly narrating the ordinary. His influence on northern comics such as Steve Coogan is clear. He describes a band, the Polecats, as “a rockabilly outfit whose one notable hit, ‘Rockabilly Guy’, went something like this, ‘A rocka rocka rocka rocka rockabilly guy. I’m a rockabilly guy, ain’t never gonna change my style.’ It’s a good number. I’m not doing it justice”.

No evidence of a coy, introspective phase in his poetic development is presented. His poems, performed in a nasal, hectoring monotone, remain fresh and urgent; their hallmarks – profanity, rhyme, immediacy, the everyday – proved an enduringly successful combination. Punk, pitched as it was somewhere between popular movement and publicity stunt, provided the ideal context for his rise. He performed his poetry alongside the Sex Pistols, Joy Division, Elvis Costello and The Fall. He also made records, produced by the mercurial Martin Hannett and championed by John Peel. Ultimately his influence is more keenly felt in pop music than in poetry. In the noughties, his lyrical blueprint secured fame for the Arctic Monkeys. Working Men’s Club, a recent signing to Heavenly Records, have just released a song called “John Cooper Clarke”.

As I write this, Johnny Rotten is justifying his vote for Donald Trump on Sky News. The inner tensions of punk continue to provoke, particularly in an era where blunt, anti-establishment gestures serve new masters. But Clarke’s “fuck word” belligerence always felt humane, even sweet, disarming and fragile. The child who recuperated from tuberculosis in Rhyl is never far away. In truth, Clarke doesn’t deal in the cheap and salacious. His portrait of the singer Nico is tender and restrained: “Her room would be bathed in a magenta light, and perfumed by the scent of Nag Champa”.

Although his poetry thrives today partly because of its inclusion on the GCSE English syllabus (a form of state assistance Clarke is happy to accept), it rightly thrives. John Cooper Clarke can show us the universal in a hire car. He is the missing link between Pam Ayres and the Sex Pistols, between Baudelaire and the *Beano*. ■

Prices of protest

The killing of environmental activists in Honduras

JENNIE ERIN SMITH

WHO KILLED BERTA CÁCERES?

Dams, death squads and an indigenous defender's battle for the planet

NINA LAKHANI

336pp. Verso. £18.99.

BERTA CÁCERES WAS A Honduran mother in her twenties, fresh from serving in the guerrilla war effort in neighbouring El Salvador, when in 1993 she and her husband started a group called COPINH: the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras. COPINH drew inspiration from Mexico's Zapatista movement, in which an alliance of indigenous groups declared war on the government over the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994), which promoted industrial agriculture and privatization.

The COPINH members had similar anti-globalization ideals but no appetite left for armed insurgency. And in contrast to Mexico, Honduras's indigenous peoples - who mostly comprised the Lenca ethnic group, in the western part of the country - had suffered cultural and linguistic attrition, and were politically invisible. The Lenca were "considered living fossils, the stuff of history and folklore, not an ancestral community with rights", writes the journalist Nina Lakhani in *Who Killed Berta Cáceres?*, an expansive investigation into the death of the Honduran activist, who was murdered in 2016, aged forty-four.

In 1994, the same year as the Zapatista uprising, Cáceres inaugurated the concept of indigenous rights in Honduras by leading a spectacular march of Lenca men and women to the capital, and for a while her efforts bore fruit. Sympathetic lawmakers signed the country up to an international treaty guaranteeing the country's ethnic minorities the right to self-determination and to hold land titles with special protections. The indigenous rights cause, in turn, reinvigorated the country's traditional leftist movements, to which Cáceres and her family had long adhered. Mega-projects on indigenous lands could not proceed without the communi-



Berta Cáceres, Honduras, 2015

ties' approval, offering a powerful brake on schemes that COPINH deemed neoliberal, or imperialist.

It did not take long for Honduran investors and their allies in government to start chipping away at indigenous land titles, at first for large oil palm plantations and later for hydroelectric dams. The big development projects were backed by the World Bank, the IMF and the US government, with Honduran banks and firms acting as intermediaries. A handful of well-placed families stood poised to profit spectacularly. And they did not hesitate to use their contacts - notably military and ex-military men schooled in counterinsurgency tactics - to intimidate people into selling their land. Within a decade, one minority community saw its holdings reduced from 20,000 hectares to 400.

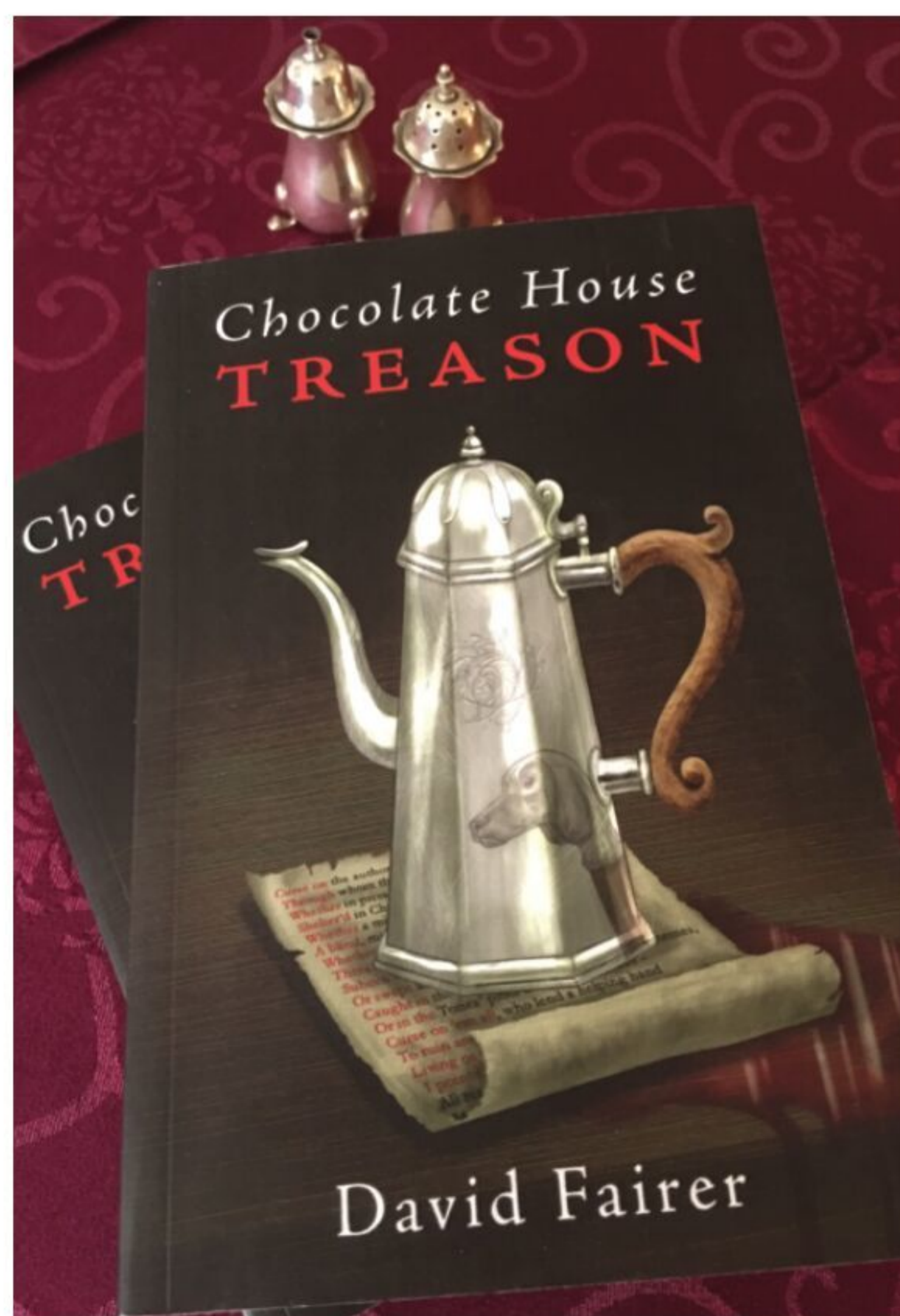
Things got worse after 2009, when Honduras's

then president, Mel Zelaya, was deposed in a coup. Zelaya was a moderate reformer, sympathetic to indigenous rights, and he had struck a deal with the Venezuelan government of Hugo Chávez to buy oil cheaply, a deal that deeply concerned US diplomats and Honduran elites. A new right-wing government immediately sought to open the country to mining and hydroelectric projects, in part to woo back foreign investors spooked by the coup, and offered lavish tax breaks to local ones. Concessions in indigenous areas were granted in rushed hearings, without the consultations required by law. In just one night in 2010, forty dam projects were approved by the Honduran Congress without a word of debate.

One of the most ambitious projects to emerge from all this was a dam called Agua Zarca, on the Gualcarque river in western Honduras. The company formed to build it was run by David Castillo, a "privately educated, bilingual, charismatic, retired military intelligence officer", as Lakhani describes him. Owned by a byzantine network of local and foreign investors, including Castillo himself, the dam company managed in the months after the coup to dismiss environmental studies predicting that the river, used for farming, and of historic and spiritual importance to the Lenca, would be left dry, and persuaded the local mayor to permit a project his constituents roundly opposed.

In 2013 Cáceres and her group began to pressure lenders to pull out of Agua Zarca. Cáceres was convinced - and Lakhani's reporting later proved - that the World Bank was extending loans through intermediaries in violation of its stated policies against projects tainted by environmental or social risk. One such lender was a Honduran bank whose owner had used paramilitaries to harass and kill activists opposed to his palm oil plantations. Now a similar dynamic was developing around Agua Zarca, where private security guards, police and soldiers were stationed. The new arrivals included a company security chief who cultivated a network of local thugs to infiltrate COPINH and harass its members.

Civil disobedience, Lakhani argues, was the only tool Cáceres and her colleagues had left at that point, though their brand of it was arguably rougher than most. In April 2013 the group



CHOCOLATE HOUSE TREASON

A MYSTERY OF QUEEN ANNE'S LONDON

"Delicious! A delightful start to a historical mystery series set in 1708 London . . . Deeply researched without being obvious, this charming and lively tale will not only sweep you into the mystery, but the era and its habits, mores, opinions and politics. Beautifully written, with a nice turn of phrase and wit, this is a stellar series kick-off." - *Shayla*

"This is a book jam-packed with period detail - you can almost taste the coffee . . . If you enjoy stories of political and courtly intrigue, excellent characterisation and a good murder mystery then you will love this book." - *Debra Davidson-Smith*

<https://www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop>
<https://www.waterstones.com>

Jennie Erin Smith is a freelance science reporter and the author of Stolen World, 2011. She is writing a book on families with Alzheimer's disease in Colombia, expected in 2022

launched a roadblock to prevent construction machinery from reaching the dam site. There, Cáceres gave rousing speeches “denouncing capitalism, corruption, imperialism and globalization”. The next month she was arrested at a military checkpoint for possessing an illegal gun. In July 2013 one of her supporters was shot dead after he and some others broke through company gates. Hours later a young man from a local land-owning family involved with the dam was killed in apparent retaliation. In September 2013 a judge sentenced Cáceres to imprisonment after she and other COPINH members were accused of setting company machinery on fire. Cáceres went into hiding after that, seldom spending more than one night in the same place.

In 2014 Cáceres won the Goldman Prize, an international award for environmental defenders, which she accepted the next year; in 2015 she won another award for human rights activism. Surprisingly, she maintained a cordial rapport with Castillo, who never stopped cajoling her, hoping for a deal. But when it became clear that she and COPINH were not interested in compromise, it is alleged that Castillo and his security chief decided to kill her. In March 2016 Cáceres was shot dead in her pyjamas in a bungalow she’d bought with the proceeds of the Goldman Prize. It was the first home she’d ever owned.

Who Killed Berta Cáceres? contains important reporting not just on Cáceres but on the current state of Honduras, a cosseted US ally presided over by a kleptocratic elite, where nearly a third of the popula-

tion lives on less than \$3 a day. During the years the author spent there as a correspondent for the *Guardian*, its homicide rate was the highest in the world. The book is also important because of the rare spotlight it casts on a type of crime endemic in the region. Latin America is home to staggering numbers of men and women whose opposition to mining, agriculture, or infrastructure projects have ended in their violent deaths. More than a hundred such environmental and social activists have been killed in Honduras in the past decade, while in Colombia several hundred have been murdered since 2016 alone. Most of these victims’ killers will not be tried, and their stories will not attract the attention of a reporter as dedicated and skilled as Lakhani. The author interviewed Cáceres once, as the dam struggle heated up, and after her death talked with virtually everyone she knew, friends and foes alike. In 2018 Lakhani was the only foreign journalist to cover Cáceres’s murder trial, in which seven men were found guilty of helping to carry out the plot. Cellphone evidence from the trial seemed to point to Castillo as the plot’s mastermind, and he currently faces a trial of his own. He denies all wrongdoing.

The problem plaguing *Who Killed Berta Cáceres?* is one of perspective. The author seems to share in large part the worldview of her subject, down to her vernacular, describing Cáceres as a “grass-roots human rights defender who refused to surrender to the patriarchal neo-liberal world order”. Cáceres’s personal and family conflicts, which were serious enough to lead to the splintering of COPINH, are mentioned but not explored. In her

“**In just one night in 2010, forty dam projects were approved by the Honduran Congress without a word of debate**”

final interview, Cáceres said it was time “to profoundly debate capitalism and how energy is part of the domination of indigenous communities ... to leave behind the logic of consumerism and privatization and think about alternative energy as a human right”. Lakhani does not explain what this might have meant in practice; it is unclear how Cáceres would have wanted to solve her country’s energy problems. Honduras had long used coal and oil-fired plants for its electricity, and Mel Zelaya was poised to prolong its dependence on fossil fuels. Lakhani does not say whether, had a proper consultation with the Lenca taken place, Cáceres’s group would have considered a dam.

The book lays out a clear and convincing case that, in Honduras, a military counterinsurgency apparatus that emerged during the Cold War was repurposed to serve the interests of an increasingly lawless elite. But Lakhani’s narrative avoids the question of whether Cáceres, too, was a vestige of the same conflicts. Though usually described as an environmentalist or indigenous leader, one of her daughters says she identified most of all as a *luchadora social*, a “social warrior”. When a supporter died of gunshot wounds in 2013, Cáceres told the man’s widow that “the struggle has lost a brave fighter, but we cannot give up, this isn’t over”. Altogether six people died in the fight over Agua Zarca, including Cáceres herself. Forged in twentieth-century revolutionary ideals and tactics, Cáceres and her colleagues appeared to see the dam fight as a zero-sum game against capitalism, with human casualties as par for the course. ■

Shooting the messengers

The dangerous world of Mexican journalism

SCOTT SHERMAN

KILLING THE STORY

Journalists risking their lives to uncover the truth in Mexico

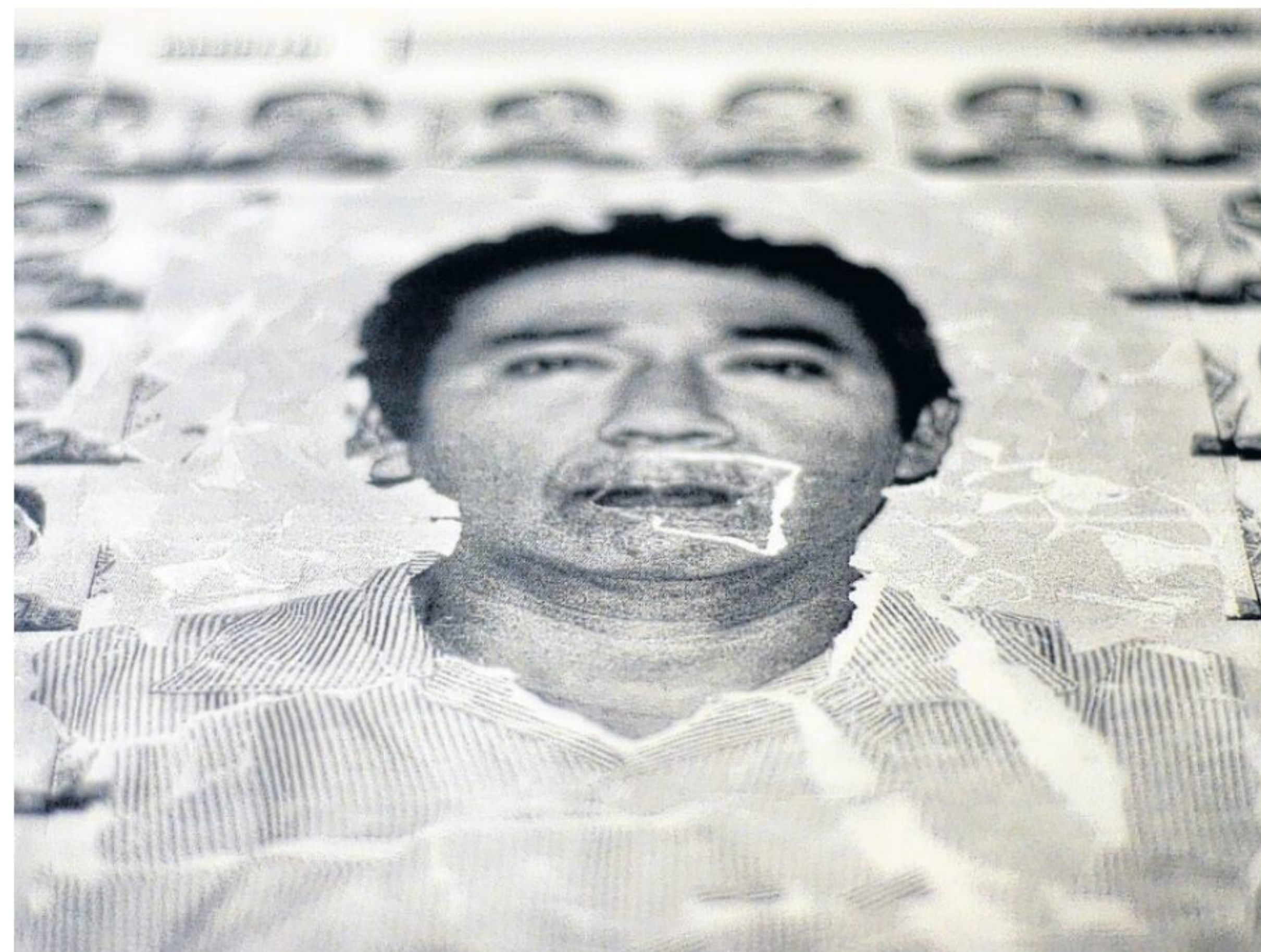
TÉMORIS GRECKO

Translated by Diane Stockwell
243pp. New Press. £18.99.

MOSÉS SÁNCHEZ WAS a citizen journalist in Medellín de Brazo, a town near the bustling port of Veracruz on Mexico’s Gulf Coast, a locale of dirt roads, abundant trash and scarce plumbing. He worked as a butcher and drove a taxi, but his true calling, for nearly twenty years, was *La Unión*, the newsletter he produced on a photocopier: black-and-white, 8 x 5 (similar to A4), a single page folded in two. (His son later helped him to produce it on a computer.) His print run was 1,000 copies per month. The only real source of news in the area, Sánchez wrote about washed out roads and unfinished construction sites, as well as abuses by police, some of whom took residents to a secret jail and tortured them until their families handed over money. The local mayor tried to pay Sánchez off, but he refused the cash.

This is a chronicle of a death foretold. Threats reached him, but he kept reporting. According to Témoris Grecko in *Killing the Story*, Sánchez often told his son: “We have a government that came to power not to work, not to build a better town ... they have come to sack, to rob, to hand out jobs to their brothers, their brothers-in-law, their sons-in-law”. On January 2, 2015 Sánchez was dragged from his home, killed and dismembered. A former police officer arrested for the crime later remarked in a videotaped statement: “He rocked the boat”.

Grecko’s book examines the most perilous corners of Mexican journalism over the past two decades. A veteran reporter and foreign corre-



Jorge Sánchez in a special edition of the newspaper *La Unión*, 2018

spondent, currently based in Mexico, he shows how Mexican journalists are frequently caught between nefarious politicians and ruthless criminal organizations, who are often aligned with each other. The recurring theme of his narrative is Mexico’s broken criminal justice system, in which nearly 90 per cent of murders do not lead to a conviction. Between 2000 and 2018, 141 journalists were assassinated in Mexico. In the first five months of the term of the current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, five reporters were killed. Nine were murdered in 2020.

Grecko is not just a skilled reporter but a sensitive writer who provides vivid portraits of his fallen comrades, many of whom toiled in lawless provincial cities far from the capital. There is Rubén Espinosa, an idealistic young photojournalist who became a thorn in the side of Veracruz’s corrupt

*Scott Sherman, a contributing writer of the Nation, is the author of *Patience* and *Fortitude: Power, real estate, and the fight to save a public library*, 2015*

governor, Javier Duarte; the charismatic Javier Valdez, who chronicled family members who used rods and shovels to search for the bodies of disappeared relatives in the state of Sinaloa; and Miroslava Breach, who wrote about crimes against women and the environment, and who discovered that criminal organizations were running their own candidates in mayoral elections in the state of Chihuahua. All three were brutally murdered.

But *Killing the Story*, which has been smoothly translated by Diane Stockwell, does not have the bleak uniformity of a human rights report. There are victories to savour here, and profiles in courage. Take Pedro Cancé, a citizen journalist of Mayan background in the state of Quintana Roo. His reporting on police brutality and political skulduggery enraged the state governor, Roberto Borge, who ordered his arrest in 2014. In jail, Cancé was viciously assaulted. But then the tables turned. The governor, accused of illicit enrichment and money laundering, fled Mexico in 2016, and Cancé earned his freedom. The reporter subsequently flew to Panama, where Borge was imprisoned, and asked his lawyer for an interview with the governor. The lawyer confused Cancé with someone else and granted him a meeting. Cancé thereby had the satisfaction of interviewing his nemesis behind bars.

Determined female reporters are not neglected here: Grecko chronicles the work of Carmen Aristegui, who, against tremendous odds, has continued to conduct her muckraking journalism on various radio and digital channels; and Laura Castellanos, who risked her life to reconstruct a 2015 massacre in the state of Michoacán to which high-ranking state officials were closely linked.

Even in the shadow of brutality, Grecko demonstrates, there can be continuity and persistence. In Veracruz, Sánchez’s son, Jorge, has continued to publish *La Unión*. “If they thought by killing him they would win silence, they’ll see that’s not how it is.” On a sojourn to Tijuana, Grecko visited the office of the independent weekly *Zeta*, two of whose editors have been shot, one fatally, as a result of their work. “This weekly has cost lives”, Adela Navarro, the current editor, told Grecko. “It has cost blood. We have had threats, political and fiscal pressure, attacks on morale, everything ... But we go ahead, to the next edition, and the next edition, and the next edition.” ■

Red dogs, black dogs

FOXES

THE WILD LIFE OF THE FOX JOHN LEWIS-STEMPEL

86pp. Doubleday. £9.99.

There is an agreeably formulaic quality to these little natural history books by the Herefordshire farmer and *Country Life* columnist John Lewis-Stempel. One knows what to expect. There will be curious facts and statistics about the subject in question, probably a John Clare poem, a Thomas Bewick woodcut or two, quotes from Pliny and Shakespeare, and an economic but lyrical prose style to match the beauty of the original. They are books that can be read pleasurably in an hour or two, leaving one with an increased respect for, and knowledge about, some familiar natural feature. After *The Secret Life of the Owl* (2017), *The Glorious Life of the Oak* (2018), *The Private Life of the Hare* (2019), and *Still Water: The deep life of the pond* (2020), this one on the fox comes welcomingly from the production belt.

Reynard, Tod, or *vulpes vulpes* - is the fox vermin or noble hunter, loathsome or lovable? It is "our largest land carnivore" and - having lived in Britain since the geological Wolstonian period - "our most ancient landowner". There are 258,000 of them in the UK, of which 33,000 live in urban areas. Introduced to Australia in the nineteenth century, there are now 7.2 million of them there. Omnivorous and highly adaptive, the fox has the second largest global distribution of any mammal, after human beings.

While city foxes scavenge food waste (I came within two feet of one the other day by the communal refuse bins: we both stayed calm and courteous), "seaside foxes may subsist on crabs, ferland foxes on frogs". According to Aesop, foxes relish grapes; Lewis-Stempel has seen one nibbling blackberries. They certainly devour earthworms, beetles, mice, voles, rabbits - and lambs, pony foals, a young calf, even other foxes. They can run at thirty miles per hour, they have acute night vision, hyper-sensitive hearing and smell, and vibrissae - facial whiskers - that allow them to navigate in the dark. According to one researcher, they may even have a unique magnetic sense that allows them to target their prey exactly. Highly territorial, they can produce twenty-eight different vocal sounds to communicate with family members. A dog with feline qualities, a cunning creature capable of learning how to switch off an electric fence, with a characteristic sneer or sardonic smile permanently clamped to its face, the fox has been treated abominably by humans (it is painful to read about

"fox courts" and the sport of "fox tossing"). As Rudyard Kipling observed in 1933, and is still the case, more foxes are killed by road traffic than by hunts, farmers, or the mange.

Graham Chainey

WIRED

EVERYTHING SHE TOUCHED

The life of Ruth Asawa

MARILYN CHASE

224pp. Chronicle Books. £21.99.

"Wire can play", wrote a twenty-one-year-old Ruth Asawa in 1947, having discovered the medium that would make her one of America's most innovative sculptors. That chance encounter with wire was through basket-weaving in Mexico, where Asawa had gone to visit Josef and Anni Albers, her teachers at Black Mountain College, the experimental art school in North Carolina. Only five years earlier, as Marilyn Chase recounts in this extensively researched new book, Asawa, her mother, and her six siblings had been forced from their family farm outside Los Angeles and sent to a "relocation center" for Japanese-Americans in Rohwer, Arkansas - a prison surrounded by barbed wire, resembling the material she'd later turn into sculpture.

Freed from her farm responsibilities, Asawa took drawing lessons from fellow internees. "The arts saved us", she later wrote. She was allowed to attend college, though not to obtain a teaching credential, so she went to Black Mountain instead: "Ruth", Chase writes, "was developing a knack for turning insult into opportunity". At art school, Asawa learned about balancing positive and negative space and using everyday materials. She also met her (white) husband, the architect Albert Lanier, and married him at a time when interracial marriage was illegal in many states. They eventually had the six children Asawa always wanted.

As Chase points out, critics often dismissed Asawa as a "housewife and mother" and sought to "exoticize her as 'Oriental'". Her work was described as "decorative" and "craft", as opposed to real art. She was disadvantaged further because she lived in San Francisco, far from the New York art world. But, Chase writes, Asawa "was no fan of any labels - female, Asian, modern - preferring to stand on her own, as an individual 'minority of one', making works as a pure exploration of the material itself", and her biomorphic pieces increasingly appeared in museums as well as in public spaces (she was dubbed San Francisco's "fountain lady" for her controversial breast-feeding

mermaid sculptures in Ghirardelli Square). She became known for advocating art education in schools, and her children played nearby as she worked. "In child rearing", she insisted, "the artist can still create by observing what is around them, children, plants, and making images that can be savored when we are old". Only just before her death in 2013 at the age of eighty-seven did she garner international recognition when Christie's organized her first solo exhibition in New York City in over fifty years.

More analysis of Asawa's work alongside that of her contemporaries - Alexander Calder, Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse - would have been welcome. But with this biography, together with *Ruth Asawa: Life's work* edited by Tamara Schenkenberg and published in 2019, Asawa is finally getting the attention she deserves.

Fran Bigman

CRITICAL THEORY

EGRESS

On mourning, melancholy
and Mark Fisher

MATT COLQUHOUN

300pp. Repeater. £12.99.

In the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis, the cultural theorist Mark Fisher's eighty-one-page salvo *Capitalist Realism* (2009) became an unexpected sensation. The sweeping polemic built its arguments on the pillars of popular culture and could be passed around university dormitories like a joint. It was easier to anticipate the end of the world, Fisher believed, than the end of the free-market orthodoxy; there was a widespread sense, he argued, "that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it". Fisher explored what this meant for art, politics and mental health by inviting readers to wonder what futures had been lost to the pressures of capital. Fisher's work has since been circulated via blogposts and seminars but has struggled to gain widespread exposure.

Egress, written by Fisher's former student Matt Colquhoun, delivers an intriguing combination of personal devastation and critical theory. Alongside fresh analyses of Fisher's theories, there are sections of diaristic personal narrative. We learn, for example, that on the day the news broke of Fisher's suicide in 2017, Colquhoun wandered the streets of south London in shocked despair. He opened his phone to see "Mark Fisher" trending on Twitter. "I was hoping to find a temporary sense of togetherness

here, to find comfort in my own confusion reflected back at me, a band-aid to that moment of isolation before meeting my friends, but these floating avatars were not enough They only made everything more surreal."

Colquhoun is a lucid writer who has produced a book containing compelling and urgent ideas. In the standout chapter, "Mental Health Asteroid", he explores the potency of post-apocalyptic films in the context of a society that has privatized the experience of depression while reinforcing the pressures that let it proliferate. But the book seems to have been written for a refined audience of left-wing readers well versed in the canon of critical theory. Some complicated ideas are delicately introduced to readers, but many more will only resonate for those with a pre-existing appreciation of Fisher and his neologisms. While there is nothing wrong with writing with a community of readers in mind, casual enthusiasts will have to wait to see concepts such as Reflective Impotence, Market Stalinism and Hauntology elucidated for a wider audience.

Nicholas Barrett

IDENTITY

THE SEVENTH HEAVEN

Travels through Jewish Latin
America

ILAN STAVANS

296pp. University of Pittsburgh
Press. Paperback, \$25.

Norman Manea, who spent the first five years of his life in a concentration camp in Transnistria, in a conversation with his friend Philip Roth, brought up the question: "What is a Jew?" Roth replied: "I'll give you the same answer I give when I'm asked 'Who is Philip Roth?' It's an impersonation".

Manea's question has a long and troubled history, beginning, perhaps, with Moses' presentation of the Ten Commandments to the Jews at the foot of Mount Sinai. Maimonides considered only the first two to be essential: belief in the existence of a single God and the forgoing of idolatry. To be a Jew, for Maimonides, was to follow these two commandments unwaveringly.

The question, not the answer, lies at the core of Ilan Stavans's travel diary *The Seventh Heaven*. Stavans travelled through Latin America over a period of four years in order to meet, converse with and attempt to understand what it means to be Jewish in the Latin-American diaspora. Is there a common feature among the individuals who call themselves Jewish in Argentina and Mexico, Cuba and Chile and the Dominican Republic?

The question of Jewish identity is not new for Stavans, a well-respected Mexican professor of Latin-American and Latino studies at Amherst College, who has pursued it in almost every one of his many publications. Here he interviews dozens of Latin-American Jews, from the descendants of the Jewish gauchos in Argentina and their accounts of antisemitic persecution, to Cubans who recall the story of the MS *St Louis* and its cargo of Jewish escapees from Nazi Germany being denied refuge in 1939. Talking to business people, Talmudic scholars, poets and filmmakers from all over the continent, Stavans paints a compelling picture of Jewish identity. Marcelo Brodsky, a photographer and human rights activist, tells Stavans about the Argentinian military targeting Jews in the 1970s; the New-Mexican publisher Ron Duncan Hart and his wife, Gloria Abella Ballen, explain to him the importance of Sephardic culture in South America; the Argentinian writer Edgardo Cozarinsky regales Stavans with anecdotes about Alberto Gerchunoff, author of *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas* (1910), who silenced a high-class lady when she asked him if he was really Jewish with the answer: "Señora, proof of it can be placed in your hand".

"Jewish Latin America was a Diego Rivera-like mural", writes Stavans, "replete with intriguing characters. The challenge was to bring all those voices and images and ideas into a narrative now that the world had changed dramatically." In *The Seventh Heaven*, Stavans has successfully met this challenge.

Alberto Manguel

FICTION

TRIO

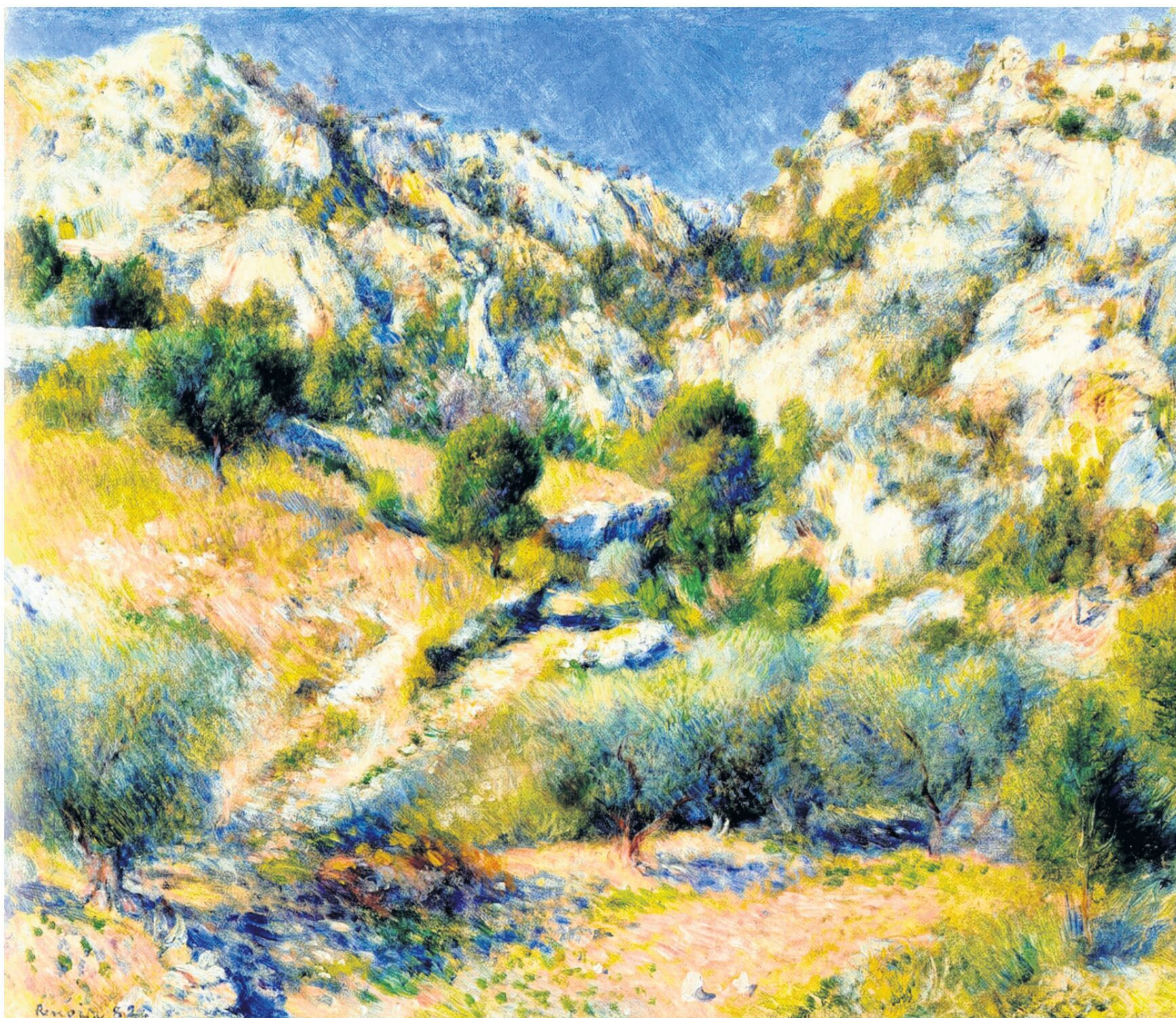
WILLIAM BOYD

352pp. Viking. £18.99.

Set in Brighton in 1968, this is a story exploring identity, addiction and the purpose of life itself through a trio of protagonists: Elfrida Wing, a novelist, Talbot Kydd, a film producer, and Anny Viklund, an American movie star. The three are at the seaside resort for the filming of Emily Bracegirdle's *Extremely Useful Ladder to the Moon*, an absurd but apt title for a definitive Sixties picture which, like this novel, vacillates between screwball comedy and high tragedy.

Elfrida is a fêted and successful author, with a string of best-sellers behind her. She has not written a word for a decade, however, and is now a hopeless alcoholic married to Reggie Tipton, the director of the film. It is difficult to distinguish symptom from cause in her downfall. Is it a miscarriage, her philandering husband, her writer's block or simply her taste for vodka?

Talbot is Bracegirdle's producer



“Rochers à l’Estaque” by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1882; from *Jean Paul Riopelle and the Automatiste Movement* by François-Marc Gagnon (212pp. McGill-Queen’s. £37.95.)

and seems every inch a respectable English gent. He had a “good War”, is married with two grown up children and has a great reputation in the industry. But behind the façade is a man struggling with his sexuality. The legalization of homosexuality has done little to alleviate his conundrum, only presenting him with more opportunities.

Anny is playing Emily Bracegirdle, an American actress filming in Brighton who falls in love with her driver, played by Troy Blaize, a Tommy Steele-like singer-come-actor. In what is explicitly acknowledged as life imitating art, Anny falls head-over-heels for Troy - her first love affair with a man her own age. Anny is addicted to prescription drugs and constantly medicates herself with uppers and downers. Her addiction is rooted in childhood trauma: her mother left her father and abandoned her.

These three intertwined and crisis-ridden journeys lead to three very different bourns. Elfrida’s passage is the most perilous. In her successful days she was hailed as the new Virginia Woolf, an accolade she detests, venting at *To the*

Lighthouse “with its footling detail and its breathy, neurasthenic apprehension of the world, all tingling awareness and high-cheek-boned sensitivity”. She becomes obsessed by Woolf’s suicide and attempts to write a novel about Woolf’s last day, with draft after draft of mundane detail descending into farce as she asks herself such questions as whether Virginia should fart on waking.

Anny’s voyage is the more adventurous: she is on the run from the FBI and treks across France. Of the three, only Talbot has it easy, escaping his world and moving happily into retirement.

At times Boyd’s prose veers towards the clinical, his scene setting like a surveillance camera picking out fine details but missing atmosphere. But the plot moves along with gusto, and with Elfrida, Talbot and Anny, Boyd has created an unforgettable trio of characters.

Justin Warshaw

AI

GIRL DECODED
RANA EL KALIOUBY
352pp. Penguin. £20.

In the early 2000s, a gifted young doctoral student at Cambridge University, Rana el Kaliouby, was close to packing it all in. “I had a

grand vision of inventing a computer algorithm that would be responsive to human emotions and needs,” she writes in *Girl Decoded*, “but the reality was that I was sitting ... staring at an emotionally ignorant piece of hardware.” But the hurdles she faced - including trying to continue a long-distance marriage between Cambridge and Cairo via email, and lab work late at night while pregnant - only made her more determined.

Decades of neuroscience have shown that our feelings enhance our thought processes; while excess emotion can be harmful, so can too little, which results in low empathy. With a computer programmer for a mother and an IT teacher for a father, el Kaliouby was exposed to technology from a young age, and excelled in her studies. Having built an algorithm for “Emotion AI” during her PhD, she brought it to life at the MIT Media Lab. Her marriage foundered because of the demands of intercontinental time and travel, but her vision for her work grew steadily. Moving from academia to business, she co-founded the company Affectiva with Rosalind Picard, a professor at MIT, in 2009. Affectiva got off the ground as an ad tech company that helped brands understand consumer reactions, but el Kaliouby steered it into collaborations in healthcare.

El Kaliouby believes that Emotion AI’s greatest asset may be to lessen

social prejudice. But she herself can come across as a little lacking in self-awareness. From middle-class suburban Boston, she sometimes strikes a gently condescending tone towards what she left behind, quipping that her traditional Egyptian aunt may be shocked to hear of her LGBTQ friends or of her celebration on becoming an American citizen and thereby joining what she calls “the larger world”. She does not acknowledge that those back home probably don’t remain in a “small” world out of choice. Her social ambitions for Emotion AI are admirable, however. Today, Affectiva’s technology - which draws on face and voice analytics - is used in care robots, drowsiness sensors in cars and software that supports neurodiverse people, among other settings. The possibilities seem endless.

Sarah Jilani

HOME FRONT

COMMEMORATIVE MODERNISMS

Women writers, death and the First World War

ALICE KELLY

297pp. Edinburgh University Press. £80.

The 1920s were years of ghosts and memorials. The hundreds of thousands of British war dead, whose broken bodies lay in France,

Turkey, Italy and Belgium, haunted survivors’ imaginations. We are familiar with the war poets’ response to the industrial slaughter: Wilfred Owen’s soldier drowning from within after a gas attack, or Robert Graves’s green and stinking “Dead Boche” left unburied in Mametz Wood. But what of women writers’ responses, enmeshed as they were with feelings of uselessness, jealousy and the guilt of the survivor?

In this careful and scholarly volume, which takes in nurses’ memoirs and works of fiction alike, Alice Kelly argues that the First World War not only transformed literary representations of death and mourning, but that the scale of the slaughter and its arbitrary mercilessness formed a major influence in the development of interwar literary modernism. Kelly shows how both during and after the war women writers searched for new modes of expression and pursued themes of fragmentation, obliteration and the intrusion of the monstrous and unpredictable into private lives. Katherine Mansfield, after losing a brother in the conflict, describes how it “creeps” and “oozes” into her. But the imaginative potential of the war also inspired her. In the aftermath of a Zeppelin attack over Paris, her immediate response is a desire to compose a short story on the cruelty of a thing that can “glide over the sky like that and hurl a bomb”. Similarly, the American poet H.D. uses the image of the Zeppelin (“a whale swam in city dusk, above suburban forests”) to convey female suffering and trauma on the home front. In *Jacob’s Room* (1922), meanwhile, constructed around the protagonist’s absence, Virginia Woolf pays her tribute to the Unknown Warrior, and reaches a turning point in her artistic development.

Kelly’s book makes for uncanny reading today, in another time of dark, empty streets, the bodies of loved ones we cannot touch, and the daily registers of a heavy death toll. Under such circumstances, artistic responses to fathomless tragedy may seem inadequate. For all the modernists’ literary sensibilities, the works that leave the deepest impression are those of the nurses who witnessed the extinguishing of so many young lives. Despite their more conservative modes of expression, their unpolished records - many read and reviewed by Woolf and Mansfield - are brutally effective. “Rochard ... turned and twisted, first on the hip that was there, and then on the hip that was gone ... morphia, good as it is, is not as good as death”, reports Ellen La Motte, an American nurse. Another nurse’s unconscious anonymization of the “nephritis case [who] died in the afternoon in a pool of steam” conveys the numbing scale of it all. Afterwards, she writes, it is time for her tea break. ■

Sarah Lonsdale

Poles apart

The unusual Holocaust stories of the 'Tehran children'

ABIGAIL GREEN

TEHRAN CHILDREN

A Holocaust refugee odyssey

MIKHAL DEKEL

384pp. Norton. £19.99.



Villagers in Ein Harod Kibbutz, Israel, c.1948

AS A CHILD IN ISRAEL, Mikhal Dekel belonged to a society shaped by the Holocaust and desperate to move beyond it. Most homes in their Mount Carmel neighbourhood contained at least one life lived elsewhere before the war, "a complex story of survival, and an entire other family ... who had existed before the war. Nobody talked. Everything was negated". Her own family was no exception.

Dekel knew that her father had been born in Poland, but she thought of Hanan simply as one of the "Tehran children" - an iconic group of child refugees brought to Mandate Palestine from Iran in February 1943. Both then and since, their story had been celebrated as one not of suffering but of deliverance: "CHILDREN OF ISRAEL SAVED FROM ORPHANHOOD AND BROUGHT TO ERETZ ISRAEL", as one contemporary headline put it. Only in later life, as a literary scholar in New York, did she start to wonder what lay behind the story.

Tehran Children is the story of Dekel's quest to understand where her father came from, both literally and metaphorically. Encouraged by her friend Salar, a Persian refugee with linguistic and personal connections that she lacked, she follows the trajectory of her late father and his sister Regina from their comfortable life as the children of wealthy brewers in the Polish town of Ostrów, through the turmoil of the Soviet occupation of Białystok, from

September 1939, to the well-documented hardships of the Gulag archipelago, where they were sent without any prior knowledge. And onwards, ever onwards, from one terrible situation to the next. Always hungry, always desperate, never in control of their trajectory, from Archangelsk through rural Uzbekistan, Bukhara and Samarkand - where the children were separated from their parents - until they eventually reached Tehran. The children then passed through a series of orphanages, homes and transit camps - via India, Aden and on through the Sinai - until they eventually settled in Kibbutz Ein Harod.

Theirs was not the usual Holocaust story of survival within the confines of the rigid logic of the death camp. Rather, as Dekel rightly notes, it was "the story of being vomited out from the tentative safety of home into a vast, impoverished, ferociously dangerous world". It is a story that speaks to the terrors of the twenty-first century in a way that perhaps the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka no longer can.

Dekel's academic training helps her to see her father's experience as simultaneously particular and generic. Hanan's "Holocaust refugee odyssey" is always his story, and based on his own written account, but by interweaving his memory with the written testimonies of other Tehran children, Dekel shows us how similar their responses were to death,

Abigail Green is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Oxford. She is writing an international history of Jewish liberal activism since 1848, and leading a project on "Jewish" country houses in partnership with the National Trust

insecurity, disease and hunger. Only 857 Tehran children arrived in Palestine in 1943, but hundreds of thousands of Poles had set out with them a few years earlier on the same terrible path. Catholics and Jews alike, they fled the Nazis and found themselves sucked into the horrors of a succession of alien worlds. As she tells her father's story, Dekel helps us to see what held these disparate groups together, both in Poland and out of it - and how what appeared to be a common plight served, in the end, to prise Jewish and Catholic Poles apart. In recovering his lost geography of suffering, she opens up new possibilities for understanding that shared past.

Perhaps, however, this was not Dekel's original intention. For this is a book that sets out to challenge the Zionist narrative of deliverance by questioning the inevitability of Hanan's rebirth as an Israeli citizen. She is at pains to emphasize the contingency of her father's trajectory, the alternative fates that might have awaited him, and the extent to which the brutal experience of forced exile was shared by almost everyone she met.

Yet she also comes to understand the Jewishness of Hanan's experience as distinctive. She had wanted to "trace my father's identity through his prewar life and his refugee journey rather than presuppose it, to 'follow the actor himself'" (here she is quoting the sociologist Rogers Brubaker). She then discovered that theoretical constructs like these could not help her to understand her father, because choice was a luxury he never had. Zionism, in short, was the only option available to Hanan and Regina by the time they reached Tehran. It transformed their sense of self in a way that was, perhaps, artificial, but there was dignity and security in this identity as well.

In 1949 Hanan's mother too reached Palestine (her husband survived the war, only to perish in a displaced persons camp). Regina later recalled this moment as one of "great happiness" that was nonetheless unsettling, for suddenly she didn't know who she was any more. "I had grown accustomed to thinking of myself as an Israeli. My mother was a refugee." In choosing to end her story with this reflection, Dekel reminds us how much Hanan and his sister had lost - and gained - in the making of their new selves. ■

Born and razed

Remembering a lost community

MEGAN MARZ

THE LAST CHILDREN OF MILL CREEK

VIVIAN GIBSON

160pp. Belt Publishing. Paperback, \$9.99.

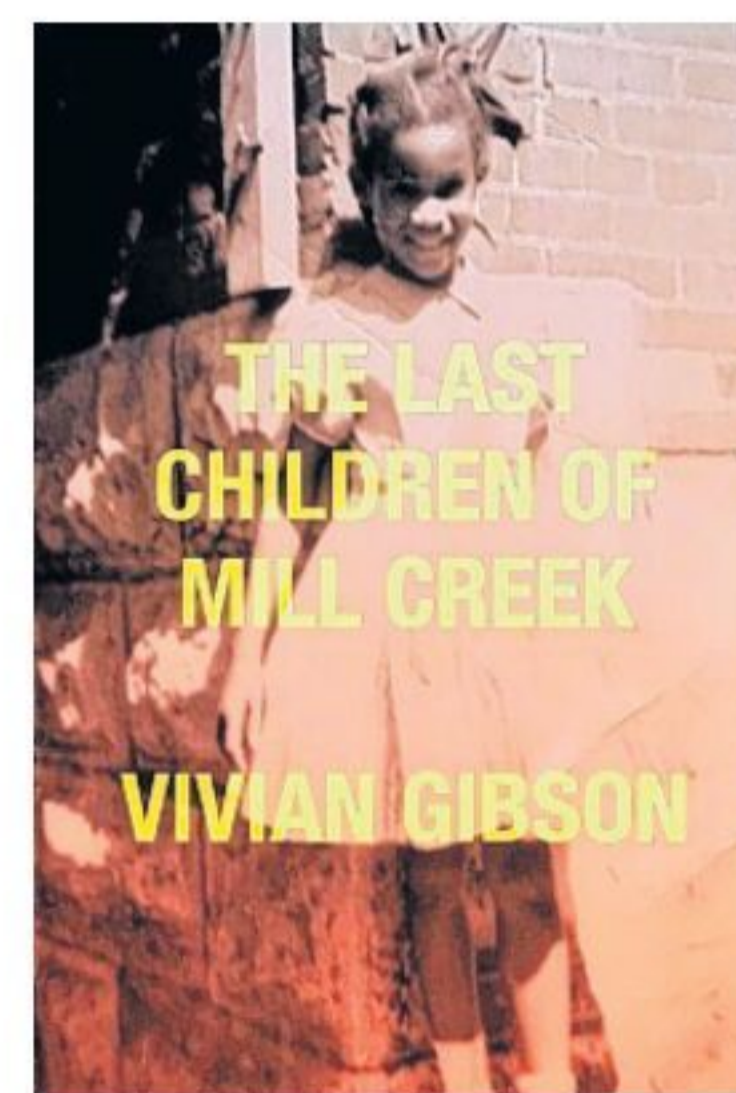
IN THE 1950S AND 60S, cities across the United States razed supposedly blighted neighbourhoods in the name of "urban renewal". These federally funded demolitions displaced more than a million people and often "destroyed tight-knit communities", according to the University of Richmond's online project *Renewing Inequality*. One such community was Mill Creek, a Black enclave in St Louis, Missouri; in the late 1950s, it met with wrecking balls that "permanently destroyed a viable urban neighborhood of more than 20,000 people", as Vivian Gibson puts it in *The Last Children of Mill Creek*.

This memoir offers a rare view of a since-levelled mid-century community through the eyes of one of the last children to live there. The seventh of eight siblings, Gibson was still in primary school when her family left Mill Creek, just before its demise, for a bigger house in another part of the city. Writing her book at the age of seventy, she supplemented her early experiences with research on both the area and her family, drawing on letters, documents and con-

versations with relatives. As a result, she's able to contextualize her memories within the history of her family, and her family within the history of St Louis and the United States.

She explains that her parents moved to St Louis, a Midwestern city, as part of the first Great Migration (a mass exodus of Black Americans seeking to escape the South's oppressive conditions during the first half of the twentieth century). Her father, the first in his family to advance beyond third grade, came from Arkansas because his town had no high school for Black people. Her mother, a "pampered" middle-class college student who could pass for white, came from Alabama during a break. Gibson ably, though only sparingly, weaves background detail into the girl's-eye perspective from which most of the book is written. More frequently, while her voice remains assuredly adult, she reconstructs her youthful worldview without much commentary. She recalls, for example, that the white people she only occasionally encountered had skin that "looked similar to Mama's and Aunt Bette's, so I was never sure if they were the white people we sometimes heard about".

By declining to add layers of explicit retrospective analysis, she makes her childhood world strikingly immediate, and the book's narrative structure reinforces the impression that you have been directly plunged into her memory. Some anecdotes stand out, of course. On June 6, 1955, Gibson's



Megan Marz is a writer living in Chicago

father had his leg crushed and his ear nearly torn off when a truck hit him as he repaired streetcar tracks at work. Gibson's older sisters came to collect her in the middle of the school day: "Before I could ask how they knew I needed rescuing from my wooden cell, they said in unison, 'Daddy's in the hospital'". Soon after came the day Gibson ate too many of the sugar packets her father sent home from the hospital and made herself ill. But most of the book describes events that occurred again and again. Gibson attentively describes the family's laborious chores and favourite meals (such as beans and franks, in which the franks "could be wieners, canned Vienna sausages, even Spam" or, best of all, "big fat Polish sausages"). She recalls her mother's entrepreneurial hat-making and crocheting, her and her sisters' trips to get their hair done, and solo visits to her godparents (when alighting from the bus, she would find her godfather "standing on the corner of Vandeventer and St Louis Avenue dressed in a suit with a starched white shirt" and a matching fedora). Of her mother's habit of whistling the children inside at nightfall she writes that

With her thin lips pulled back tightly against her teeth, her thumb and middle finger expertly curved to almost touching between her slightly parted lips, Mama took in a deep breath through her nose and forced air from her lungs, over her tongue, and through her teeth and fingers to make a piercing whistle: a two-part, birdlike shriek that skidded on the night air and carried to the middle of our city block.

It's one of many descriptions that seem to have gathered detail over time, becoming so vivid that you yourself might be meandering down a bustling street as the sun sets, reluctant to go inside just yet. ■

In next week's

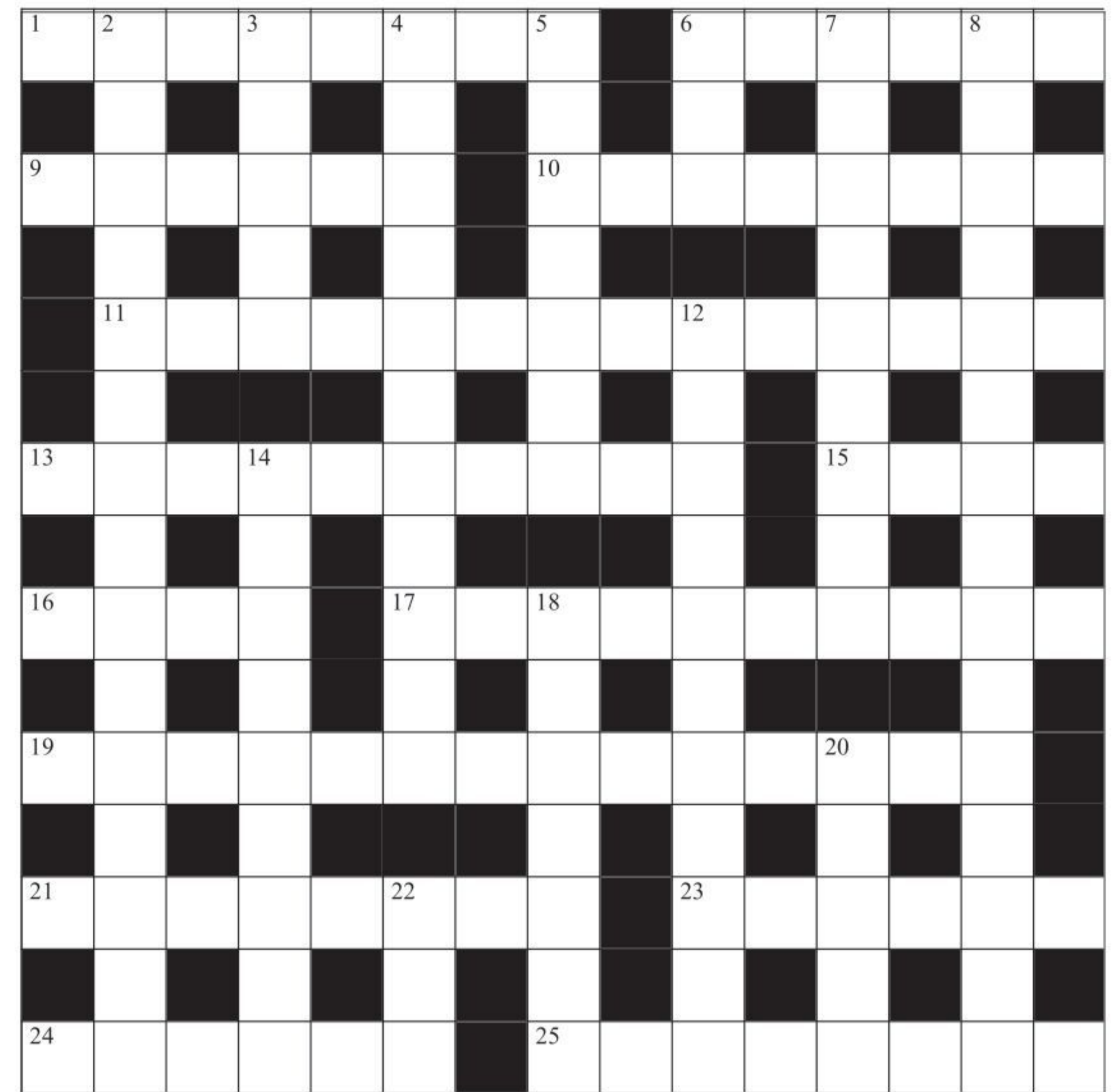
TLS

NORMA CLARKE

Another fine Meissen



TLS CROSSWORD 1359 BY BROTEAS



ACROSS

- 1** Spin doctor, Liberal, in a revolutionary position in Churchill's work partly about politics (3,5)
- 6** Lady in Ecclesiastes, the rudest book of the bible (6)
- 9** Trollope's most important title of all? (6)
- 10** End in sight in vegan fresh fruit harvest (8)
- 11** Reformed prisoner's scratched out message received previously (5, 9)
- 13** Sci-fi's opening works, translated (5, 5)
- 15** Small carriage wheel component (4)
- 16** "What chance has the ignorant, uncultivated — against the educated expert?" (Mark Twain) (4)
- 17** Traded Amis novel for stage presentation (10)
- 19** A series of sins including love in a novel about apartheid (1, 5, 2, 6)
- 21** A dancing event perhaps, or something else unmissable? (4, 4)
- 23** A sleuth fooled, taken in by a swine (6)
- 24** Present 17 points to a Nabokov novel (6)
- 25** Dangles US author in sodas, oddly (8)

DOWN

- 2** Mess or germ — topic difficult for a lady with OCD? (6-9)
- 3** Three notes about one composer (5)
- 4** Strange lair in which a superior man met a very posh lady who wrote about nuns (5, 6)
- 5** Ancient sorceress adopting core of plan to serve up raw seafood (7)
- 6** Bear's story included in video novel (3)
- 7** Italian form of western revolutionary art replacing a hotel of sorts that can be seen on the Grand Canal (9)
- 8** Wild savage drowned, or Lucy's lover who died in an improbable way (5, 10)
- 12** See gossip rejected in this poem ending in pleasant dreams (11)
- 14** Dramatic beginning of a Noel Streatfeild book (7, 2)
- 18** This, I know, is a Roger McGough poem (2, 3, 2)
- 20** Maritime machinery responsible for a fictionalised shipwreck (5)
- 22** Brief actions seen in two kinds of theatre (3)

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SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD 1355

The winner of Crossword 1355 is M. Harrison, of Stratford on Avon

The sender of the first correct solution opened on February 12, 2021, will receive a cash prize of £40. Entries should be addressed to TLS Crossword 1359, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF



Reaching out

To the great unvaccinated, now might seem a good time for the trimming of sails. It is time to reorder the bookshelves, if order appeals, or to pile up some books for the charity shop in readiness for when the charity shop reopens - if it ever reopens. After that, you may open your copy of *Newsman's English*, the first in Harold Evans's five-volume series *Editing and Design*, and meditate on a time (1972) when trainee hacks needed just a few pages of guidance on "Editing in the Electronic Era". "All the electronics will not replace journalism. They will enable us to make it more effective." Evans's notes on "stale expressions", meanwhile, remain valuable, *not least as, in this day and age, the writing is on the wall*. Not to put too fine a point on it with a brutal reminder, but the current situation is nothing if not a powder keg. Truly, there is a wealth of information in *Newsman's English*.

And after that? Well, maybe turn to *Some Time After: And other poems* by Anne Ridler, from the same year. Your long-lost copy has just fallen out of the hardback volume in which it was performing the humble office of bookmark. "Why does the story always turn out badly?", Ridler asks in "Reading the News":

All these years we have watched
the statesmen talking,
The hopeful signing letters to
The Times,
And while we dragged our feet,
the road was leading
To famine, torture camps, and
atom bombs.

The poem ends by asking where it was that those "serene masters" - T. S. Eliot being one of Ridler's own - found their faith that "all shall yet be well". That question remains valuable, too.

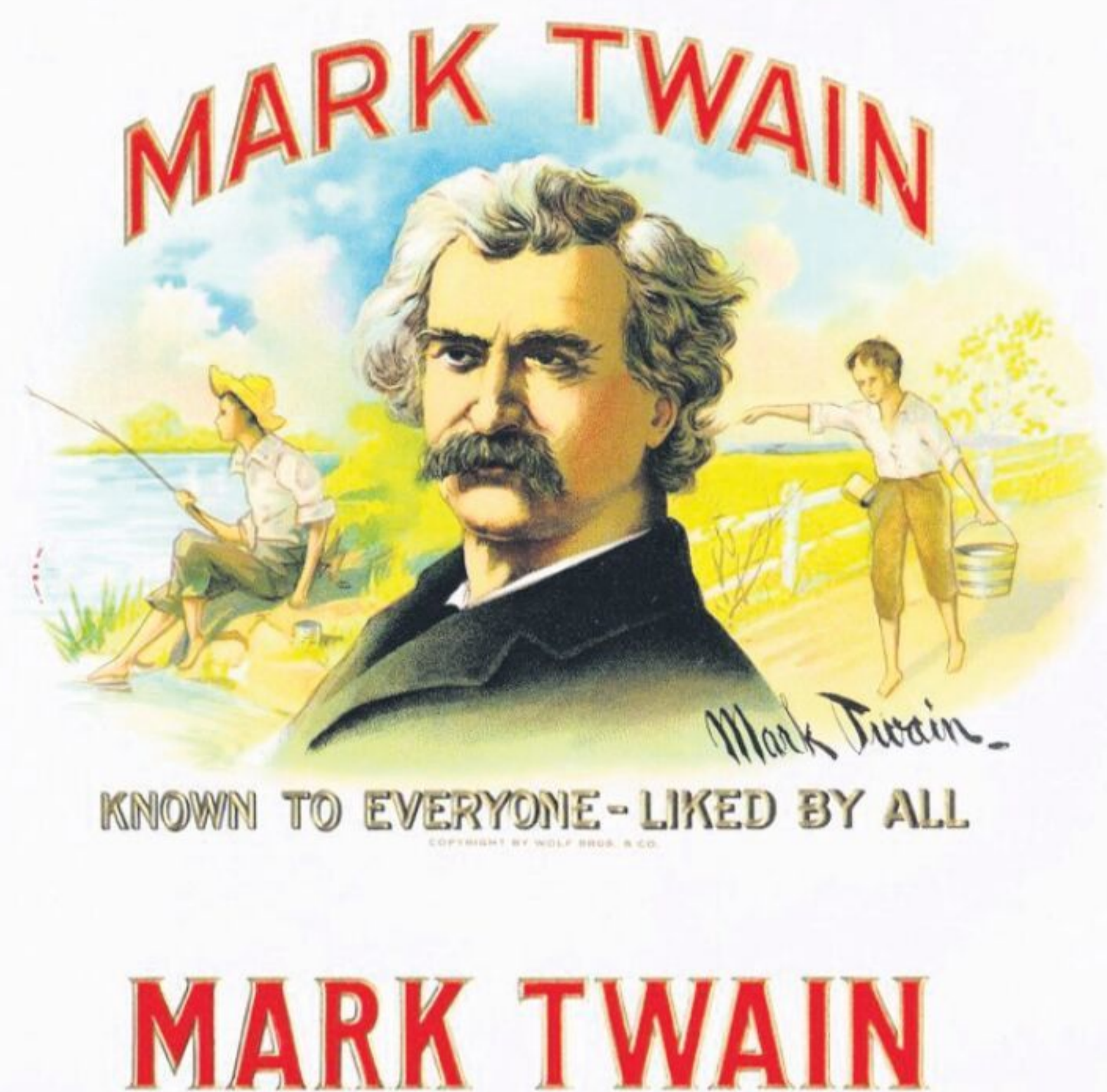
Let's hope that the good news reported in the *Bookseller* last week shows that some things at least may yet be well: there were more independent bookshops at the end of 2020 than there were at the beginning; for the Booksellers Association has reported that it now has 967 bookshops as members, 136 new ones being classed as independents. Three years earlier, in 2017, the total figure was 868.

Things may yet turn out badly. Forty-four indies did close last year. The lack of a Net Book Agreement still gives the supermarkets and a certain tax-shy online retailer a gross advantage over smaller competitors. We cannot hear a chorus of economists raising their voices in jubilant song for the Age of Brexit-19. All the same, the BA's news suggests that a long period of

decline ("Is this the final chapter for traditional bookshops?", the *Independent* howled in 2009), wrought by the combined forces of Amazon and the nation's supermarkets, has been reversed. It just might not be realistic to imagine a return to the situation of twenty years ago, when there were twice as many indie bookshops around.

Advertising authors: an occasional series. Thackeray representing Wills's "Three Castles" cigarettes. Whitman, not a smoker, adorning a cigar box. Hemingway, very much a drinker, helping to sell Ballantine Ale (but who were the other authors who contributed to this series of advertisements?). Scott and his "brand name", Waverley, being used to advertise smooth pen-nibs and coarse-cut tobacco alike. Last October it was suggested in this column that literary "phizogs" were rare in such commercial contexts - rare but not unknown, we should have said.

The latest addition to this collection is Mark Twain. Jeffrey Susla of Woodstock, Connecticut brings word of Twain appearing on both a box for containing cigars and an advertisement for a chromolithograph. Prompted to look a little further into these matters, we first found a chromolithograph portrait of Twain made for promotional purposes in Cincinnati, Ohio, around the turn of the twentieth century. A little more typing, scroll-



ing and muttering about more effective journalism in the electronic era revealed the cigar box label pictured above. Here, c.1920, Twain's portrait is flanked by bucolic vignettes of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and beneath his signature appears this reassuring motto: "Known to everyone - liked by all".

Eleven years ago, Cornell University marked the centenary of Twain's death with an online exhibition called *Known to Everyone - Liked by All: The business of being Mark Twain*, based on the Twain collection of Susan Jaffe Tane. Thanks to Cornell and Tane, we know now, and not a moment too soon, that the association between Twain and cigars was once such an obvious one to the public that manufacturers could start rolling (out) "Mark Twain Cigars" in the 1870s; the name was trademarked in 1931.

We also know that, in 1937, Twain starred in a magazine advertisement for Old Taylor Kentucky Whiskey, lounging centre-stage in a clubbable scene by Pierre Brissaud. And we know that the author himself coined the phrase "Known to everyone - liked by all" to promote his lectures in the 1880s. Had he lived long enough to see it, Twain might not have enjoyed spotting it on a product copyrighted to somebody else. In addition, this image of the author is based on a photograph by Napoleon Sarony that Twain disliked, referring to it as that "damned old libel" - and the signature is not his.

It is now the time to mention Lydia Davis's contribution to the latest issue of the *LRB*, "Dear Who Gives a C**p"? In which the translator of Proust and Flaubert offers the charitable purveyors of recycled toilet paper some constructive feedback: "could you please offer the option of shipping your product in an unidentified box?"

Authors critique commerce, and not just their own. It feels like - though it need not be - the start of a whole new series.

Correspondence. Those who were amused to learn that an eighty-one-year-old man called William Shakespeare was among the first Britons to receive the Pfizer vaccine last month will verily split their sides when they hear that

James Joyce (see also pp10-13) graced a football pitch this month in the historic FA Cup tie between the non-league team Marine and Premier League fancy dans Tottenham Hotspur. Less amusing, perhaps, for the historian Robert Service is a conflation of identities that has happened to him more than once: he is mistaken for Robert W. Service (1874-1958), the British-Canadian "Bard of the Yukon".

Most recently, for example, a small publishing company that "researches online consumer demand for books and identifies out-of-print titles with high levels of reader interest". On this occasion, the company's research had indicated that "there is demand for *Spell of the Yukon* and we would like to discuss opportunities to bring this title back into print". Professor Service of St Antony's College, Oxford was encouraged to "reach out", indeed, "if you have any out of print works you'd be interested in discussing". *Spell of the Yukon: And other verses* was published in 1907.

But perhaps that zealous publishing company was right to infer that Service (the poet) still has his readers. Service (the historian) was having lunch with somebody a few years ago, he recalls, and was asked whether he had written any poems recently. His reply: "Not since I was in my twenties. I write history and politics nowadays". Her comment: "That's a real shame. I do hope you go back to the poetry. I'm a great admirer".

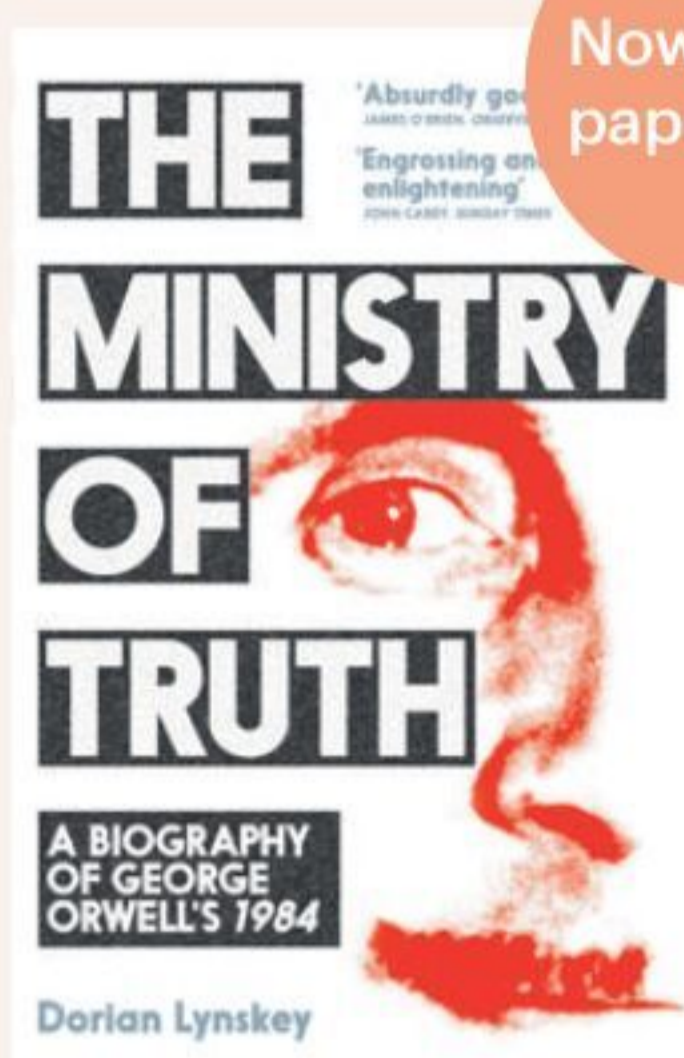
M. C.

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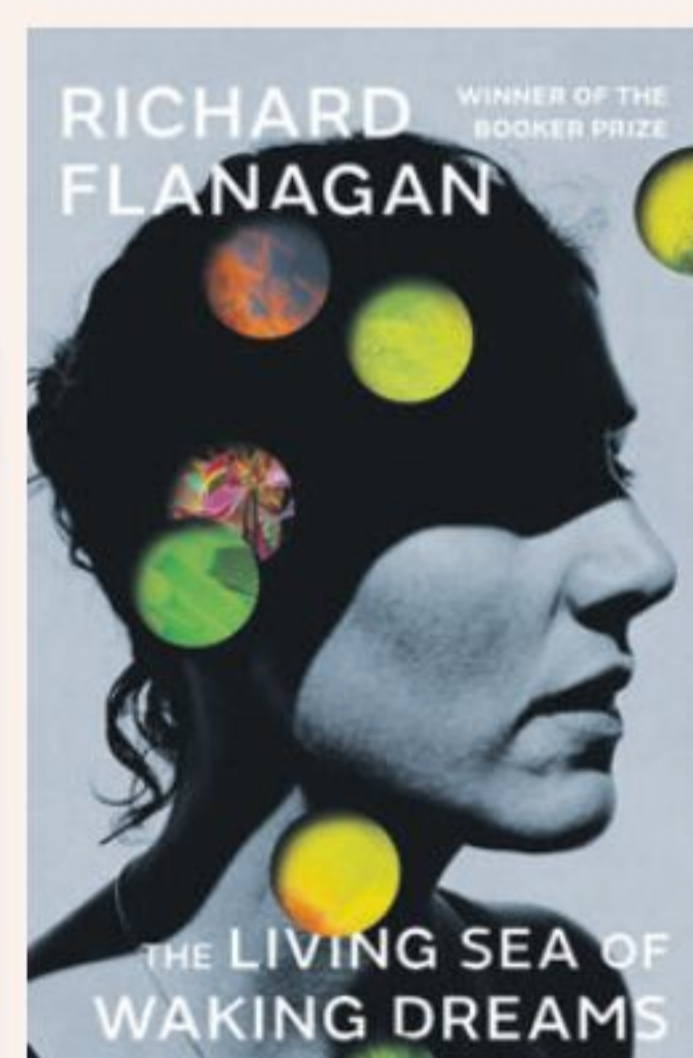
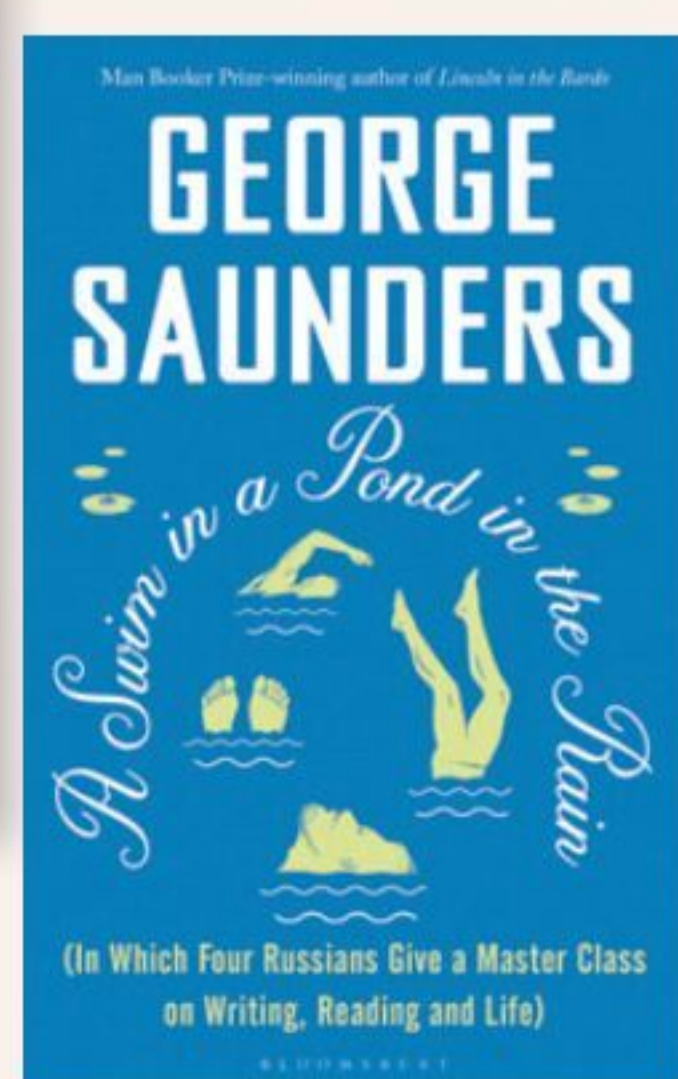
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