Killer lines
Alex Clark on Patricia Highsmith at 100
ART HISTORY
NORMA CLARKE
The City of Blue and White - Chinese porcelain and the early modern world Anne Gerritsen. Porcelain - A history from the heart of Europe Suzanne L. Marchand

POEM
ANNE CARSON
Sure, I Was Loved

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
ALEX CLARK
Legacies of the Enlightenment, SOE in France, Scottish Independence, etc

LITERATURE
ANNE NELSON
Still inexthaustible - Patricia Highsmith at 100

POLITICS

LITERARY CRITICISM
THEA HAWLIN
STANLEY WELLS
The Critic as Amateur Saikat Majumdar and Aarthi Vadde, editors Shakespearean - On life and language in times of disruption Robert McCrum. No Boys Play Here - a story of Shakespeare and my family’s missing men Sally Bayley

HISTORY
DAVID REYNOLDS
JOHN FLOWER

ARTS
CLIFFORD THOMPSON
EN LIAN KHONG
One Night in Miami (Amazon Prime Video) A Year in the Art World - An insider’s view Matthew Israel

FICTION
ARIN KEEBLE
DAVID COLLARD
TASH AW
TIPHANIE YANIQUE
A Burning Megha Majumdar should we fall behind Sharon Duggal Memorial Bryan Washington Luster Raven Leilani

EXTRACT
CLAIRE-LOUISE BENNETT
Curiosity without limit - Ann Quin’s rejuvenating, kaleidoscopic Passages

SOCIAL STUDIES
CHARLOTTE SHANE
Entitled - How male privilege hurts women Kate Manne

POETRY
MIN WILD
DECLAN RYAN
CARLA ROSA MANFREDINO
RORY WATERMAN
MARY ANNE CLARK
Jeffrey, the Poet’s Cat - A biography Oliver Sedden Life without Air Daisy Lafarge Singing / Breathing / Trembling Jen Hadfield Randomly Moving Particles Andrew Motion The Air Year Caroline Bird

POEM
DALIJIT NAGRA
Letter to Professor Walcott

CULTURAL HISTORY
CLARE SAXBY
OLIVER BALCH
Rag and Bone - A family history of what we’ve thrown away Lisa Woollett Magdalena - River of dreams Wade Davis

HISTORY
JOHN ROGISTER
Siècle de Louis XIV - Seven volumes Voltaire

IN BRIEF
24

CROSSWORD
27
NB
M. C.
Looking ahead, Academic book reviews, Unquiet Graham Greene, John Le Carré’s times

The Times Literary Supplement (ISSN 0305-7228, USPS 82-226) is published 50 times a year, with double issues in the periodical issues of August and December, by The Times Literary Supplement Limited, London, NW1, and distributed by IAX, Inc., 24 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022 USA. The TLS is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation and abides by the standards of journalism set out in the Editors’ Code of Practice. If you think that we have not met those standards, please contact IPSO on 0300 123 2222 or visit www.ipso.org. For prentation to copy articles or headlines for internal information purposes contact Newspapers Licensing Agency at PO Box 10, Watford Bridge, TN2 4YS, tel 01922 822547, email copyright@nla.co.uk. For all other reproduction and licensing inquires contact Licensing Department, 1 London Bridge St, London, SE1 9RP, telephone 020 7799 5888, e-mail sales@newtimeslit.co.uk
From white gold to white elephant

The rise and fall of porcelain

NORMA CLARKE

THE CITY OF BLUE AND WHITE
Chinese porcelain and the early modern world

ANNE GERRITSEN
£26.99 (US $34.99).

PORCELAIN
A history from the heart of Europe

SUZANNE L. MARCHAND

CLAY, WATER AND FIRE are all that is required to make pottery. Clay vessels for storing, cooking and serving food date back over 20,000 years, their invention located at multiple sites from the pre-Neolithic onwards. Porcelain is pottery brought to its highest artistic form: from crude clay the most translucent wares can be made, given the right materials in the right quantities treated in the necessary ways. Therein lay the challenge. Others had pots – earthenware and stoneware; but until the eighteenth century only the Chinese knew the secret of porcelain. Chinese potters had experimented with different clays, washes and firings throughout the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) and refined their techniques. The city of Anne Gerritsen's fascinating study is Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, a sprawling province in southern China, rich in natural resources, situated along the riverbed of the Chang and with mountains to the north, east and south that were covered in vegetation and excluded a distinctive high-quality white clay. By the rule of Zhenzong (AD 997-1022) of the Song dynasty, Jingdezhen was producing fine white wares. They attained such quality that the emperor ordered porcelain from Jingdezhen's kilns for his imperial court, and thus its primacy was established.

In the history of ceramics Jingdezhen has a further significance as the place of “discovery” where, in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, blue and white porcelain began. Or so the story goes. Gerritsen argues that Jingdezhen’s “exceptionality” has been exaggerated. Paradoxically, she seeks to de-centre Jingdezhen while writing about it in detail, to show how it was part of a larger network of production and trade that already existed before its excised a distinctive high-quality white clay. She looks to the Song dynasty period when porcelain was first made and associated with the imperial court. There were many other kiln sites, competition for local resources, including the vast labor force required, and technological experimentation across the region. Her book is not a history of ceramics, of which there are many, or of porcelain, like Suzanne L. Marchand’s Porcelain: A History from the heart of Europe (2016), which also investigates Jingdezhen’s long history. The focus is intensely local and at the same time global as Gerritsen seeks to understand patterned trade, the role of the imperial court, and something of what it might have been like to be one of the many workers involved in the making and distribution of a commodity that had world-wide appeal and was made nowhere else.

Excavations of tenth-century tombs in Korea and Japan have turned up Chinese porcelain, but it was a shipwreck in the early fourteenth century that provided evidence of the extent of trade. A fully loaded Chinese vessel went down off the southern coast of Korea, near Sinan. Researchers in the 1980s were, astonishingly, able to use the packing slips in the cargo to date the wreck: it was loaded in Fujian in 1323 and bound for the Japanese port town Hakata (Fukuoka today), destined to travel on to the Higashiyama Temple in Kyoto. Japan imported a wide range of goods from China – copper coins, silks, aromatic plants, books and tracts as well as ceramics. Over 200 shipwreck sites have been identified along the Korean coastline, testimony to the active trade connections between China, Korea and Japan in which porcelain was important; the Sinan wreck underlines the size and value of what might still be lying on the seabed. It was carrying 28 tons of copper coin (at $8 million coin) and some 16,800 ceramic pieces, 6,000 of which survived whole, as well as metal objects: bronze candle holders, incense burners, weights, cooking pots.

What was not recovered from the Sinan shipwreck was any blue and white porcelain. Blue and white, it was concluded, began after 1323. But it was before 1351 because in the British Museum there are two exquisite temple vases (beautifully reproduced here), superbly crafted and decorated with cobalt, with the date 1351 inscribed on the neck. They are from Jingdezhen. Gerritsen reminds us of the hazardous nature of evidence – no blue and white on the Sinan wreck does not mean no blue and white was being made - and takes issue with the slightly mystical notion of “discovery” a few decades later. She stresses the movement of people, a multifaceted, unpredictable flow of expertise and knowledge; and convincingly argues that the quality of those vases alone points to a longer, deeper and more varied set of interactions.

Why does it matter? Gerritsen wants us to see the many working the messy, repetitive and arduous tasks that lay behind the image of “one labourer sitting in a chair with a brush in his hand” that has too easily summed up the city and its luxury product. With her feet solidly planted in Jingdezhen, and starting at the present-day Shand market where cracked bowls and stem cups change hands for decent sum, she takes us into the workshops. She reckons more than thirty different kiln sites were active in the city from the Tang dynasty onwards, the majority serving the needs of the imperial court, but many privately owned. The court had need for a large supply; the imperial household extended from the emperor, his consorts and children to a number of secondary courts and no fewer than 100,000 eunuchs who each maintained a household of one or two servants and perhaps an adopted son. In 1422, Jingdezhen was required to send 443,500 pieces of ceramics; in 1577 it was 174,700.

A porcelain office oversaw production at every stage, costing and guarding against cheating and theft – and bequeathing valuable information to future researchers. All the tools required for the many stages of the process were made on site, as were the vats, vessels, containers and buckets; and they were logged, as was the quantity of cobalt used (cobalt was expensive). Wood was measured by shoulder-loads, a gang, about fifty kgs. Each wood-fired kiln might take 180 gang (9,000kg) to reach the very high heat required to fire the clay. The wood would have been sent down from the mountains either on a boat (more expensive, but it arrived dry) or floated downriver (a bit damp). The clay itself needed refining by pulverization and purification in water. By the sixteenth century a hand-powered hammer had been invented attached to a beam and with a rope, and in the seventeenth century a waterwheel drove the hammer. Cobalt also needed pounding, washing and mixing. The majority of the work tasks involved digging, beating, sieving, carrying, pouring, stirring – and then more carrying. It goes without saying that the lower skilled were paid little; and were regarded by the imperial overseers as “crafty villains” liable to slip bits of cobalt into their pockets while pulverizing it into powder. It was the nearest they would get to possessing porcelain.

Jingdezhen was the biggest and most significant site of ceramics production in the world. It was connected via the Yangzi, China’s main east-west arterial river, to the urban centres of eastern China and the ports. As well as with Korea and Japan, trade with the Middle East was well established, but it was rare to find Chinese porcelain in Europe.
Sure, I Was Loved

For Dimitris Papaioannou

I tamed you.
(No you don't).
You were made.
You were intangible.
You were unconvincing.
You were vague.
You claimed you were born from angels.
You stank of the horrors of war.
You blazed with ruthless pride.
Your full, loose mouth blazed.
You had a freckle.
You bloomed like a cannibal.
Ready to devour or be devoured.
Or both.
You had your portrait painted as a butcher's block.
Yet you were not a still life.
You were meat but recently living.
You had come with your own legs.
Near your legs.
I replaced your crotch.
Crotches.
All of them.
You were ghosting around as if a mystery of Hymen.
I undressed you.
That is the only difference.
Beyond that there was little development between us.
I used crutches, stilts, veneration, plaster casts.
I rooted your shoes.
I tilted the stage, I knocked it apart, I combined you with other genders.
I rolled up my sleeves.
I showed you no tenderness, we might as well have been sexual!
Or medical!
Or archaeologists!
I required you to clean up whatever mess we made.
I used the menses again next day.
I slowed your steps, inhibited your breathing, assaulted you with film score music (waltz).
I littered the stage with open graves and you fell into them - hilarious!
I laughed at you!
I made you walk on your hands without oxygen or effective friends.
I made you build the floor you walked on.
I blew your clothes off.
I mangled your Orpheus scene.
I threw someone else's thighs at you.
I dosed you with the waters of Lethe.
I flattened you into a lozenge and stuffed you in my pocket.
I shot all the arrows of King Darius' Persian army at you (fast!)
then made you pick them all up (slow).
I tossed your skeleton off its slab (it smashed).
I played with your skull.
I got you chasing a nostalgic scrap of paper then turned out the lights
and told the audience to go home.
Beyond that nothing was resolved between us.
The legs were of various heights.
You invited me into your golden age, I made you a stranger,
a loser, an arriviste, an undocumented alien, an unclaimed hostage,
a bed birthday gift.
I had you eaten into by the human.
I broke your energy,
I invented your gravity,
I pulled you out through your own peep-hole.
(No you didn't).
I tamed you.
(No you don't).

ANNE CARSON

Johann Böttger was searching for the philoso-
pher’s stone - the recipe for gold. Frederick I of
Prussia showed an interest, which led Böttger to
travel over the border into Saxony, where Augustus
the Strong promptly locked him up and lavished on
him all he needed to conduct his experiments. What
Böttger became obsessed by, however, was “white
gold”, the East Asian porcelains that Augustus loved
(Augustus confessed to having a “porcelain sick-
ness”) and that had become status symbols among
Europe’s rulers: Philip II of Spain amassed some
3,000 pieces; Elizabeth I owned a substantial collec-
tion of blue and white (raided from Spanish ships
by Sir Francis Drake); the Medicis collected and
displayed it and so did German princes. Saxony, with
its long traditions of mining and assaying, glassmak-
ing and alchemy, had craftsmen skilled in working
at high temperatures; it also had the raw materials:
kaolin clay and wood in abundance. Getting the mix
right, and working out techniques of glazing and
underglazing, was an expensive process fraught
with failures; in the heat, vessels cracked and glaze
mixtures ran. Augustus was willing to pay: his “sick-
ness” was about prestige, not profit, although once
Böttger succeeded and his kilns began turning out
imitations of pieces in the royal collection Augustus
stopped supplying the vast sums he’d been spending
on imported porcelains. The Treasury cheered up.
Böttger and his operations were moved to Meissen
and an industry was born.

Suzanne L. Marchand’s Porcelain is at heart a
history of the Meissen manufactory near Dresden
and the KPM (Königliches Porzellan Manufaktur) in
Berlin; less a commodity history like recent books
about salt, coffee, tea, sugar or cotton and more
about how businesses weathered historical change.
By looking closely at what happened to porcelain
during the Napoleonic wars, for example, or dur-
ing the Biedermeier era and the Weimar Republic
and then under the Nazis, in the postwar period
and up to and after the financial crisis of 2008,
Marchand aims to tell a story about “people, states
and markets, and... the changing nature of work
and consumption”.

It is an ambitious project - “to fuse porcelain’s
story together with the history of central Europeans
since about 1700” - and at times the level of detail
is such that reading the book is like being in one
of those dense German forests that provided the
firing for the kilns. However, while there are a lot
of trees you also see the shape of the wood. Mar-
chand, a specialist in German history, writes with
clarity about what was regarded as a quintessential
German commodity, a source of pride and identity,
tracing its transformations from an aristocratic
obSESSION into a bourgeois necessity “and finally
into an unloved white elephant”. Her closing pages
surveying the porcelain industry in late 2019 offer
a gloomy picture of “the changing nature” of work
and consumption: companies shut and workers
laid off and even the great Meissen facing an uncertain
future. How many of us, after all, now decorate
our shelves with busts of Cicero or Frederick the Great
and keep a set of “best” china in a cabinet that only
comes out on special occasions? There is an irony
here, too, the closing of a circle that began with
early modern trade. One reason German porcelain
may not have a future is that the market is flooded
with cheap imports from China.

The problem with porcelain was always expense:
experimentation was expensive and wastage colos-
sal. Even perfectly made pieces might not sell and
last year’s production would accumulate in the
warehouses. The tension between whether to
make exhibition wares and elaborate collectors’
items that boosted pride, or horribly bowls and kit-
chy figurines for a popular market (“populuxe”) was
constant. Competition in the eighteenth
century came from Britain and France. Stafford-
shire’s potteries had pioneered techniques of slip
casting, press moulding, stamping and lathe turn-
ning and speeded up the making of identical wares.
Josiah Wedgwood, both a scientist and an entrepre-
neur, perfected a recipe for a fine, light-coloured
stoneware he called "creamware" (sending a box to Queen Charlotte and thereafter calling it "Queen's Ware") and had even more success with "Jasperware" - imitations of Greek and Roman vases to suit the neoclassical taste of the times.

Marchand acknowledges that the eighteenth century is the "golden" age for connoisseurs but wants us to step with her into the lesser-rated, lesser-studied nineteenth-century history of porcelain, using it as a window to examine political and proto-institutional transactions. "Perhaps more keenly than anyone else," she writes, "the porcelain makers of this era experienced the long, slow death of mercantilism, intertwined with the equally attenuated and painful rise of capitalism and industrial society." (A quibble: perhaps textile workers felt it no less keenly.) The old order of courtly consumption gave a flourish at the Congress of Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic wars. German, English, Russian and other nobles set up camp in the city for several months and took the opportunity to buy and give each other gifts: the KPM gave the Duke of Wellington a 460-piece "Waterloo" service. A few years later the market dived and KPM's profits were a tenth of what they'd been in 1816.

Porcelain remained a form of ornament but its usage shifted towards eating, drinking and smoking - fewer figurines for the dining table, fewer snuffboxes sold. Silver services, many of which had been melted down in the wars, were replaced in elite households by porcelain and glass. For the non-elite, porcelain began entering their lives as coffee pots and pipes. The expansion of coffee-drinking and the bustle of Parisian cafés and a café culture is central to this part of the story. New dining habits such as service à la russe provided opportunities for those who could afford it to show off, as did afternoon tea or coffee parties hosted by women. From about 1850, when they began to be made in large numbers, dolls with porcelain heads might be seen in the arms of the little girls of the family. Doll heads were now some of the first truly mass-produced porcelain items, made by lower-end manufacturers, finished at home by poorly paid female painters. Marchand includes a revealing photograph from 1927 of a woman in Thuringia with her four young daughters gathered around a basket of heads, hard at work in a shabby interior, and dressed in a style of clothing unchanged since the middle of the previous century.

Mass production brought prices down, but other changes meant that a twelve-piece service of porcelain was unlikely to be high on a worker's list of wants - for one thing, there would be no space to store it in a tiny apartment. Marchand makes interesting comparisons between the 1920s and the 1980s, in each case a decade following destructive wars in which businesses mostly shrank. The big difference was in the expansion of "technical" porcelain which began in the later nineteenth century. Porcelain was used as insulation for telegraph lines; KPM's "hygienic wares" factory also supplied pipes to municipal buyers, a market that - like roof tiles and stoves - didn't depend on artistry or changing tastes. The increasing use of machines and extension of railway lines created a need for porcelain parts to prevent friction. Porcelain became a vital component in munitions making during the First and Second World Wars, used in fittings for field telephones, mine covers, cartridge boxes and parts for hand grenades. Porcelain connoisseurs take no interest in these applications, as Marchand points out; but given the ubiquity of sinks and lavatory bowls and bathroom tiles it would have been good to learn more here about the social and cultural changes that running water and fitted bathrooms brought to those who previously had little more than a porcelain pot to piss in. (In the 1920s, 80 per cent of German households owned at least one piece of porcelain.)

Marchand tells us about taxes and tariffs, state subsidies and profits, numbers of employees taken on and laid off, the shift to employing women and children (at lower rates of pay), about technical progress and the need to keep up exports. (The US was the biggest buyer in the twentieth century.) She explores the contradictions inherent when a luxury commodity found itself being mass-produced and when cartels took over and the porcelain industry became divorced from its craft tradition. The porcelain industry in central Europe, like the iron and machine industry, was expensive to set up and, like so many industries, grew exponentially. Paternalism didn't stretch to taking measures against silicosis until 1945, although it was well known that porcelain workers were more likely than others to suffer from silicosis and die young from lung disease. A nineteenth-century study concluded that bad air in the lathe operators' rooms was particularly dangerous, especially combined with the drinking of spirits. It recommended banning the consumption of spirits and moving the lathe turners to a room where the windows could be opened. As Marchand comments when discussing the difficulties workers had in organizing themselves into unions, working conditions varied greatly but nowhere were they very comfortable. Turners might be working twelve-hour days in rooms that were so cold the clay froze and when they went without shoes the better to turn their wheels.

Increasingly, porcelain marketing was directed at end consumers. It celebrated the well-to-do respectable home. Department store windows featured porcelain displays. In 1927 and 1931 in "National Porcelain Week" the slogan chosen was "You and Your Own - Your Own Porcelain in Your Own Home!" Porcelain was already carrying antisemitic images before the Nazis came to power championing porcelain as a prestigious "German" art form, as well as a source of hard foreign currency. The porcelain pâte de verre wares sold under the castellated "objets décoratifs" in the Antwerp market. "Porcelain," as a description, could be accompanied by a whole range of terms: "blessings," "roses," "whitewash," "whitewash damask", as an advertisement from Meissen put it in 1835, "... don't they make one happy, even when one has no money?" The army ordered porcelain in bulk. Annexation of the Sudetenland expanded Germany's porcelain-producing capacity by at least 30 per cent and eliminated the need to pay for transport and loading fees. The recently modernized "Bohemian" factory near Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) was commanded to make dinnerware for the army; female inmates of a nearby concentration camp were forced to work there, and in the kaolin mines nearby. Similarly, labourers were drawn from Dachau and forced to make figurines and plaques for the SS. Hitler loved Meissen. For Himmler, a white porcelain figure of an embodiment of the German soul. "Aryanizing" included ousting Jewish factory owners and disposing of respectable Jewish households of their porcelain collections. Gustav von Klemperer's 800-piece collection had already been expropriated by the Nazis before it was mostly destroyed in the bombing of Dresden. Porcelain "embodied an emotional world that was largely, but not wholly, destroyed by World War II and the Holocaust," Marchand writes, and the stories of the largest collections represent the tip of an iceberg of family histories. As she notes, the ceramicist Edmund de Waal sensitively captured some of that in his elegiac The Hare with Amber Eyes (2010), bringing her understanding of the love of objects to the "hidden inheritance" that came with the transfer collection his great-uncle bequeathed him (netsuke is wood and ivory) and that had been saved when the family's goods, including the "porcelain on every surface", were compulsorily removed.

Like Anne Gerritsen writing about Jingdezhen and the early modern world, Suzanne Marchand's Porcelain: A History from the Heart of Europe is less about the "historicism" that comes with a critical approach to the history of manufacture and meaning. But the love of porcelain shines through, and as befits their subject matter both books are beautifully produced and a pleasure to handle as well as read.
Legacies of the Enlightenment

Jane O’Grady has provided a very fair and reasoned review of Ritchie Robertson’s magnificent book The Enlightenment (January 15), but is Robertson’s optimism as misplaced as she seems to suggest? Does Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s Dialektik der Aufklärung (1947) still rule OK? Its beguiling intellectual appeal does not bestow an equivalent moral or legal authority, for, as Mark Twain might have said, O’Grady’s talk of the Enlightenment’s “demise” is surely premature.

Our two most inclusive political philosophers, Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, have both explicitly stressed the Enlightenment’s gift to modernity: it has contributed ideals such as tolerance, fairness, freedom of conscience, cosmopolitanism and human rights to our political debate. They both assert the continuity of Enlightenment tenets in the postwar era. The basic “norms” it established, as our supreme jurist Hans Kelsen would have it, occupy a place in our legal universe. It is only a short step from the Declaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen (1789) to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and on to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

Scottish independence

Frank Field’s 2021 suggestion of a local parliament for England as a means of unlocking constitutional logjam in Scotland (Letters, January 1) has an 1889 answer from Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who mooted a similar proposal, primarily in relation to the Irish Home Rule question. In a letter pondering the idea, however, he recognized the fatal flaw to be the utter absence of any popular feeling among the English electorate for such a model. He judged there was simply no conception of any local parliament beyond the “imperial parliament”. One hundred and thirty-two years on, it seems inconceivable that a post-Brexit electorate in England would plump for a diminished devolved assembly for local English matters in place of the imperial allure of Westminster. Campbell-Bannerman recognized that until majority opinion in English constituencies would come to hold such a view (“educated to that point”), inflexibility on constitutional issues would persist - as played out bloodily in Ireland over the next thirty years (incidentally, the traditional numerical calculation of “a generation”).

Donald Gillies
Glasgow

Alan Sked’s Letter, January 1) is wrong to concentrate on the phrase “once in a generation opportunity” and instead should focus more on the mention of a “material change of circumstance” necessary to trigger another referendum contained in “A Better Future”. That 60 per cent of Scotland voted to remain in the EU is, even to a Euro sceptic like Sked, clearly such a change.

Further, it is somewhat ironic that he goes on to comment that a regular plebiscite is not on the agenda of the SNP. He is, after all, standing for George Galloway’s Alliance 4 Unity Party whose sole purpose is to deny Scottish voters a vote on leaving the EU.

Graeme Finnie
Forfar

Peter Lomas’s take (Letters, December 18 and 25) on the SNP leaders’ repeated reference to the singular nature of the 2014 referendum just won is untenable.

Nicola Sturgeon in the Scottish parliament and later repeatedly on the campaign trail referred to a vote as “once in a lifetime”. She bolstered this by calling it “once in a generation”, again very frequently. Alex Salmon also used both expressions, in speeches and on TV.

Neither Nationalist restricted these comments to the month of September 2014 as Lomas says. The phrases were used before the campaign started and repeated throughout. They were, however, prefixed by the SNP’s White Paper in 2013, which on three occasions called the electorate “once in a generation.” The Edinburgh Agreement of 2014 between the UK and Scottish governments stated that the referendum would “deliver a fair and decisive expression of the views of people in Scotland and a result that everyone will respect”.

This was signed by Salmond and Sturgeon.

In the circumstances Scots can be forgiven for taking the SNP leaders at their (repeated) words on the matter. The great majority of us believed, rightly in my view, that the 2014 vote (won for the UK side by what would in the USA be called a landslide) settled matters for a generation.

David Forrester
Glasgow

Ordinary people

In his review of Marc Stearns’ Out of the Ordinary (January 8) Stefan Collini does not mention that Professor Stearns’s “ordinary” and “modest” committies of the 1940s consisted exclusively of white people whose celebrated activities were pursued mainly by men.

Stearn’s contention that today’s society would profit from rediscovering the traditions of such communities appears to ignore the reality of today’s multicultural and multiracial Britain.

Simon Roberts
Twyford, Berkshire

Bruce Wannell
I enjoyed Robert Irwin’s review of Tales from the Life of Bruce Wannell (January 8), and it was natural that he should mention that some contributors to the book felt that Wannell, whom I knew for almost forty years, was a scrounger. Those con-

tributors were correct, but unfair. He was never paid enough to climb on the UK housing ladder while paying his way around on his extraordinary travels. What could he have done? As Irwin says, Wannell was generous to a fault with what little he had.

As far as I know, Wannell left Oxford with no money. He never had a home base here in the UK. For most of his life, he was a home

less nomad. He had nowhere to put his mother’s piano (I looked after it for a while) or his few possessions. He had no desk of his own. He trav

elled light. He refused a mattress and slept on my floor.

It may be no coincidence that his best work was done when William Dalrymple effectively gave him a home for a while. As it was, this extraordinary orientalist and scholar ended up like a vagrant in housing association accommodation shared with ex-prisoners and addicts, some of whom stole from him. He hid his feelings about this behind his infectiously warm enthusiasm.

Jim Glidt. Wannell was a man who banked his treasure in the hearts of his friends.

John Batten
Watford

Poets’ mistakes

This writes in May Week Was in June of the engagement on University Challenge between Pembroke College, Cambridge and St. Hilda’s College, Oxford in 1968: “Bamber Gascoigne, moderating the programme, could barely begin a question before Bearepiere answered it.” It was historical of Bearepiere and announced it. “It was May Week, not June of the engagement on University Challenge between Pembroke College, Cambridge and St. Hilda’s College, Oxford in 1968: “Bamber Gascoigne, moderating the programme, could barely begin a question before Bearepiere answered it.” It was historical of Bearepiere and announced it. “It was

William H. Janeway
Cambridge

“The ringing grooves of change”. Tenenmy: wrong about the opera-

Correction

In Jennifer Howard’s review of Having and Being Had by Eula Bliss (January 15), it was stated that Bliss’s 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. In fact, the position is untenured, which provides half the salary of a tenured position and less job security.

CONTACT

1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
letters@the-tls.co.uk

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOE in France

The collapse of Prosper, SOE’s biggest network, in June 1943 led to the death of hundreds of French resisters. In War in the Shadows, I provide new evidence from the National Archives linking that tragedy to a British deception operation.

While I can sympathize with Francis J. Sutti’s refusal (Letters, January 8) to accept my explanation of the collapse of his father’s network, that does not entitle him to describe my work as “fiction”. And your reviewer, Nigel Perrin, continues to misquote my book. For example, the memo linking Sir Claude Dansey, the vice-chief of OS, with Henri Détourcourt does not just “mention Dansey’s name”. It shows that Dansey was shielding a Gestapo double agent from an MI5 investigation.

Anyone interested can judge for themselves by reading War in the Shadows.

Patrick Marnham
Woodstock, Oxfordshire

The addition to your edition

Complement your copy with the weekly podcast from the TLS. Thea Lunardon edits a variety of guests, from novelists to philosophers and poets to cultural commentators.

Subscribe to the podcast today at the-tls.co.uk/podcast

TLS
JANUARY 22, 2021
A singular traveller
Patricia Highsmith at 100

ALEX CLARK

THE SECRET OF WRITING successfully, advised Patricia Highsmith (1921–95) in her slim guide Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction (1966), is nothing more than individuality - "call it personality" - and, since we are all individuals to begin with, this simply becomes a matter of finding a way to express one's difference from the next person. "This is what I call the opening of the spirit", Highsmith continued. "But it isn't mystic. It is merely a kind of freedom - freedom organised."

On a straightforward tally, Highsmith was at this point halfway through her career as a novelist: eleven books had been published, including Strangers on a Train (1950), her debut, The Blunderer (1954), Deep Water (1957) and the first of her five Ripley novels, The Talented Mr Ripley (1955); eleven were still to come, perhaps most notably, Ripley aside, Those Who Walk Away (1967) and, a decade later, the highly curious Edith's Diary (1977). (Interestingly, though death is present in both these later novels, outright murder is not.) There were also numerous short stories and even a children's book, Miranda the Panda is on the Veranda (1958), which Highsmith illustrated - she was a talented artist - to take her mind off a tricky novel (A Game for the Living, 1958) and a failing relationship (her then girlfriend, Doris Sanders, provided the text). Under a Dark Angel's Eye, a new selection of the stories, published this week to coincide with the centenary of Highsmith's birth, has even unearthing two that have never previously been seen.

Highsmith was, then, at this mid-stage in her career, and by her own estimation, proving effective at organizing her own freedom, despite the normal creative hurdles. Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction is candid, and even kind, about the false starts and blockages that all writers encounter, counselling that ideas must take time to percolate and breaks must be taken. Whether Highsmith would have been an adornment to a modern creative writing faculty is another matter, and certainly she had little time for the practice of workshopping: "I cannot think of anything worse or more dangerous than to discuss my work with another writer. It would give me an uncomfortably naked feeling".

Freedom and nakedness - or expression and exposure - are the twin poles that occupied Highsmith throughout her writing career, which is why her most memorable characters, from Guy Haines and Charles Bruno in Strangers on a Train to Tom Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf, as well as Ray Garrett and his would-be assassin Ed Coleman in Those Who Walk Away, come in pairs; their progress through the novels is an agonized, slow-motion dance of attraction and repulsion. That this is an established method of the kind of claustrophobic psychological thrillers that now dominate bestseller lists, in which a protagonist is threatened by a chaotic, malevolent other who gradually reveals the fault lines in their prey's superficially orderly life, is perhaps not entirely down to Highsmith; but it is difficult to think of them without her. It is also difficult to think of her own work without acknowledging the picture we have of her life, its details provided by two biographies - Andrew Wilson's impressively microscopic Beautiful Shadow (2003) and Joan Schenker's more freewheeling and spunky The Talented Miss Ripley (2000) - and now more or less calcified in the frequent retelling. There was the unhappy childhood, with the mother who told Highsmith that she drank turpentine to try to end her pregnancy and remarked on her daughter's fondness for its smell; the reviled stepfather and the affectionate yet sometimes fierce grandmother, who, despite their closeness, was an inadequate stand-in when Highsmith's mother took off, the procession of lovers; the compulsion to frequent movement and relocation; the rackety approach to health (a diet of cigarettes, gin, whisky and the odd scrambled egg), the uncompromising political and social views (she was profoundly racist; her quarrels with the feminist movement included a disgust at menstruation); the pet snails in her pockets, the most regularly cited of her eccentricities, though also, tellingly, the most endearing. Which of us has not wanted a friendly snail in whom to confide?

Critically speaking, one tracks the life too closely at one's peril, and risks what, in football commentary, for example, shades into chasing the game: retrofitting the action to the score. When Slavoj Žižek reviewed Wilson's biography for the London Review of Books in 2003, he suggested that the idea of understanding the context of Highsmith's life in order to understand her work was about face; rather, it is that her work enables us to understand the context of her life and, what allowed her, in Žižek's words, to survive it and to preserve her san-

Alex Clark is a literary journalist and broadcaster who writes for the Guardian, the TLS and the Observer

ity. (It was a cursory review, to be truthful, analysis of the biography making way for such grand statements as "For me, the name 'Patricia Highsmith' designates a sacred territory: she is the One whose place among writers is that which Spinoza held for Gilles Deleuze (a 'Christ among philosophers')."

For all her fondness of doublings and dopplegängers, of relationships in which violence and criminality stand in for concealed desires, and of identities tried on, shocked off and manipulated, Highsmith's most constant and intriguing subject is solitude and singularity. It is her characters' frequent state (how many only children did this only child create?), and it is both prized and repudiated, connoting at once active independence and a passively uncertain self. When Ray, in Those Who Walk Away, finds himself having dinner with an attractive waitress who has helped him to find a hiding place in Venice, he suddenly dissociates from her and from his surroundings, an experience that is almost like not being:

He felt faint, blank, dead or perhaps dying. Distant, high-pitched bells rang in his ears. The girl was saying something that he could not hear, looking off to one side now, and her unconcern at his condition made him feel quite alone.

That sense of separation from another, and from the materiality of the world, is what gives Highsmith's work its emotional depth; it is why we can feel sympathy even for the loathsome Charles Bruno, also given to spells of faintness, as he embarks on the enterprise of murder in order to bond Guy to him (there might be no better evocation of the fantasy of inflicting mortal violence than the sequence in which he tracks Guy's wife through a fairground and by a rowboat in order to strangle her in the bushes; it is a dream of pure desperation and domination, from start to finish). The world's materiality, is, consequently, now not only more, but also more visible, for obvious reasons of milieu, not to mention an occasional consonance of style, often bring F. Scott Fitzgerald to mind; it was delightful to discover that, in 2010, the magazine Fictionado held a salute for Fitzgerald, whose writer purportedly said that he wished he had written The Talented Mr Ripley.)

Highsmith's physical world is partly one of transient pleasures - bars, hotels, ticket offices, trains - and partly one of objects that can't seem to get rid of (the rings Ripley steals from Dickie Greenleaf; Guy Haines's pearl-handled revolver). The notion of continuous movement, repeatedly escaping out to and flight from, the opportunity of a new beginning somewhere else, the possibility of one's problems and one's predators following on.

Going back through Highsmith's oeuvre, one is, mind you, left feeling that it is best to be tormented somewhere nice; you might not just get thrown off a boat but, in the small-town America of Deep Water, also end up at the foot of a quarry, having been bored to boot in the meantime. Better to be sipping cappuccino in Italy than seething in marital disharmony waiting for your steak to get cooked. In Edith's Diary - a compelling but frankly depressing novel - Edith Howland and her husband quit city life for the serenity of the rural suburbs, where life is soon cindered by a selfish gerrarian uncle and the increasing dysfunction of their delinquent son. Edith's solution is simply to write a better version of her life in her diary, a covet record of what might have been with which to comfort herself. It does not end well.

The problem with being alone is that one never is: you've always got yourself to contend with. It is a good enough reason to keep on writing, as Highsmith reminds her reader-pupils in her primer. The thing is to find the ideal that to have faith in what they will. On this matter, she is braisingly prescriptive and, in an optimistic - even uncharacteristic - way, reassuring. The ideas will come because "you are inexhaustible as long as you are alive".
Jesus is just all Right?

Christian fundamentalists have taken over the Republican Party

ANNE NELSON

The United States’ battered democracy is stumbling into a new era strung with the wreckage left by the previous administration. The various certifications of Joe Biden’s election victory, which have long been pro-forma affairs, are challenged in unprecedented ways by Donald Trump and his enablers, culminating in his mob’s shocking invasion of the halls of Congress on January 6; many ongoing questions remain as to how the components of the protest were organized, paid for them, and what they planned to achieve. While some of the protesters have presented themselves as ingenious tools on the Hill, there is ample footage of others snaking up the Capitol steps in paramilitary gear and brandishing plastic handcuffs in the Senate. Some protesters carried signs reading "Jesus Saves"; others bore the blue-and-red evangelical Christian flag. Most of the rioters were maskless in a week when the US reached a new height in daily Covid-19 cases. At least five members of Congress tested positive for Covid following the invasion, and five people died amid the violence, but the biggest casualty may be faith in American democracy itself. While polls in the aftermath showed that even a majority of Republicans disapproved of the violence, a sizeable and growing number of voters now doubt the integrity of the electoral process itself, poisoned by the unceasing diet of lies and misinformation.

This is just the democratic wreckage. The Trump administration not only attacked the foundations of the American political system, it crippled the government’s ability to respond to the deadly crisis, and the damage won’t end with his departure from office. The US will be burying the mass casualties of an erratic Covid-19 policy for months, if not years. In the final days of his presidency, Trump hosted super-spreader campaign rallies, censored public health information and mocked the efforts of Dr Anthony Fauci, his own appointee on the Coronavirus Task Force to promote safety measures. US deaths approached 400,000 on the eve of the inauguration, and experts believe the toll will easily reach 600,000 before the vaccines take effect. Moreover, Trump’s personal behaviors were far worse than his recent attempts to overturn the election and undermine the medical establishment. No other American president has approached his record of attacks on federal agencies.

Now comes a period of national reflection: how could this happen - and, more importantly, could it happen again? Joe Biden won the popular vote by some 7 million, but his electoral college victory rested on a mere 45,000 votes spread across Arizona, Wisconsin and Georgia. Trump won the votes of more than 74 million Americans, the majority of whom still believe he was cheated of his victory. The Democrats badly miscalculated their chances in the House and the Senate, and, notwithstanding their recent RUN-off victories in Georgia, they will face headwinds in the coming 117th Congress.

Before then, they will need to address the essential question of the dominant organizing principle of their opposition. Was it the Republican party, Trumpism, or the underlying network of strategists who brought Trump to power in the first place? Prominent among these enablers was a longstanding operation to organize conservative Christians into effective voting blocs in critical swing states. This movement was promoted by conservative operatives, pastors and tycoons who laboured for decades to place a champion in the White House. They did not consider Trump, an occasional churchgoer with a history of skirt-chasing and grit, to be a “man of God”, but they did declare him to be an “instrument of God” who would carry out their agenda once he gained power. Over Trump’s four years in office, they gained a new prominence. The Southern Baptist lobbyist Tony Perkins dictated repressive social policies for the Republican party platform. Trump appointed evangelical activists to high office, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. There they imposed their religious values on secular institutions and resolutely gutted their agencies, in the belief that an effective federal government undermined their goal of theocracy. Many of these figures were connected through networks such as the Council for National Policy, an umbrella organization of right-wing political operatives, media organizations and activists seeking power. This “movement” began decades ago as an instrument for the televangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to protect their lucrative enterprises from federal taxation and regulation, and it remains a powerful force to this day. Its proponents describe themselves as “Christian”, but they prefer Holy War to the Beatiudes. They operate a panoply of tax-exempt organizations that are legally required to be non-partisan, yet conduct active political campaigning on behalf of conservative Republican candidates. Their network is heavily funded by American plutocrats, including oil barons in the southeastern and the DeVos family in Michigan, and they operate in the vast middle regions of the US that coastal sophisticated dismiss as the “Flyover.”

The Capitol Riot of January 6 illustrated the recent convergence among once disparate forces, which are overlapping but not synonymous: Christian Nationalists, White Supremacists, QAnon conspiracy theorists and neo-Nazis, with economic support from conservative corporate interests. The confluence has long been bubbling under the surface of American political life, only to erupt as the shocking spectacle on Capitol Hill. This movement’s chronicles have labels for its various components but, like the celebrated blind men and the elephant, we have not yet named the whole. Its religious elements include individuals who identify as “evangelicals”, “fundamentalists”, “Dominionists”, “Pentecostals” and “charismatics”, as well as conservative Catholics, but the taxonomy is far from complete. Some scholars label the aggregate as “Christian nationalism”, a term that gained currency in the 1940s. Others prefer “Religious

Attendants pray before Donald Trump addresses the crowd at an “Evangelicals for Trump” rally in Miami, 2020

Right”, which gained popularity during the Reagan administration. Neither conveys the scope of the movement. The Council for National Policy, for example, has included both Christian Nationalists and the heads of the Koch-founded groups Americans for Prosperity and Tea Party Patriots, which stress economic policy over religious ideology. Some of the failure to give this movement a name can be ascribed to the national news media’s reluctance partly born of myopia, partly of caution - to cover it systematically. Over the past four decades, its regional media outlets have been ignored and its highly co-ordinated activists dismissed as “grassroots organizations”.

Whatever the nomenclature of the umbrella, the religious and economic interests beneath it converge in their desire to channel taxpayer monies to billionaires at the expense of working-class Americans. Economists attached to the movement have made feahe arguments about the virtues of the “trickle down” economy, but the dollars have undeniably flowed upwards: US income inequality is currently at its highest level in 80 years. Now a host of new books has emerged to describe these political-religious operations and their outsized influence on American politics.

One starting point is the work of Sarah Posner, a journalist who has been covering the story for over thirty years. Her most recent book, Unholy: Why white evangelicals worship at the altar of Donald Trump (Ecco; US $28), is a useful history of the movement. In 1986 Posner, then an enterprising student, made her way to Washington, DC to interview the subjects of her senior thesis. There she met the grand master of the movement, Paul Weyrich, who, she reports, “harbored a disdain for political and economic elites” and maintained that “an authentic America has been destroyed by greed and avarice, and the expansion of civil rights”. Weyrich’s “authentic America” echoed past movements of white supremacy, and predicted Trump rhetoric in the years to come. He wanted to turn the GOP into a party of “the Washington event where the Christian right and Republican politicians carried favor”. Posner anticipated the arrival of Mike Pence on the national scene in 2008, when he declared that the fate of America “can be like the one I knew when I grow up”. In the symbiotic relationship between Christian Right leaders and the former president, she writes, they “regularly glory in Trump, and Trump in turn [gave] them the chance to radically reshape law and policy”. The ultimate goal is to transform America into a nativist power that accords different rights to different groups of people, based on race, religion, and ethnicity.

Evidence of this philosophy can be found in the gospel of Perkins, who has described Islam as “a suppressive system which is incompatible with the Constitution.” (Trump subsequently named him head of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.) Perkins has described the purpose of Black Lives Matter as “a violent revolution with one goal: to change America”. It is no coincidence that his pronouncements resonate with those of Weyrich; until 2020 Perkins was president of the Council for National Policy, whose vision statement promotes “Judeo-Christian values under the Constitution.” As Posner and others have shown, Weyrich’s successors are nothing if not resilient. They have cleverly responded to their historical setbacks by evaluating the conservative operation, forging new alliances and re-entering the fray with the help of their media empire, which serves to wall off fact-based knowledge and reinforce a community of unmitting obedience. Their sprawling defining

Anne Nelson is the author of Shadow Money: Media, money, and the secret hub of the radical right, 2009. She is a research scholar at Columbia University’s Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies
forms reach hundreds of millions of Americans on social media, including the Daily Caller and the Salem Media Group. (See “The #MeToo Era, Redux: From #MeToo to #MeToo2.0.”) Media. (Salem's online publications reach a combined audience of 70 million.)

This reach would not have been possible without the commercial revolutions of religious publishing, a subject covered in impressive detail in Daniel Yaca's Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America (Harvard University Press. £31.95; US $30). The Bible, of course, is the best-selling book of all time, and where there are sales there are profits. Yaca shows how religious publishing, bookstores and revival movements evolved into an integrated industry. "Since the Reformation era," he writes, "branding strategies perennially have cultivated authority on behalf of the products and people around whom evangelical publics have taken shape." In contrast, you can "sell" a religious affiliation, which becomes a tribal identity for its adherents; the individuals who promote its ethos then become the equivalent of "celebrity spokesmen." Martin Luther's vernacular Bible, complete with illustrations and self-branding (the "Luther Bible") altered the political landscape of his time; the subsequent marriage of religion and publishing prospered in unexpected ways. So did the Southern Baptist pastor, Tim LaHaye, the founding president of the Council for National Policy, co-authored a series of potboilers called Left Behind, interfering crude Cokie Roberts perennials. The series culminates in "his Rapture" that vaporizes the faithful into heaven and abandons sinners to be "left behind." The books have sold nearly 80 million copies worldwide, which makes them the top-selling non-fiction books in history. The books have been translated into over 50 languages and sold in over 100 countries, making them a global phenomenon. The series has become a cultural phenomenon, and its success has been attributed to its ability to tap into the fears and anxieties of readers, providing them with a sense of comfort and escape.

Radio broadcasting was advanced by Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network and its flagship program, The 700 Club. The Gospel of the Good Friday of Jesus joined the GOP (2017) in 2017, and Robertson's long-time producer, is an insider account of the operation. An evangelical Christian himself, Heaton began his CBN career in the 80ies believing the show could bring "a breath of fresh air" to a failing "state." Instead, he writes, "we altered the balance of power in the GOP by bringing in millions of Christians who were able to look completely past the reality that" Republican candidates had deviated from the party's core values. The show was an amazing accomplishment, but one that has left our culture in a really bad situation, for fundamentalist Christians were a key element of Donald Trump's electoral victory. In fact, it was the bottom line: "money was pouring in, and that was a validation of my efforts." But his inner conflict mounted, and he mumbled it with alcohol. Leaving the network was a step in his recovery, and he calls the book "part of my amends".

Like many other fundamentalist enterprises, Robertson's network is defined as tax-exempt, non-profit "religious media" by the Internal Revenue Service, but Robertson's political agenda is no secret. In 1987 he founded the Christian Coalition, which he handed over to the political operative Ralph Reed. Reed went on to direct the Faith & Freedom Coalition, uniting the Religious Right and the Koch-backed Tea Party. Both the churches and the "parachurch organizations" have benefited from affiliated media operations. These serve to sow distrust in fact-based science, medicine, professional journalism - in favour of authoritarian belief-based systems, directed towards the 64 per cent of the electorate who lack a college degree. This endeavor has been underway for a long time, but the bottom line: "money was pouring in, and that was a validation of my efforts." But his inner conflict mounted, and he mumbled it with alcohol. Leaving the network was a step in his recovery, and he calls the book "part of my amends".

Salem's online publications reach a combined audience of 70 million... Tim Lattaye's books have sold nearly 80 million copies.

The defence of these principles extends to the realm of human relations, as evangelicals desperately defend the imperative of the male-headed nuclear family, while the rest of society moves in the opposite direction. Half of American marriages end in divorce, and 40 per cent of American children are born to single mothers. The backlash against these trends can be vicious: the Religious Right and its media platforms literally demonize homosexuals, pursue legal vendettas against transgender people, and oppose nutritional support for single-parent families living in poverty.

Kristin Robes Du Mez takes on this version of toxic masculinity in her book Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation (Liveright. £18.99; US $27). Like Heaton, Du Mez writes from the inside. She was raised in the Christian Reformed Church, a splinter sect of the Dutch Reformed Church. (Betsy DeVos is a member, and a graduate of Calvin University, where Du Mez was a student.) The author writes: "American evangelicals, with their levels of theological illiteracy mean that many ... hold views traditionally defined as heresy."

Commercio has replaced theology. "White evangelicalism has embraced politics as an expression of the way they experience the culture it has created, the culture it sells." The Christian bookstores and broadcasting outlets described by Yaca and Heaton have mushroomed into what Du Mez calls marketing everything from cartoons to teas towels. Their consumers, Du Mez reports, have "learned more from Pat Robertson, John Piper, Joyce Meyer, and The Gospel Coalition than they have from the time, on the screen." The result is a decades-long effort to reinforce male dominance, promoting cowboys and soldiers as American icons and elevating avatars such as John Wayne to virtual sainthood. "Du Mez writes about the Old South, where "white masculinity had long championed a sense of mastery over dependents - over women, children and slaves", and she describes the culture of violence required to maintain such dominance.

Du Mez devotes serious attention to the fundamentalist psychologist James Dobson. Dobson has published over 100 books, which have sold 10 million copies, and built a massive media empire. Dobson's parachurch organizations, Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, have leveraged his role as kingmaker, influencing the beliefs of the model of the submissive wife and the subjugated child. (Once found one of his pamphlets in an Oklahoma paediatrician's office, urging me to strike my toddler with a stick because he should associate my hand with affection.) Once such punitive attitudes are instilled in the family, it is a short step to imposing them on society.

Many prominent figures in the Religious Right, including Robertson, Falwell and LaHaye, have been Southern Baptist pastors; the DeVos family are Dutch Calvinists and Dobson belongs to the Church of the Nazarene. Others have less familiar affiliations, such as Trump's perienced Pentecostal spiritual adviser Paula White, who can be viewed online speaking in tongues and commanding "all satanic pregnancies to miscarry". Pentecostal and charismatic churches are dispersed and localized, rooted in the white rural communities of the early twentieth century. They now include African Americans and Hispanic populations. Many attend megachurches with anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 people. Church leaders have struggled to balance the pastoral care and service of people, who are often struggling with poverty, disease and the belief that the dominant religious narrative is not true. They have had to navigate the tension between caring for their congregation and maintaining their beliefs, which can be challenging in a world that is increasingly diverse.

The Canadian author André Gagné's Ces Évangéliques derrière Trumpp: Hégémonie, démonologie et fin du monde (Labbé et Fides. CDN £24.95) places the contemporary Religious Right into a contemporary political context. Gagné is especially helpful in explaining the role of Seven Mountains Dominism in the worldview of the Religious Right: "Le Royaume 'se manifeste lorsque l'Église est propulsée en dehors de ses murs pour la conquête des 'Sept Montagnes' de la culture". (The "Kingdom" is the church, which is to exert influence on society to "conquer the Seven Mountains" of culture.) The "Seven Mountains" are defined as family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business and government. Once this ambition is understood, the hermetically sealed information environment of the Religious Right makes perfect sense as the bridgehead to other peaks.

The electoral politics require negotiation among groups representing competing self-interests. At best, the resulting balance of power reflects a quest for a common good, but the core values of Christian nationalism can coexist with the interests of other religious groups above those of the wider public. Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead have published a detailed study of this subject in Tackling America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States (Oxford University Press. £19.99; US $29.95). In a field that is deluged with anecdote, Perry and Whitehead offer data, dividing evangelicals into four categories, ranging from the authoritarian Christian nationalists they call "Ambassadors" to "Rejectors" who practice tolerance and subscribe to New Testament principles.

The prevailing Christian nationalism is essential to understanding recurrent conflicts over immigration, anti-black prejudice, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and even stigma directed toward atheists", they write. Their analysis demonstrates that such an effort is ultimately unhelpful, relying on the privilege. It co-opts Christian language and iconography in order to cloak particular political or social ends in moral and religious symbolism. It is tragic to think that this country's history is being censored on a local level, as constituents vote to pollute their water supplies in the name of "economic freedom" and support regressive tax policies that cripple their children's education. 

Dobson's message has moved from the left to the right, striking two enabling factors. First is the reaction of mainline churches, which have been reluctant to court controversy by taking a stand. Second is the Democratic Party. In 2016, it was the only major party to promote gay marriage on its platform. In 2020, the party chose to distance itself from the party of America's diverse future, has lost ground in the present by declining to address these voting blocs in their language of faith. Democrats have failed to correct the imbalance of their positions on hot button issues. For example, the Religious Right accuses Democrats of supporting "abortion on demand" up to "the day of birth," suggesting that a woman who is nine months pregnant can simply change her mind. This is not true. Third-term abortion is extremely rare, and involves situations in which a mother's life is in danger or cases of extreme fetal anomalies. Every Republican platform since the party was founded has included wording that would dismantle the postal service and attack election officials, much less stoke insurrection on Capitol Hill. Presi dent Biden has the reputation of a man who plays by the rules. His political will find even a winner, and, as Covid the toll demonstrates, its success has come at a terrible price.

Anyone brought up in a Christian tradition recognizes the struggle between authoritarian and liberal values (in common with most religions). Contempo rary US politics suggest that authoritarianism is having a very specific renaissance in the country, wedding biblical inerrancy to constitutional originalism, which argues that the nation should comply with the words of the Founding Fathers as they were written, rather than legislative interpretation. The US Constitution is presented as an immutable text that should never be questioned or revised.

In 2001 Weirich oversaw the creation of a manifesto proclaiming: Our movement will be entirely destructive, and entirely constructive. We will not try to reform the institutions. We only intend to weaken them, and eventually destroy them ... We will use guerrilla tactics to undermine the legitimacy of the dominant regime. By this, he meant American democracy as we know it. Opponents of Weirich's vision maintain a fulminating civil as they try to win elections and prop up public institutions through traditional means. Few ever imagine an administration that would dismantle the postal service and attack election officials, much less stoke insurrection on Capitol Hill. President Biden has the reputation of a man who plays by the rules. His political will find even a winner, and, as Covid the toll demonstrates, its success has come at a terrible price.
Everyone’s a critic

The indispensability of amateurism

THEA HAWLIN

THE CRITIC AS AMATEUR
SAIKAT MAJUMDAR AND AARTHI VADDE, EDITORS

In this age of fake news and a mistrust of experts, what value can amateur impulses bring to criticism? In The Critic as Amateur a space is made for this question and many more in a fascinating essay collection curated by Saikat Majumdar and Aarthi Vadde. Critically speaking, an amateur’s “excellence”, Rosinka Chaudhuri declares, “resides in the love (amoure) she or he brings to the work”. Kara Wittman, another contributor, suggests that, “unsheltered to formal licence or qualification”, the amateur enjoys the freedom “to cast aside dogma, to ask new questions”. At times they ask valuable questions that the professionals don’t.

All critics certainly begin as amateurs, as Wittman points out. Students are asked to show originality in their work, their untrained sensibilities leading them (ideally, at least) to a higher level. Obviously, Derek Attridge notes, “the latter would not exist without the former”. Attridge traces the evolution of the word itself, in France in the late eighteenth century; initially “amateur” meant a “lover” or a “devotee”; and it only later became an insult to be deemed “amateurish”. In sport, meanwhile, the complementary relationship between amateur and professional performance is self-evident: you must first be an amateur before you can become anything else. It is no so different when “amateur” criticism ends up informing and invigorating its professional counterpart.

Mimi Winick shows how “amateur” has remained, throughout its history, a term skewed towards the female experience. Women are the amateurs; men are the professionals. But amateurs may have “purposely rough edges”. Indeed, Florence Howe knew “next to nothing” about publishing on founding The Feminist Press in 1970, as Melanie Micic reveals in her absorbing study of “The Small Press and the Feminist Critic”. It was born as “fifty people in her living room”, just as Virago Press (which was initially called Spare Rib Books) began at a kitchen table, its inception “fuelled by red wine and late nights spent arguing”. Persephone Books, meanwhile, was founded in 1988 “in the room above a pub”. Vibrant conversation leads to vital action. “No one seemed awed by the tasks before us”, Howe recalled; “The room crackled with energy.” All the amateur needs is “energy and enthusiasm, not expertise or even experience” to forge onwards. Power comes from passion.

Virginia Woolf, who features extensively in The Critic as Amateur, founded Hogarth Press to free herself from the constraints of the professional publishing sphere. In Three Guineas, Woolf wrote about how independent, implicitly amateur, presses provide intellectual freedom: “You can at once rid yourself of the pressure of boards, policies and editors”. Woolf understood that the best vantage point sometimes lies beyond the conventional mechanics of publishing. Yet, as Micic notes, the rules that define what is amateur and what is not are still drawn along lines of gender, race and class; the term remains two-faced. For some, it embodies “youthful anti-establishment vibrancy”; for others, “a mode of denigration and dismissal.” The novelist Dorothy Richardson wrote a series of articles on film for the monthly magazine Close Up in 1927; Zlatina Nikolova and Chris Townsend investigate how her position outside the world of film-making enabled her to write about details that “professionals” rarely deemed worthy of note: the musical accompani-

Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott, founders of Spare Rib, at the magazine’s offices, 1972

All the amateur needs is ‘energy and enthusiasm, not expertise or even experience’ to forge onwards. Power comes from passion.

Thea Hawlin is a freelance writer and reviewer based in Italy.

Richardson may not have possessed the correct technical vocabulary, but what mattered was the original perspective of her “amateur” eyes.

Amateurism and the technology of mass communication go hand in hand, it seems. The BBC writer and radio producer Stephen Potter, after leaving his (insufficiently paid) job as an academic, sought to repackage criticism for the many. Emily Bloom explores how Potter created the “New Judgement” series on air, in which Stephen Spender discussed Walt Whitman and Elizabeth Bowen talked about Jane Austen. Radio was inclusive; collaborative; it fostered discussion. Like many such innovations, it “points to the origins of a participatory culture in which, suddenly, everybody’s a critic”.

On the other hand: “They say everyone’s a critic”, Tom Lutz notes, “but they don’t mean everyone writes criticism.” On the contrary, despite its apparent prevalence, “being a critic, is much more like being an orthodontist”. How? “We don’t do it without a professional reason.”

Lutz is the only contributor to The Critic as Amateur to engage fully with the irony that the volume’s existence depends on a comfortably professional cohort of contributors. He worked in academia both before and after founding the Los Angeles Review of Books. His essay chimes with Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan’s “It’s All Very Suggestive, but It Isn’t Scholarship” as one of the more autobiographical offerings here. For many, it seems amateurism amounts to letting the mask of academic professionalism slip, “forgoing critical distance in favor of intimacy”, in Winick’s words. Yet it can’t be denied that subjectivity is a central part of criticism. Conversely, you might ask if professionalism merely means being able to put one’s views in the approved impersonal terms. Surely there is more to it than that?

For Winick, “the sophisticated amateur” is responsible for the proliferation of what Vernon Lee called the “Vital Lies” in society. Lee adopted the term from Ibsen’s play The Wild Duck to describe what she saw as the increasingly popular discourse of scholarly writing on religion and politics in which “emotionally satisfying” arguments trumped the truth, and “self-aggrandizement” triumphed over “accuracy”. In Lee’s eyes, this is what we might now call a post-truth age: “Mankind has always wanted, perhaps always required, and certainly always made itself, a stock of delusions and sophisms, of vital lies or of white lies”. Such lies can be weaponized, seized on at a political as well as a personal level. Lee witnessed countries “destroying each other on behalf of their vital lies”.

A nothing comparable is going on when today’s amateur commentators (you know where to find them) “use the style of modern science to legitimate conspiracy and the language of liberalism to advocate free speech from illiberal positions”. Yet she also suggests that the edginess of amateurism, the roughness that it affords, the self-confidence that it brings, might be its saving grace. This is the uncertainty that Tharoor Srinivasan identifies as a potential advantage: “if we don’t know what we don’t know, we are free to know otherwise.”

“If there is some especially urgent claim to be made for criticism”, Edward Said wrote in 1984, “it is in that constant re-experiencing of beginning and beginning again whose force is neither to give rise to authority. In Lee’s terms, our orthodoxy.” Peter D. McDonald echoes this view: “It is important to be writing about literature”, he suggests, “amateurism can never be optional” because criticism itself “entails a particular kind of learning and unlearning”. For Wittman, it is about returning “to the origin, the vegetable, the creative self”; for Attridge, it has to do with “a willingness to be changed”. It is the power to begin again that resides in us all. The best critics, those whose voices ring out in this volume - are those who are unafraid of their own “amateur” impulses because they are constantly evolving; they know that it is better to be amateur than never to try at all.
Bard for life
Shakespeare's relevance today, both public and private

STANLEY WELLS
SHAKESPEAREAN
On life and language in times of disruption
ROBERT MCCRUMB

NO BOYS PLAY HERE
A story of Shakespeare and my family’s missing men
SALLY BAYLEY

These two books may both be seen as examples of the emerging subgenre of the bibliomemoir; both focus, in radically different ways, their authors’ close engagement with Shakespeare. Robert McCrum’s focus is broad, his range diffuse. Disarmingly, he describes Shakespearean as “a personal inquiry into Shakespeare’s life and works, a literary and biographical essay for the general reader, not a work of cutting-edge academic prowess for Shakespeare scholars, though I hope they may profit in passing here and there”. He is both lifelong reader of and about Shakespeare and a theatre-goer. From time to time he writes amiably of his play-going experiences with a group of friends, “The Shakespearean as I have come to describe him is a quintessentially English mix of stage-struck, struggling, improving playgoers with Eng. Lit. degrees”. For over twenty years, the club has attended numerous Shakespeare productions, including “no fewer than a dozen Hamlets”, followed by a pizza dinner to “hash over” the performances they’ve just seen. He tells some good stories. Laurence Olivier’s “vision for the screenplay” of Henry V was absolutely but not always workable.” “Now this is a beautiful tune I’ve thought of”, he told William Walton. “Yes, replied the composer. ‘It’s a lovely tune, out of Meistersinger’.”

The performances and the Club appear to have been given mostly in London, but McCrum’s book was inspired, he tells us, by his attendance in New York at the notoriuous Shakespeare in the Park presentation of Julius Caesar in 2017, in which the assassinated Roman dictator and his wife Calpurnia were played by lookalikes of Donald and Melania Trump. “Suddenly ‘Shakespearean’ was much more than a mere, a visceral mixture of threat and promise. To conservatives, this production was a shocking and distasteful affront to American values; to democrats, it was a thrilling assertion of free speech, wired into a longstanding American dialogue with Shakespeare’s plays.” And he writes that “in the general woe (Shakespeare’s words) that broke out during and after the election of 2016, it was to Shakespeare that many Americans turned in their distress.”

As McCrum points out, threats of civic rebellion and the plague “overshadowed Shakespeare’s entire creative career”. Shakespearean turns on the interplay between past and present, in meaning our past and our present, but also what would have been the past and the present for Shakespeare. McCrum wants, he ambitiously writes, “to connect these complete works with audiences past and present, old and new”, “to enlist the experience of these plays in performance to explore the secrets of literary inspiration, the magic of creativity itself”, and “to vindicate the claim that Shakespeare’s words and ideas are part of our shared humanity”. All this helps to justify the author’s broad-brush survey of all Shakespeare’s writings treated in conventional order of composition. He is adept at drawing parallels between the subject matter of the plays and events of Shakespeare’s time. He vividly evokes, for instance, the relevance of Macbeth to the court of King James reeling under the horrific impact of the Gunpowder Plot, which had been hatched in Shakespeare’s own Warwickshire. No less central to his purpose is the meaning that the plays can have for modern audiences. Shakespeare, he writes, “has now become a strongly comforting assurance that says ‘You are not alone.’” Rhetorically he asks “Why does he never fail to speak to us? Whence is he always so modern? And, finally, what holds the key to his enduring sympathy?”

Clearly, then, this book is the work of an enthusiast. Its subtitle, “On Life and Language in Times of Disruption”, points to its topicality. It bears witness to a wide, if unfocused, range of reading in Shakespeare scholarship, scrupulously and generously acknowledged, although the author is occasionally let down by his sources. He is lazy about the contents of the First Folio, mistakenly writing that it includes the narrative poems. Much as I should like to believe in a close relationship between Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton, the surviving evidence does not support the assertion that Shakespeare “secured Southampton’s commission to compose” sonnets or that he was “Southampton’s house poet.” Also, there is no evidence that the sonnets were “shared with an inner circle that included the Earl of Essex”; the earlier poems in the 1609 volume do not “trace the up-and-down progress of a single love affair; and Somets (clearly a slip for I27, as I26 begins “O thou my lovely boy”) to I52 are not “addressed to the poet’s mistress, the ‘dark lady’” – a common misreading. The dedicatee of the sonnets (Shakespeare’s only explicitly religious poem), another (I29) an anguished meditation on lust, and I45, with its pun on “hate away”, is a wooing poem clearly addressed to Anne Hathaway (who may or may not have been “dark”).

Whereas McCrum is engaged with the public Shakespeare, the Shakespeare of the theatre and his impact on the society of his time and of ours, Sally Bayley, in the cryptically entitled No Boys Play Here, is a reader, not a playgoer, and she inhabits a world of the imagination remote from the metropolis. For her, Shakespeare’s plays are an escape route, facilitating journeys of the mind that take her far from reality. Now in her forties, and well established as a university lecturer in Oxford, in this book she writes retrospectively about her deprived and often unhappy childhood and adolescence in a town on the south coast. Bayley’s book is an extended soliloquy, requiring and repaying an exercise of the reader’s imagination. The blurbs describes it as “a story of poverty, missing fathers, sons and testament to the way that great literature and its characters can guard an imagination against the bad”. The book’s title is only faintly illuminated by its subtitle: “My family’s missing men and Shakespeare’s lost kings”. Bayley’s personal circumstances – a deprived childhood only partially alleviated by caring school teachers; an absent father replaced by the drunken “Uncle James”, who lies around on the floor, fat and snoring, and lives on benefits, and who merges into Falstaff, “smorling like a hug by the half lock” – mental disturbance; teenage life in care – are hinted at rather than expounded. The title and subtitle of her previous quasi-memoir, Girl with Doves: A Life built by books are similarly oblique. There, her roads of escape are mainly the detective fiction of Agatha Christie, Jane Eyre and Great Expectations, until an elocution teacher introduces her to Twelfth Night. Here, although Falstaff – deployed by her mother – is still in the wings, Shakespeare is centre-stage. A “Dramatis Personae” describes Sally Bayley as “a daughter aged 12-16 who sometimes plays at being a boy; cousin to Jessica, who lives in Venice, where merchants set sail with their treasure”. For her, Shakespeare is an interior resource, providing escape from that unpleasant real world which is only elliptically evoked.

Her childhood environment, though often squalid, is not without culture. Her mother is “proud of her Shakespeare. ‘I may have left school at sixteen but at least I went with a bit of Shakespeare’”. Having learnt Puck’s “The King doth keep his revels here tonight” by heart, she “says it every Sunday whenever she washes her hair”. Her favourite writer was Dylan Thomas, and Bayley’s prose style, freely associative, cryptically allusive, evocatively resonant, has affinities with his. Fact merges into fiction, the sordid present into the dramatic past, current slang into Shakespearean prose and verse. Taken into care after an episode of pilfering, the author finds that “the only place I could run to for peace was to the toilet, the jordan, the chamber, the pisspot, taking my Shakespeare with me. So I sat on the loo with my Henry IV, now Part 2, and read of Captain Pistol with his swaggering sword”. And her aunt, who has come to visit her, metamorphoses into Mercutio: “METTRESS QUICKLY: Marry, my lord, there is a nobleman of the court at the door. FALSTAFF: What manner of man is he? METTRESS QUICKLY: Well, strictly speaking, she’s a woman. Says she’s your aunt. You’d better go and have a word.

It is in her closing paragraphs that the author comes closest to explaining her purpose. “Poetry in action”, she writes, “can lead to bold and hopeful revisions; and so Jessica can turn herself into Hal and Hal, in turn, into a king.” Her book is a private statement, an interior monologue making no concessions to readers; McCrum’s, more outward-looking, is a public statement, speaking to Shakespeare’s relevance for our times.

Laurence Olivier, Henry V, 1944

- Poetry in action, Bayley writes, ‘can lead to bold and hopeful revisions’

Textual Shakespeare
Writing and The Word
Graham Holderness
Second, revised and expanded edition
www.eerpublishing.com

Stanley Wells is Honorary President of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Shakespeare on Page and Stage: Selected essays, edited by Paul Edmondson, was published in 2006
Victims and villains
How the Soviet Union sought to hold the Nazis to account

DAVID REYNOLDS

SOVIET JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG
A new history of the International Military Tribunal after World War II
FRANCINE HIRSCH

The IMT attracted renewed interest at the beginning of this century, with the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002. At that time of US triumphalism about its victory in the Cold War, Nuremberg was portrayed in books and films as a celebration of American legal values - bringing the Nazi ringleaders to justice yet ensuring that they got a fair trial - with Robert H. Jackson, the US chief prosecutor, sitting centre-stage as a square-jawed American hero. Britain and France received honourable mentions. The Soviets were marginalized or treated as German accomplices.

It is this version of history that Francine Hirsch confronts in her absorbing and readable new book. Fifteen years in preparation, Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg draws on groundbreaking research in Moscow archives to illuminate the Soviet dimension of an episode that was both “the last hurrah” of wartime Allied cooperation and “an early front of the Cold War”. Hirsch also offers a colourful account of what the four national teams did after hours, including rowdy nights in the Grand Hotel nightclub and the occasional fracas with the locals. Tighter editing would have helped in places, but much of the rich detail is fascinating and the overall thesis compelling. Not only did the Soviets stand in judgment of others in Courtoom 600 at Nuremberg’s Palace of Justice, but they also were subjected to judgment. Hirsch captures this inversion with a real sense of drama and irony.

The Soviets viewed the IMT as a chance to judge the Nazi regime for what it had done to their country between June 1941, when Operation Barbarossa began, and May 1945, when Germany surrendered. Of all the allies, the Soviets were keenest on a formal trial. At the other extreme was the British Cabinet, which - recalling the farce of the Leipzig trials in 1921, when the Kaiser had fled into Dutch exile and a German court had let off a few of the small fry - now favoured summary execution of top Nazis. (Although Hirsch does not mention this, Winston Churchill suggested treating Hitler like an American gangster - using an electric chair, which he thought the United States might provide under Lend-Lease.) But the Americans and the Soviets wanted a legal process to demonstrate Nazi guilt for posterity, and they prevailed.

Stalin’s model was the show trials used in 1936-8 to parade and destroy his enemies, real and imagined. It was no accident, therefore, that Andrei Vyshinsky - chief prosecutor then, and now deputy foreign minister - was appointed impresario of the USSR’s Nuremberg show. Vyshinsky revealed his approach, with black humour, at one of the early four-power dinners, offering a game of chess in Russian to “the defendants”. Prosecutors and judges dutifully downed their glasses, only to learn with dismay from the belated translation what exactly Vyshinsky had said: “May their paths lead straight from the courthouse to the grave”. Such was Stalin’s chutzpah that he even included the Katin massacre in the Soviet indictment, to vindicate his claim in 1943 that it was a German atrocity, even though he personally had ordered this mass shooting of Polish officers in 1940.

Despite that Stalinist agenda, however, the Soviets proved capable of working with their allies, as Hirsch demonstrates. It was through the advocacy of Aron Trainin, one of their leading international lawyers, that “crimes against peace” became part of the case against the defendants - in other words, the crime of launching “aggressive war”, and not just crimes in war such as violations of the Geneva and Hague Conventions. This was a significant Soviet contribution to legal thinking.

But the IMT also upended Stalin’s expectations by casting judgment on the Soviets’ wartime record. Although some jurists criticized the process as ex post facto justice - trying the Germans for crimes first defined in that courtroom - the defendants were allowed to choose their own lawyers and the judges let them speak at length. Hermann Göring, assumed to be a vain windbag, ran rings around Jackson when he took the stand. The Germans were even able to introduce evidence of the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, by which Stalin had gained a slice of Poland and then a free hand in the Baltic states. The Kremlin had intended to keep the pact off limits. And Stalin’s cynical Katyn charade back-fired. Although the Germans failed to prove Soviet guilt, their witnesses threw reasonable doubt on the Kremlin’s case. Katyn ended up as a drawing, and so, observes Hirsch, effectively “a Soviet loss”.

But the battle for history was only one side of the IMT. The Soviets believed that stamping their own narrative on the Second World War would help them to shape the emerging Cold War, too. In April 1945 Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov told the Americans that the Soviet Union was now “in the first rank of the powers and would not be pushed back into the second rank”. Seeing themselves as victors, power, having borne the brunt of the land battle against Germany, the Soviets - from prosecutors to pressmen - were appalled at Western ignorance of what their war had been like. People “stare wide-eyed when I tell them about Leningrad and Stalingrad”, the playwright Vsevolod Vishnevsky wrote home. Making the West take seriously the USSR’s struggle for survival was deemed vital for winning respect across the postwar world.

Instead, it was the Americans who established themselves as the principal stage managers of the trial, and in so doing promulgated their own version of what the war had been about. Jackson, in particular, had no time for communists and cramped the process accordingly. It was he who designed the four-phase indictment: the United States would lead on the key charge of conspiracy to wage aggressive war, and then the other allies would fill in the details on crimes against peace (Britain), war crimes (France) and, finally, crimes against humanity (USSR). In the event, Jackson and his US colleagues set out all four charges before the other prosecutors could speak. The Soviets were furious at being denied the right to tell the story of their own suffering.

It did not help that their drab, baggy suits made them look less impressive than the well-cut US team. Or that the Americans (and British) expected the other allies to provide English-language versions of German documents; the Soviets struggled for months to find enough translators. Stalinist controls meant that Moscow’s prosecutors had to follow a tight script, checking every revision with the Kremlin, while the Americans, like the two other Western teams, were free to refine their own case. By the time the Soviets began to address the court on February 8, 1946, they had been made to look like also-rans.

But as Hirsch makes clear, while waiting in the wings, the Soviets learned how to “perform” on the international stage. Shaken by Jackson’s sudden introduction of German eyewitnesses, the Soviets trumped his theatrics by producing, to a “thunder-struck” courtroom, Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus, Hitler’s vanquished commander at Stalingrad, who gave detailed testimony on the planning of Barbarossa. Even more effective was the Soviet use of atrocity footage. The Americans had shown a film about the liberation of Dachau, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. The Soviet documentary of what the Germans did in the USSR was far more graphic: “Severed heads, severed arms ... naked skeletons, murdered children”, the filmmaker Roman Karmen later noted. “It hadn’t been necessary to show the Soviet purge such footage”, but this was “a document of the court”, and it struck home. Although the Americans had scoped the showdown, the Soviets still managed to tell it in their own graphic way.

Nuremberg is an elegant and important piece of scholarship which adds a significant new perspective to the history of the International Military Tribunal. Nuremberg did indeed become a show trial, but in ways that Stalin never intended. The book offers a sobering reminder of the paradox of the Great Patriotic War, in which - to borrow Francine Hirsch’s words - “the Soviets were heroes and victims” but “also perpetrators.”
The sorrow and the pity
The complexities of resistance and collaboration in Vichy France

JOHN FLOWER

LA FRANCE A L’ENVERS
La guerre de Vichy (1940–1945)
ALYA AGLAN

752pp. Gallimard. £11.50.

So deeply ingrained in the French psyche are the antagonisms that developed during the État français (1940–44) between those sympathetic to the Nazi occupation and to the Vichy government, on the one hand, and those who resisted, on the other, that it may take generations before they will disappear. So concludes Alya Aylan in an interview which she contributed to a supplement published by Le Monde in June (“Le Régime de Vichy est un cas avéré de trahison”). While she may not come quite so explicitly to the same conclusion in her most recent book, her extraordinarily detailed analysis of those years of the Pétain regime shows how its disruptive impact on the sociopolitical climate of France and the French empire resulted in what amounted to a civil war.

So much has been written about this dark and intensely disruptive period of French history that it is difficult to imagine that there remains anything of significance to discover. A twenty-eight-page selective bibliography and 1,732 page notes attest, however, to Aylan’s research drawing not only on the latest related work but on hitherto unexplored archival sources. Such was the complexity of these years that a simple linear account is impossible. While the book has a basic chronological structure, Aylan’s solution is to focus on predominant themes and issues in eight dense chapters – in most cases exploring them through to 1944 or 1945. The result is a depiction of a France which, by the Liberation, had become increasingly divided, and conflicted about being drawn into a worldwide opposition to Nazism.

In her opening chapter, Aylan reminds us of Pétain’s well-known vow to return the country to pre-Republican values, his insistence on the land, the family, Christianity and “National identity” (racial purity). But she also importantly shows how this coincided with a right-wing crusade that had been growing during the 1930s to establish what Thomas Mann once described as a “European federation” under German supremacy. While much would subsequently be made of a spirit of resistance to such policies and of de Gaulle’s role, Aylan rightly reminds us of the already active antisemitic police to remove Jews from positions of management or control in French industry in an attempt to create an “arsonisation économique”. Faced with such pressure and the threat of total commercial collapse, a number of enterprises – notably that of the Renault family – readily collaborated.

While by 1942 the true face of Nazism was apparent throughout the world, France was too divided to participate in any counter-offensive. Although resistance was growing both in metropolitan France and in parts of the empire (especially Algeria), the Vichy government continued to be supported by many who considered resistance acts to be those of terrorists. In January 1943 the paramilitary force La Milice was formed to stem these acts, and Aylan reminds us not only of the resulting brutal confrontations but of the total disintegration of communities where lives and properties were destroyed, especially as the Nazis retreated, and nearly 15,000 civilians were killed. These months did indeed witness what Aylan describes as a civil war, which in many ways split over the issue of the Liberation with reprisals, brutal revenge, and trials and executions that were all too often illegal. They also saw the purging (the épuration) of the many politicians, doctors and members of the armed forces who were found or considered to have been guilty of collaboration. Curiously, within this context, Aylan makes almost no reference to the position of the Church, which, at best, was ambiguous, nor is there any discussion of the activities of some publishers, notably Grasset and Gallimard, apart from the pages devoted to the fate of the Nouvelle Revue française.

Aylan’s obvious concern to be as complete as possible results in lists, statistics and unwieldy sentences often half a page long. The structure of the book also makes for repetition. But it is clear that anyone working on or simply interested in this period will find Aylan’s book invaluable. This was a time of immense complexity which for many years was in danger of being reduced to a simple “resistance versus collaboration” equation, but one in which, as she abundantly shows, has not simple solution and will continue to frustrate. Though Alya Aylan concludes that the emotions and convictions aroused by these issues may take generations to be eradicated, we might add, “if ever”.

Minor Doxology

Circle of light on the village street from his kitchen window where he stands in the slowing breath of nightfall, starkes through that cold fire into sitting shadow: dusky-blue snow banked against the porch, and beyond the row of houses, evergreens in dagueureotype darkening on winter fields.
The galvanized taste of chokes rises in his mouth: well-water, dander, frost and straw.
And because place calls to place inside us, he is seventy in the kitchen, even as he is twelve in the farmyard, midway between house and barn, metal pale of new milk, quarter moon, spilted oats, early stars.

SHERI BENNING
Fear in the gut, change in the air
A fictionalized meeting of real Black celebrities

CLIFFORD THOMPSON
ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI
Amazon Prime Video

B eing a Black American celebrity in the 1960s was a tricky business. In previous decades there had been a few prominent African Americans who sought to say and do what they wanted (the early twentieth-century heavy-weight boxing champion Jack Johnson and the singer, actor and activist Paul Robeson come to mind); in the 1960s, segregation and entrenchment, racism so publicly accepted, that to challenge the system in any way was to hold one’s head up high – in a foxhole. Today, by contrast, while racism remains stubbornly alive, Black celebrities abound and feel free to tell it like it is, or at least like they see it. But in the 1960s, when a growing freedom movement brought excitement and optimism and made it seem possible, for those Black people who dared, to begin to speak their minds and pursue their desires, the questions were how, and how much, and when, and where. This climate, in which famous Black citizens were the objects of intense scrutiny (often by the Federal Bureau of Investigation), in which every word was measured and their every step was a risk, exposed stark divisions within the Black community and across the way forward. That hopeful, dangerous, hair-trigger time is the backdrop for Regina King’s terrific, stirring and deeply moving debut feature film One Night in Miami, adapted for the screen by Kemp Powers from the Oscar-winning play by the same name. It is an absorbing film with a notable cast led by Aldis Hodge as Jim Brown, Leslie Odom Jr. as Sam Cooke, and digital legend Laurence Fishburne as Malcolm X. The film offers a revealing character study of Brown, Cooke and Malcolm X (the only Black man in the room, and the one who could have been her own stage play. The action takes place on the night of February 25, 1964, when Cassius Clay (Eli Goree) – soon to change his name to Muhammad Ali – folded his 32-pound advantage and was defeated Sonny Liston to become the heavyweight boxing champion. The story imagines the twenty-two-year-old new champ celebrating his victory in a Miami hotel room with three equally prominent Black friends: the soul singer Sam Cooke (Leslie Odom Jr.), the football legend-turned-action-film-star Jim Brown (Aldis Hodge), and the public and outspoken privately politely notion of Islam minister Malcolm X (Kingston Ben-Adir). Well, “celebrating” may be the wrong word. To the acute disappointment of Cooke and Brown, who are ready to party and want to know where the women and booze are, the upright Malcolm has in mind that the four use their time together to “reflect” on the meaning of Clay’s win. That reflection quickly gives way to an airing of sharp and sharply worded differences of opinion among the four men, who beneath it all have great affection and respect for one another. The film opens with the characters shown separately, fighting their individual battles – literally in the case of Clay, who wallops the daylights out of the British boxer Henry Cooper (Sean Monaghan) before dethroning Liston. These scenes capture well the young Clay’s dazzling presence in the ring – or, rather, his dazzling absence, as opponents swung in vain at what he had just been and were pummelled with jabs for their trouble; the scenes also hint at the steep price the fighter would later pay for those moments when his ring magic didn’t quite do the trick. Malcolm is shown arguing with his wife, Betty (Joaquina Kalukango), over his lonely and eventually fatal decision to break with the Nation of Islam’s leader, Elijah Muhammad, because of Muhammad’s moral lapses. Cooke’s performance in front of an ice-cold all-white nightclub audience demonstrates the challenges faced by Black entertainers. And a scene between Brown and an older, white, affectionate longtime acquaintance in his native Georgia (Beau Bridges) is a devastating study of how genteel a mask virulent racism can often wear. Brown endures a personal affront of the kind from which his record-setting achievements in foot- ball cannot protect him. Coming together, then, the men bring their private concerns and differing styles even as they face the common enemy of racism, and their contrasting pursuits and temptations in part fuel their ideological clashes. The story establishes Malcolm and Cooke as political poles, with Clay and Brown trying to mediate their conflict. Malcolm criticizes Cooke for singing love songs such as his smash hits “You Send Me” and “For Sentimental Reasons” while resistance to the freedom movement is claim Black lives; he taunts Cooke by playing a record of Bob Dylan’s song “Blowin’ in the Wind”, the work of “a white boy from Minnesota” that alludes to race matters not yet mentioned in any of Cooke’s music. Cooke, who in real life had a head for business nearly as impressive as his beautiful singing voice, counters by talking about his efforts to achieve economic empowerment for Black entertainers by encouraging ownership of the music they record. “Everybody talks about how they want a piece of the pie”, Cooke says, “Well I don’t. I want the god-damn recipe.” The argument recalls the ongoing debate decades earlier between two other African Americans: the educator and orator Booker T. Washington, who urged Black people to focus on economic security before worrying about political matters such as the right to vote, and the scholar, writer and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who stressed the urgency of achieving equality on all fronts. One of King’s major strengths as a director is patience: the scenes in One Night in Miami are allowed to build, gaining momentum not through frenetic action but through character, their payoffs earned and resonant. The subdued browns and dark reds of the film’s interiors create a hominess and intimacy that serve the dialogue well. The performances are uniformly good. Goree does justice to Clay’soutsized personality – the curious mix of ambition, Kentucky down-homeiness, braggadocio, clowning, fierce appetites and childlike innocence that charmed many and infuriated many others. Goree’s young champ is on the fence, wanting to follow Malcolm’s righteous path but not ready to deny himself earthly pleasures. As Malcolm X, Ben-Adir portrays an American mix of son of the land and son of the land – bygone even in 1964 – that appears to stem from a deep calm (and that, once in a while, slips); that calm, in turn, seems rooted in a sense of purpose, and those qualities anchor him in the face of his own passions and his fears for his life and the lives of his wife and young children. As Jim Brown, Hodge actslargely with his eyes; they are cold, not from an absence of feeling, but from a need to protect himself. We sense the person behind those all-but-closed shutters, assessing those in front of him before putting himself forward. And Odom hits the mark as Cooke, who finds the limitations of a movie star good looks and sunny personae lurk both shrewdness and (though the film plays it down) a roaring libido. The emotional impact of One Night in Miami comes from the discord among concerned friends who, at bottom, want the same thing: freedom for their people. And that impact comes also, perhaps even more so, from the sad knowledge of what awaits those who dare to face reality, to live their fiction and be shared, at the end of the film, that life of his friend over Malcolm’s split with Elijah Muhammad. (The stirrings of Ali’s heartbreak decision are portrayed in the film.) The punishment Ali absorbed in the ring over the following decade and a half reduced this seemingly irresistible spirit to a slow-moving shadow of his former self decades before his death in 2016. (Brown remains alive, his long career including not only football and roles in such iconic films as The Dirty Dozen but also work as a sports commentator and efforts to help youth caught up in the gang scene.) Beyond its interweaving of the four men’s stories, One Night in Miami wistfully captures a special moment in American history, when a rising tide of hope carried with it an undercurrent of division and danger.

Clifford Thompson's nonfiction book What It Is: Race, family, and one thinking black man's blues was published in 2019.

Aldis Hodge as Jim Brown and Leslie Odom Jr. as Sam Cooke

“The Edwin Mellen Press
One Hundred Poems by Shizue Ogawa
by Dr. Brian Keith-Smith
Publish your scholarly book with Mellen
www.mellenpress.com

One Night in Miami wistfully captures a special moment in American history, when a rising tide of hope carried with it an undercurrent of division and danger, with fear in the gut accompanied by the change in the air. The film arrives at another dramatic moment in the life of a deeply divided nation, as the presidential administration of a white nationalist sympathizer, brought to an end by a record number of voters, winds down – through not without the horrifying spectacle of a Confederate flag being paraded through the United States Capitol. As African American and other tragedies in the kind of références, Ben-Adir’s Malcolm is called for, an important question for us now, as it is for the four main characters in One Night in Miami, is how to put differences aside so we can figure out where to go from here. #

© LANDRIS, REPRINTED FROM JULY 1964
Art as a one-stop shop

Private vaults, frictionless travel, superstars: an insider’s account of an international market

“Art as a one-stop shop”

We learn that around 80% of the world’s art resides in storage

Jeff Koons in 2008 in front of his sculpture “Tulips”

En Liang Khong is Director of Digital at ArtReview. He was formerly senior editor at frieze magazine

W

A YEAR IN THE ART WORLD
An insider’s view
MATTHEW ISRAEL
256pp. Thames and Hudson. £19.95.

HAT IS, OR WAS, THE ART WORLD? In A Year in the Art World, the curator and historian Matthew Israel promises an insider account of the studios, art shows, museums, fairs and biennials; as well as the armies of curators, critics, collectors, estate managers and “advisors” who keep the show on the road. At the same time, he hopes to persuade the reader “that the art world has much more to offer than eccentric celebrities, pretentious ideas and stories of record-breaking auction prices”. The art world, he writes - citing a study of major US museum collections in which more than 85 per cent of artists were white and male – “inevitably reflects inequalities”. But Israel admits that his portrait is of power as he finds it, not a corrective. His interview subjects are nearly always drawn from the art world’s professional elite: here he is conversing with Adam Sheffer, the vice-president of the megagallery Pace; Klaus Biesenbach, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; or Ralph Rugoff, the artistic director of the Venice Biennale.

We hear from art fabricators on the West Coast, who turn the visions of world-famous artists - a Kusama, or Hirst, say - into the (astronomically expensive) stuff of reality. Or, as one firm outlines in Israel, “a painter having a ‘moment’ might seek out their services when they reach “a point in their career when they want to try making sculpture, in order to be seen as something more than a painter”.

We learn that around 80 per cent of the world’s art resides in storage, as Israel tours the maze of hi-tech private vaults at Crozier Fine Arts in Chelsea. The warehouse manager recalls one client who rents a 500-square-foot room, which he has had painted and lit to his specifications, to house a single work of art. “He visits the facility once a year to see only this piece; he goes into the room, spends a few hours with the work, and then leaves. Then he comes back a year later to do it all over again.” At other times, the cracks in the facade begin to show. The New Museum’s artistic director Massimilliano Gioni worries about competing with an increasingly asinine, immersive culture: pseudo-artistic, Instagram-friendly “experiences” such as the Museum of Ice Cream. “I’ve seen the end of cinemas”, says Gioni, “and I may be living long enough to see the end of museums as we know it.”

Israel’s art world is one of frictionless travel; its characters at once exceptionally well-connected and strangely rootless. He stops off in Hong Kong to broker a conversation between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Jeff Koons (for what account of contemporary art would be complete without the obligatory appearance of the jet-setting curator and superstar neo-pop artist?), and wanders through the endless, identikit aisles of a “one-stop shop” art fair. “The experience of Art Basel Hong Kong is better than 99 percent of what happens at most fairs, because the production of the event by Art Basel is really good”, he raves. “The space is grand, the design cutting-edge, the organization is very intuitive - and the art is made by the most talented and critically acclaimed artists in the world, represented by the world’s best galleries.”

Israel is so entranced by his art world, principally a tale of money, power and professionalization, that he neglects to look at the art world as the domain of the powerless too. It is the tension within the division of labour that, so often, sets the art world’s messy energy in motion. The fate of thousands of gig economy cultural workers, whose incomes have withered away under successive lockdowns, has shown us just how shaky the foundations of our arts institutions are: galleries entirely dependent on a system of precarious, casualized labour; publicly-funded museums increasingly reliant on commercial income. (Last year, the Tate cut half of its commercial arm - with more layoffs around the corner). I want a book that listens to the gallery interns, the staff running the museum gift-shop, the cloakroom attendants: what if these people had a say in how arts institutions are run? I want to hear from the artists demanding galleries pay them a proper commission, the educators engaged in unionization drives, and the activists seeking to divest museums from dirty money.

Many of Israel’s conversations date to 2018 and 2019, before the pandemic brought the parade of the international art market to a grinding halt. Viewed from the remains of a ravaged art world in 2021, the chapters often read like dispatches from ancient history: “the fact remains that the fair system is booming, and it seems to be here to stay”. Arts institutions have sought refuge online - a surrogacy that often floats with the absurd, from digital “walkthroughs” of exhibitions to VIP “virtual viewing rooms” for elite collectors. One enterprising private museum, M Woods in Beijing, created a pop-up gallery inside the Nintendo videogame Animal Crossing. Meanwhile, the ceaseless travel that Israel documents (and partakes in), was once the hallmark of the art world insider: a game of “being there” as social capital, from gallery dinners in Venice to champagne-swigging preview nights in Shanghai. Need I mention the environmental cost of these 24/7 rituals? (I remember discussing frequent flier miles with a fellow critic, as we both hunkered over bowls of seaweed soup at an eco-themed biennial set, no less, in the Arctic Circle). But is this hyperactivity likely to survive the pandemic?

A more intimate, slower mode of looking will surely persist. There’s an unintentional poignancy, then, when Israel visits the “post-studio” studio of the artist Taryn Simon, whose photography spans crime scenes, customs facilities, even the CIA’s abstract art collection. What does she wish her audience would bring when viewing her artworks? Israel asks. “Time. That people give the work time”, Simon replies. “That’s something the work asks for. It’s something that nobody has any more.”
WHAT IS AVAXHOME?
AVAXHOME - the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE ICU
AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu
Better together
A novel of poverty, struggle - and solidarity

DAVID COLLARD

should we fall behind
SHARON DUGGAL


In 2016 the Yorkshire-based Bluemoose Books published Sharon Duggal’s The Handsworth Times. The novel was set in the Birmingham district where the author grew up, and vividly described the challenges faced by an ordinary South Asian family at a time of political and economic turmoil, high unemployment, racial tension, National Front marches and the 1981 riots. A notable debut by a female working-class writer of colour, it was largely overlooked by mainstream reviewers. Duggal’s impressive second novel, should we fall behind, would be similarly undeserving of such a fate. It opens, beautifully, thus: Jimmy Noone drifted, alone in a cold subway, falling away with the day as it faded to shadow. He dreamed of balloons, sky-blue, bought by his father to mark his birthday. The homeless Noone - literally “no-one” and perhaps a nod to the pauper Nemo in Charles Dickens’s Bleak House - lives on the streets of an unspecified British city, a place that is modern without feeling particularly contemporary. He forms a brief, intense friendship with a troubled young woman named Betwa who is new to the streets and, when she suddenly disappears, he sets out across the city to find her. He later ends up in a remote suburb, sleeping in an abandoned car. According to an interview with the author, the novel has its origins in the moment, twenty-three years ago, when she discovered a homeless young man sleeping in her own car, not abandoned but parked in a Tottenham high street. Short, briskly-paced chapters of third-person narratives focus variously on Jimmy and four other main characters living separately on Shifnal Road: Rayya, a carer for her dying husband Kostas; a bright, observant child named Tuli; her mother Eebe, and their landlord Nikos, a Greek Cypriot who runs a falling furniture shop and who is also Eebe’s employer. Jimmy’s unexpected arrival in their lives is the catalyst that offers Duggal a way to explore the different back stories leading up to the present day. The result is a multicultural novel spanning generations, and one largely stripped of upbeat, feel-good qualities. Some of the main characters are refreshingly unappealing, at least when we first encounter them and before we learn more about their pasts. Take the widower Nikos, for instance, whose blissfully happy marriage to Ourania slowly comes to light, informing our sympathetic understanding of his stalling construction of “a small but sturdy brick-built house” to contain a kidl and potter’s wheel which his late wife will never use. Other figures are more sketched in, such as the dowdy neighbours, a couple called Grace and Mandy, who become fused in young Tuli’s perspective as “Grandy.” The connections between the characters are thoughtfully revealed in plain, unaffected prose that navigates a world of poverty, addiction and violence with unflinching detail. Duggal’s writing is heartfelt but never mawkish, and she treats her subjects and their circumstances without condescension or irony. Her themes are loneliness and social isolation, loss and disrepair, all slightly and partially mitigated by the minor improvements her characters are able to make to their respective lots. The modest connections offer on many harder to off the many, through that the expected moments of spartan beauty, as when Jimmy finds, and then has to surrender, temporary shelter in a public library. He closed his eyes, planning to rest for a moment but when he opened them hours had somehow slipped by and the library was preparing to close. He stepped outside to a low slung sun and a fresh breeze in the air. In Bleak House Dickens navigated all levels of society, from the destitute crossing-sweeper Jo to the aristocratic Deadlocks, all of them implicated in the interminable legal case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Duggal, with a smaller cast and less expansive social palette, explores the more fragile links connecting characters at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She is particularly convincing on the grinding realities of poverty, and of hunger, and the sad fact that those struggling daily to get by as victims of the gig economy have very little community, faith and those immediately below them, at the bottom of the heap. Only through co-operation, connection and solidarity, she suggests, can they hope to better their lives. Sharon Duggal affirms the importance of more cohesive community, in which there are communities with shared values and interests. She does so with passion and integrity but without tib-thumping, and her generous, humane novel is all the stronger for it.
Identity crisis
A romance that doubles as a quest for parental love

TASH AW
MEMORIAL
BRYAN WASHINGTON

B enson and Mike are two young men living together in the Third Ward, a historically deprived but rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood in Houston. Benson is Black, from a solidly middle-class family, with a job as a teacher at a day-care centre for kids drawn from immigrant backgrounds. Mike is Japanese American, overweight (or so he thinks) and works as a chef in a Mexican restaurant. They have been together for a few years, though neither seems sure about exactly how many. At this point in their relationship, nothing feels certain, apart from a daily routine that is at once reassuring and fragile. They go to work; they eat the food of modern, multicultural America (kombu, panzanella, natto, chilaquiles, sriracha); occasionally they talk about race; sometimes they talk about where their relationship is heading; and, more often than not, they would like, they argue, about their respective backgrounds, about Mike's numerous Green Card hook-ups, in fact about anything at all, before having sex that is meant to smooth over their differences but that leaves them feeling more lost than before. Neither is able to work out exactly how and why they got together in the first place, which makes figuring out their future all but impossible.

Memorial, Bryan Washington's tender and exhilarating debut novel, is not just about the collision of past and present, even if both of its protagonists are engaged in a perennial struggle to keep their relationship free from the baggage of their childhoods — loving but dysfunctional families loom large in both men's lives, constantly threatening to engulf them in distant traumas. The novel explores an entire system of forces that shape our identities — history, both personal and national, race, gender, sexuality and the movement of people across international, cultural and class borders — and dramatizes the collision of individual choice with these external pressures. Benson and Mike know they love each other — they are both emotionally alert men, and talk about their relationship with candour and acuity — but they are simply incapable of fashioning a more settled life together. Both have long-separated parents who themselves struggle with complicated histories. Both are rented car gods, with traces of racism that feel fundamental to their identities as Americans. Their vision of a joint future is entangled with all that is broken in their collective pasts.

If this sounds like a lot to process in just 300 pages, it isn't, because Memorial's restless excavation of modern identity is artfully wrapped up in a romance narrative that is also a transpacific quest for parental love. The novel opens with a dilemma that defines both characters' inability to resist the tides of modern life. Mike's father, whom he hasn't seen in sixteen years, is dying of pancreatic cancer in Osaka. Mike feels he has no choice but to make the journey to see him before he dies; but a day before he leaves, his white girlfriend, Mitsuko, flies in from Tokyo to spend some time with him in Houston. She doesn't feel she can cancel the trip and Benson feels obliged to accept this arrangement.

In this odd configuration of strangers, Benson and Mitsuko learn to live with each other, and also to start to figure out what Mike means to them. They cook together, navigate the streets of Houston together, talking about Benson's sexuality and relationship with Mike, with an honesty that Mike — naturally — reserved — finds impossible with his own parents. As a pair they work their way not just through their enforced companionship but the city's different cultural spaces — a FedEx office staffed entirely by African Americans, the front yard where they chat to Venezuelan neighbours — and their different appearances and viewpoints invite responses that act as a kind of live recording of the cultural complexity of contemporary America. When Benson is slow to pay for the groceries in the local Hmart, for example, propensity, Mitsuko to pick up the tab, the shop assistant's wisecrack along racial lines perfectly illustrates the novel's cultural awareness and confidence, as well as Washington's fine judgement of timing and trickery.

Memorial is set in the same gritty neighbourhoods that form the backdrop to Lot (2019), Washington's collection of short stories, in which marginalized people and communities strive to carve out their place. In both books, and despite its manifest energy, Houston is sometimes transformed into a backdrop for the failure of the immigrant dream. Remembering Lot, through the city in a encounter with his father when he was small, Mike describes the fancy neighbourhoods they went past, and his father's predictions of the future — not long before he returns to Japan. "You'll be where you live," his father confidently told him, "after every glossy building ... their lights shining down on the two of us."

"Girl, wife, lover"
A tale of growing self-acceptance
- and subverted expectations

TIPHANIE YANIQUE
LUSTER
RAVEN LEILANI

I am tired of cyclical books about intelligent but self-destructive young women who try to make their lives in New York City and then end up getting, both literally and figuratively, screwed. Raven Leilani's debut novel begins in such a fashion. True, it is, for a change, narrated by a young black woman, but it is also a white saviour at its centre, so that novels is swiftly cancelled out.

Luster is narrated by Edie, a snarky, beautiful editor at a publishing house where she is one of only two Black women. She is also a sex addict, who has hooked up with most of her colleagues. But Edie's real sadness is that she wants to work in the art department. She is a trained artist and has applied for positions there but can't get in. Having run out of colleagues to mess around with, she gets on the dating apps and meets Eric: a married, middle-aged father who has a job he loves. Eric is white and has a Black wife, a grown-up daughter. Eric is a pretty happy thing, and Edie immediately becomes his mistress. Eric's wife Rebecca, the white saviour, is even on board with the arrangement — sort of.

Cynicism, then, abounds. But about a quarter of the way through Luster, Leilani completely subverts the reader's expectations. When Edie hits rock bottom, getting herself fired and becoming homeless, the novel becomes almost unrecognisably sincere. Edie gets a job as a delivery person, becomes depressed, and then, completely by accident, meets Rebecca. What transpires is a move away from something sardonic and wry (Eric "looks at me and pretends I am not just a cheaper version of a fast Italian car") to something bumbling and optimistic.

Edie ends up staying with Eric and Rebecca. She becomes her heedless lover's financial and emotional responsibility; the woman his wife and daughter most depend on; the person even he comes to depend on. She begins to understand that her doting on Eric, and desire for his life, may be misplaced. But the novel's pivot to earnestness doesn't come at the cost of emotional integrity, and even in her newfound capacity for self-love, Edie never loses sight of the pain. She muses:

So, sure, an older man is a wonder because he has paid thirty-eight years of Com Ed bills and suffered food poisoning and seen the climate reports and still not killed himself, but somehow, after being a woman for twenty-three years, after the ovarian torsion and student loans and newfangled Nazis in button-downs, I too am still alive, and actually this is the more remarkable feat.

That I didn't feel duped by Luster, even as I was masterfully manipulated by it, is a testimony to the way in which Leilani has nailed her protagonist's voice. Having described getting up with an addicted mother, Edie reflects on her past loves, and her propensity to cast herself as prey, "presuming the intent of the jaws that lock around my head. ... In other words, it's not just the love, it's a violence". At this moment we suddenly understand that her entire interpretation of sexual attraction is a symptom of attachment trauma. At another point, when describing how racism and sexism take a psychic toll on Black female productivity of all kinds, Edie says, "Last time I painted, I was twenty-one. The president was black. I had more serotonin and I was less afraid of men". Not one Black person needs another comma or adjective to understand the emotional truth of those sentences.

Leilani also cleverly employs New York real estate as a narrative tool, as she moves Edie from a nice-ridden apartment to an upper-middle-class suburban home. Her narrator's loneliness, and its development, is tied to these spaces. She starts out with a roommate and colleagues; via Eric, she gains a full-on family in whose confines she can morph at will (she is at once an eldest daughter, a wife, a lover, a big sister). But she is still starving — literally, since she has digestive problems, and figuratively, for the family she never had and the friendships she has never found a way to forge. By the novel's end, she is able to face her parental abandonment while accepting help and rejecting abuse. Brilliant in terms of voice, Luster is equally strong on plot and structure. In her levelling of cynicism with hope, Raven Leilani writes as if she were three books wise, at least. I closed Luster feeling a little more cynical than when I'd opened it — but I loved it nonetheless. 
Curiosity without limit
Ann Quin’s rejuvenating, kaleidoscopic Passages

CLAIRE-LOUISE BENNETT

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to Ann Quin’s first novel, Berg (1964), Giles Gordon wrote, “Here was a working-class voice from England quite unlike any other. What set her apart from the main stream was that Quin eschewed the sort of gritty realist stuff being produced at the time by writers such as Arnold Wesker, John Braine and John Osborne. They frank, they shocking, Quin wrote, “with their damn 19th century proce.” Writers with working-class origins are often expected to write in a straightforward kind of way about the lives and struggles of working-class people; this does and should occur, of course, though still not nearly enough of it finds its way to publication. It shouldn’t be presumed, however, that because your socio-economic position dictates your interests and your culture doesn’t extend beyond it, envisioning alternative selfhoods and experiences. You’ll never stop seeing inequality and disadvantage if that’s where you come from, believe me, and you’ll never stop feeling helplessly apologetic about it. Being from a working-class background will always be a part of how you see and are seen in the world, but you might also realize that it needn’t define you, or what you write about.

It occurred to me some time ago that growing up in a working-class environment may well engender an aesthetic sensibility that naturally produces work that is idiosyncratic, polyvocal and apparently experimental. The walls are paper-thin; you rarely have any privacy. Nor do you have the safety nets, the forms of social support that provide the people from affluent backgrounds enjoy. Your own skin is paper-thin. When you are living from one measly pay cheque to the next with no clear sense of a future, even the most casual conversation is hyperbolic, fragmented, permeable and beyond your control. In Quin’s essay “One Day in the Life of a Writer” – an undated fragment published posthumously in The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments (2018) – there is no romantic talk of pottering off to the shed at the bottom of the garden in order to write in hallowed seclusion. There is a laneway hoisting up the stairs to rippers and lamb stew, a window-cleaner up on his ladder peering into unemployed men along the Front, spitting and muttering, burn holes in the carpet, burn holes in the lampshades. It’s all so very raw, and visceral, and impossible to shut out. Elsewhere Quin mentions the “partition next to my bed”, how it “shook at night from the manoeuvres, snores of my annoyance, resentment”.

Quin’s prose is atomized, kaleidoscopic. It evinces a perspective that is constantly shuffling the distinction between objects and beings, self and other, and conceives of the world in terms of form and symmetry, texture and tone. These characteristics led some critics at the time to suggest that Quin was indebted to the nouveau roman. In a brilliant essay on Quin for the TLS (“The Quin thing”, January 9, 2010), Julian Bell calls some predictably snippy assessments (“Ronald Hayman charges her with ‘borrowings’ from Nathalie Sarraute; she has been ‘infected with an ‘idiosyncratic disdain for inverted commas’”) or, equally, unconscious imitation (Robert Nye calls Berg “nearer the early work of Graham Greene than the fashionable French new-wavers its author … imagined she was imitating”). To my mind, these derisive evaluations fall – of course they do – to take into account the impact that one’s domestic set-up has on what and how one writes. Discussing how her short-story collection, Fireworks, came about, Angela Carter, for example, said “I started to write short pieces when I was living in a room too small to write a novel in”. Boom! When I read Quin, I experience her fidgeting forensic style as a powerful and bona fide expression of a tense paradox that underscores everyday life in a working-class environment. On the one hand, it’s an abrasive and in-your-face world, yet, at the same time, much of it seems alien and is completely uninvolved – overwhelming and yet understimulating at the same time.

Is it any wonder, then, that such a paradox should engender a sensitivity as acute as it is detached? Quin has an eye for minutiae, the “snugness of egg at the mouth corners”, no doubt about it, but she doesn’t dwell long on the strata of reality those sorts of details typically delineate: she knew there was more to life, more to people, than that. The two characters we encounter in Passages – her third novel, published in 1969 – brush up against a totalitarian regime on their travels abroad, an oppressive, unpredictable presence, which throws them back onto themselves – “the mind goes out to meet itself”, Quin writes – and they begin to experience a deepening of consciousness that brings about a voluptuous dissolving of self. “She says she knows no limits in/for herself”, says the man about the woman. She explains that her “frenzied intensity” prevents her from being “eaten up by reality”. The man meanwhile favours obscurity over intensity in order to stave off reality, there is “something to be said”, he muses, “for remaining in a place far off, without name, without identity”. Quin’s prose charts this dissolution and the existential conundrums it gives rise to with breathtaking insight and dexterity. To what extent is it possible to remain distinct and intact when identity has been given the slip? “I have no sense at all of who I was yesterday”, the man notes. He has become a creature of his imagination, and in doing so he has also become “More and more unable to observe, determine the truth of things, share an experience”. Can two people be as circles from two stones thrown into a pool and “increase equally, one within the other, without the one destroying the other”?

Evocations of the sea ripple and surge throughout Quin’s books. In Passages it is referred to as the perfect malleable form; “waves kept their direction when intersecting. Movements of the water’s impressions penetrated each other, without changing their first shape”. In an arresting line, the man asks, “Is it her body I hold in my arms or the sea?” For this reader, Passages offers one of the most veracious and moving depictions of the push and pull that beset a fervid love-affair. Not since Sarah Kane’s plays have I read anything that so urgently conveys the torment of desiring someone, of wanting to know their “dreams, needs, obsessions, demands, desires” – of “wanting”, as the woman does, “to take in his history while taking him in her mouth” – while at the same time wanting to stay mute and free of discussing one’s secrets. “The problem”, the man says, “is to discover whether I can live with this woman’s demons without forfeiting my own.”

Both Kane and Quin were drawn to Greek mythology, Kane most notably in Phaedra’s Love. In Passages the woman’s search for her dead brother alludes to Antigone, while the man’s journal is annotated with descriptions of ancient Greek friezes of an often violent nature. This conflation with mythical elements puts me in mind of Thomas Mann’s notion of the web of the past and the idea that the many elements that make a man “come from the Universe outside and previous to him”. Mann suggests that perhaps “each person’s role is to revive certain given forms, certain mythical schemes established by forebears, and to allow them reincarnation”. Quin turns this formulation on its head by situating it in the context of female experience: “The matriarchal goddesses reflect the life of women, not women’s life of the goddesses”. Passages is rife with scripted prepositions, no sooner is something in it than it is out, or it is down. It is no wonder the man concludes that “we seem to be becoming going around and around”. Indeed, the overlaps in Passages that there is an accruing sense that there is no past and no future - a “Fold in time/order/space” - and the woman and the man are perhaps “Emerging from an observation which hasn’t revenged itself, and which a hundred and one centuries of life would never satisfy now”. Passages is a slim volume, but once you start to unravel its layers and combinations, its possible meanings seem endless, like a beautiful ancient puzzle. Read it in one sitting - there really is no other way of experiencing it. Imbibe it whole. Become the sea. The more attention you give it the more it will unravel you, your demands and demons. Returning to your “fleshly boundaries”, to use Mann’s phrase, you will feel rejuvenated and quite transformed, since your mysteries have been awakened. “Coming back to my body”, writes the man in the book’s final pages, “a sense that I was perhaps someone else, some drifting thing that at least had found somewhere for inhabiting, not to remember happiness – just curiosity.” Curiosity. That’s the thing. Passages stirred up a certain kind of curiosity that I hadn’t felt kindling in me for so long. It’s difficult to describe - it’s almost like the opposite of curiosity, one burns with as an adolescent - sexual, solipsistic, melancholic, fierce, hungry, languorous – and without limit.


© CLAIRE-LOUISE BENNETT

This is an edited extract from the introduction to Ann Quin’s Passages, republished next month by And Other Stories.
With deepest sympathy
Why male privilege is less significant than male power

CHARLOTTE SHANE
ENTITLED
How male privilege hurts women
KATE MANNE

I n a year characterized by death, poverty and political vitriol, the 2020’s final cruel
ties was President-elect Joe Biden’s pledge to appoint a cabinet that “looks like”, rather than lives
like, “American”. As families across the country were
twisted into the winter of an unending pandemic,
and protesters against police brutality were met with
— you guessed it — police brutality, television pundit
and mainstream journalists enthused over the “all
demale” senior communications team of a million-
For those who campaigned on the promise to “get policemoney” and continue to insist that his strug-
gleing constituents “aren’t looking for a handout”.

The plodders weren’t a surprise. Liberals are
notorious for promoting superficial adjustment to
the status quo, and both parties are old hands at
wrapping recessive agendas in appealing optics.
I well remember the naïve shock, in 2008, of the
Republican presidential nominee John McCain’s
announcement of the obscure, unaccomplished
Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate — a trans-
parently cynical attempt to woo any Hillary Clinton
supporters who were embittered by non-woman
Barack Obama’s securing of the Democrat nomina-
tion. “We don’t have a problem with women in power” was the implicit brag, and maybe the plot
worked, a little: 53 per cent of white women voted
for McCain that year, with 46 per cent going to
Obama, although who knows how many of those
were determined by racial allegiance? And it is
insulting (and inaccurate) to assume that policy and
platform do not matter, it is also a mistake to play
down how easily identity buttons can be pushed —
particularly among voters who are insulated from
state violence. Some women are determined to oper-
ate as if gender supersedes all other considerations,
including political record or personal history. In
this way of thinking, they resemble plenty of men.

In Entitled: How male privilege hurts women, the
philosopher Kate Manne takes up the cause of the
single-issue feminist. The book’s premise, as indi-
cated by its title, is that “male entitlement gives rise
to a wide range of misogynistic behavior”. This
depresses women of “their genuine entitlement to
both feminine-coded and masculine-coded goods”.
In other words, sexism harms women, though
Manne’s preferred term for this ingrained inequity
is misogyny, framed in her previous work, Down
Girl (2017), as “the ‘law enforcement’ branch of patriarchy — a system of laws function to police and
enforce gender norms”. This book illustrates various
facets of this entitlement complex with the aim of
helping its readers to “fight better” by being “clear
about what we are up against”. Manne’s focal points
include the unusual idea that the feminist concerns
rape, abortion and housework.

I appreciate Manne’s use of “misogyny” to
describe behaviour rather than the internal experi-
ence of hating women. And I agree that misogyny
is bad for women. But there is a fatal analytic
absence at the core of Entitled, and it is the insuffi-
ciency that plagues every feminist project conceived
without a foundation of anti-racist, anti-capitalist,
anti-statist thought. Manne draws on the work of
several contemporary Black feminists, mostly in
regard to medical mistreatment of Black women,
and dutifully identifies herself as someone who is
white, cis, able-bodied and so on. But what matters
indefinitely more than her demographic credentials
(or lack thereof) is a willingness to think through
the implications of what it means to oppose white
supremacy, or to advocate for “justice” within
a system that exists to thwart the same.

From the book’s first pages, this void manifests
itself in linguistic hollowness. Privilege is left
undefined, with “male privilege” invoked regularly
enough that “privileged male” might be read as a
simple redundancy. Although Manne gestures to
“the forces that hold misogyny in place” and “unjust
systems” and “other oppressive systems” that aug-
mentation male entitlement, she doesn’t identify what
they are. All relevant “environments” and “ills” and
“structures” are “social” — that is to say, interper-
sonal, perhaps even spontaneously arising, rather
than specific, intentional products of laws, state vio-
ence or class warfare. An inability or unwillingness
to name misogyny’s supplementary “oppressive sys-
tems” — the material mechanisms that perpetuate
“privilege” of all types — explains otherwise inexplic-
able features of Entitled. These include a chapter
on healthcare that never addresses affordability and
access, and the shameful assertion that rich white
women exploit the domestic labour of poorer, darker
women because they (the wealthy women) are
“exhausted and desperate” because of their unhelp-
ful entitlements (“Privileged white men’s dere-
cliction of their duties have [sic] deleterious effects
not just on their own wives, but also, by extension,
on more vulnerable women”). The reality that anti-
choice female politicians can do more damage to
abortion rights than most cis men isn’t fussed over.
Some women who are against abortion “have much
to gain by abiding by the norms of good womanhood
vis-a-vis the values of our white supremacist patriar-
chy”, Manne writes, but she doesn’t dwell on what
they gain, or how much harm they can do and have
done.

If and when Manne verges on insights about
systemic injustice, those insights usually can’t be
pursued because they don’t fit with the perspective
that male entitlement best explains matters at hand.
Her chapter on rape (“Unexceptional — The Entitle-
ment to Sex”), to take one good example, is incoherent with motivations and contradictions.
Manne opens with a clear-cut case of assault in
which a woman’s boyfriend raped her while she was
unconscious. The boyfriend admitted he did it, but
the police force to whom the crime was reported
declined to arrest him or open a case on the matter,
just as the local prosecutor declined to prosecute.
Manne takes this opportunity to expound on her
notion of “hinpathy”, the “inappropriate sympathy
extended to a male perpetrator”. The police and the
courts, Manne writes, are made up of “bad actors
who are enabled, protected, and even fostered by a
hinpathic social system” (my emphasis). She pro-
ceeds to lament untested rape kits, which ostensibly
hold conviction-making material, in spite of having
established that a rape might not be prosecuted even
when the rapist admits he did it. She then disavows
the suggestion that rapists should receive life
in prison while highlighting lax sentences and low
incarceration. “The point here is to simply identify
the negligence and double standards”, she says. But
why? To what end? Should readers want rapists
incarcerated more, or other offenders incarcerated
less? “Hinpathy” is the most accurate, useful word
to describe a brutal judicial system? And why worry
about testing rape kits when the rapist won’t be
prosecuted, or convicted, or “punished”? Why should a
victim report rape at all when, as Manne notes in
the same chapter, women are increasingly sued and/or
prosecuted for making the allegation?

As the “bad actor” line makes clear, Entitled treats
men as atomized individuals, all individuals who generally think and act alike. The villainous figure
of the “powerful man” shows up often, in the guise of
Harvey Weinstein and Brett Kavanaugh as well as faceless others, but without an explanation of when
he derives his power from. (This seems like the
opposite of what Manne aimed to accomplish in
Down Girl when she located misogyny in the public sphere of action rather than the private sphere of
inner experience.) And the source of the power
matters tremendously, because the power matters
more than the entitlement. I know there are men
who believe I owe them, and the world, a certain
performance by virtue of my gender: a smile, sex,
childrearing. But their entitlement in and of itself
is irrelevant to me unless they have the power
(through physical strength, the backing of the state,
money) to enforce it. In Entitled, the problem with
women’s home lives isn’t a lack of secure housing or
a basic income or state-funded preschool or gener-
ous paid parental leave, or any of the resources
that can make them less vulnerable to exploitation
from powerful parties of any gender; it’s entitled
husbands. And women’s political struggle isn’t to
establish a government that provides them with
even one of these services but rather to insist on
a woman’s “entitlement to power”, so that female
political candidates aren’t passed over for male.

Entitled’s main contribution is to move the conception of liberation or “structural change”, though Manne
claims to call for just that when she asks readers to
“fight for a world in which girls and women are
valued, cared for, and believed, within our social,
legal, and medical institutions”. Her use of “our” is
precisely the problem. The US’s legal and medical
institutions, much like its government, were never
intended to serve everyone. Exclusion and abuse
are not incidental. To set the “fight” within this
functionally unjust system is to foreshadow the very
possibility of structural change.

— — —

Churchill, The Contradictions of Greatness
William Rubinstein
Churchill’s extreme stances on Bolshevism, Nazism, Jews & Zionism, British Empire, &
Anglo-American alliance.
www.eerpublishing.com

Charlotte Shane is a co-founder of Tigertree Press

Joe Biden addressing the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, October 3, 2017
Gravity and wagery
The playful biography of a literary cat

MIN WILD

JEFFORY, THE POET’S CAT
A biography
OLIVER SODEN

WELL, HERE IS A RAVISHING OBJECT, FROM the cover’s inset of a cat curled nose to tail, to the beautiful colour plates within. It fits beguilingly in your hand, and is astutely set in the eighteenth-century typeface Bashkerville throughout its 185 sumptuous pages. The words themselves are pretty ravishing too, especially if you like cats. There must be, necessarily, some bristling when it comes to the notably unfeline sea that separates the academic jealously defending her tiny territory from the reader prowling for likely-looking gift books.

Oliver Soden, who has also written an acclaimed biography of Michael Tippett, knows well Benjamin Britten’s cantata Rejoice in the Lamb (1942), which included a striking strand of sung verse on a cat at play. The epic eighteenth-century poem of grace and clumsy transcendence from which it came, Jubilate Agno (1759-62), was an object of literary and musical curiosity. Christopher Smart, its indigent creator, had been helped in his madness and debt by Charles Burney, the musicologist and father of Frances. Robert Browning, imagining the lunatic Smart as a one-poem wonder, would later come to love his “Song to David”, which alone sets Smart “with Milton and with Keats”. Jubilate Agno makes him a much more intriguing figure; nowadays Smart stands confirmed as a powerful wit and prose satirist as well as devotional poet.

Soden’s fine, concise description of Jubilate Agno notes the imperative “the poem is obedient to its own title”, “gathering up in its capacious embrace the wonders of the natural world, and extolling them to worship the Lord”. A sustained section of seventy-three lines, just over halfway through, focuses on Jeoffry, and if the name Christopher Smart rings a bell to most, it sounds like this cat’s of “gravity and wagery” and his much-anthologized depiction. Jeoffry greets the day by “wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness”. When he “takes his prey”, “the plays with it to give it a chance”. Although he “cannot fly”, he is “an excellent clamberer”. Soden’s clever and vivid book is an imagined biography of this undocumented creature of the London streets. Nothing is known of Jeoffry beyond his cameo in Smart’s poem, and Soden takes his mode not directly from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s spaniel Flush, but from Virginia Woolf’s Orlando, in which the wunderkammer narrative is interrupted with asides like Soden’s “or maybe it didn’t happen like that at all”. Jeoffry’s life is envisioned here with ingenuity and tact, evoking Paul Gallico’s Jennie, say, and Pangur Bán, the ninth-century Irish monk’s cat, also banged up with his “kindred spirit, veteran” writer. Soden can write, and knows feline liquidity and transformation: Jeoffry “tilting himself off the wall” is matched when he is “a thrumming loaf of warmth” at the bed’s foot. Born in a well-realized Covent Garden brothel (“buzzing into the suede under-slip of his mother”), he is later cast into a small room with a little man, a kind of William Blake holy fool, with a large forehead and preposterous eyes. Smart’s long poem meant quill pens to play with. Soden sends Jeoffry on a journey where he meets in his nonage a baby Sam Coleridge. Venturing into the past as a cat means you can avoid all the “so I hear George Ill has died” stuff, and describe famous people (Handel, Garrick) by their arms and legs. Soden doesn’t duck cruelty and pain, and Jeoffry ends movingly, back with Smart’s poem, “for nothing is sweeter than his peace when at rest”.

Elsewhere in Jubilate Agno, a mouse addresses a cat: “I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are”. Soden’s book comes with scholarly appanages, but despite this I fear that he doesn’t know his human very well. Smart wasn’t William Blake, but a clever, learned man, a Cambridge satirist with Greek, Latin and Hebrew. The wit that Soden well discerns in Jubilate Agno has strong origins. As “Mrs Mary Midnight” – a name skated over by Soden – Smart wrote a monthly magazine, The Midwife (1750-53), which was brimful of extravagant satire, radical expression and brilliantly nuanced gender play. He crossed the border for publications with the audacity that we see in his asylum poems as well as in his bearing, exuberant earlier prose. But this is a cat’s tale, and there are legions of...

Min Wild is Lecturer in English at the University of Plymouth

Dalljit Nagra’s most recent collection is British Museum, 2017

Letter to Professor Walcott

Hardly worth calling them out, the old masters.
Each time a cause gains ground, should their estate become glass house to alleged misdemeanours?
Their body of rhyme can be felt, it propagates its own lineage. Should we read poems from a cave, half-written by the missing forefather? I stand before the compressed volumes of verse across my shelves; who covered their tracks, who’ll outlive their flaws?

Who’d topple the marble of some national bard, or galgal their name and the chela guarding them? How many writers, the world over, are behind bars for crossing a border of taste? It seems natural to harm art and the artist. Consider Larkin who, where he knew where he was, amiss, who, if akin to his father’s brown shirt, who, if published by Old Possum who laid rats on Jews... and I’ve lost myself, and the Work is no longer the work.

If influence imparts bad genes, who to weigh in the scales of my nurture? Weigh Chaucer who forced a minor into raptus? Weigh Milton mastering tongues to bate his women like a whip? Weigh Coleridge pairing the horror of Othello’s wedded state to those of a black mistress? Weigh Whitman and Tennyson who’d cleanse by skin? If Kipling says we’re devils, may I weigh the man of “IF”?

How do I edit the Frost-like swamp I’ve swilled so many poets to recycle either side of this fireplace before sweetens and light. Before I woke, in tune with the differentiated rainbow and its burning flames. Should I calmly cease their leasehold if they’ve abused the canonical fortress? Or ride a kangaroo court on its flood of Likes? Take down each Renaissance Man to his manhood? But I hear the poems breathe: We can’t be judged by our birth, or judge our birth as Parnassian.

And you, dear Derek. Your Adam-songs for an island sparked paradise from sandering, breadfruit. Your spade dug the manor and bones fell up. The senile columns fanned your arrival. They donned a black male and colour was virtue. You opened my mouth and verse came out. Your advocates cleaned your mess, their arms held down the age, as though gods roaming the earth to graduate girls. As though rape were the father of art.

You were “Dutch, n—“, Brit, you were my Everyman! Why take on Calliau’s revenge? Your moustache a broom wedging its stanza of nightmare – in how many Helens? Did you lust after lines inspired by whisper, taunted by sirens for your Homeric song? Intellectual finger-jabbing seems off the mark: in the papers. Korean Ko Un’s erased, and who’d fly to a terminal if it was named for a serial pervert, Pablo Neruda?

I bet they hunt the dark man, Derek, in pantheon death. Haunted or wreathed – how should you be honoured at Inskilling? Well, it seems fitting you fall in the West where you carried our”our” burdens. Beside the foul spot, I’d test my love again. You are in me: I’d never lose you, if I tried. I’d begin with these, your old books, anew. Now where on my shelves are you, travelling through the old world? Where’s your dog-eared Don Juan?

DALLIJT NAGRA
Airs and graces
A round-up of recent poetry collections

LIFE WITHOUT AIR
DAISY LAFARGE

Daisy Lafarge's debut gives off a whiff of the lamp, a glint of the petri dish: rather than setting for science as glibby good meta-
phor, Lafarge demonstrates a thor-
oughly researched understanding of subject as much as subtext. Tox-
icity and the theory of Anaesthmesia (air “as the primary material from which all things are made”) help to
power densely clinical work, accre-
tive in effect, to do with bad air as lateral and emotional atmosphere.
For all its precise, occasionally brutalist lexicon, its “Lower Cretaceous schlick”, Lafarge's writing can still be
plainly and elegantly musical, as in “axiology”: “There was weird light on our sheets / from the too-
soon marsh, or ‘Winter’ as when the moon, so with our mothers / it is what we make with the fallout that matters”.

Like the debuts, Lafarge's work
can chime with certain of its imme-
diate peers: she makes use of the cool-handed essayistic mode (“Symptoms of emotional dis-
plasm include...”) the antic surreal-
ist (“woke one morning to the trumpet / of her mother, its mouth-
piece from the room where she earned her sternum”), and even the burning baby subgenre (“children who resolve too soon to never / play with matches end / up setting them-
elves alight”) across poems which vary in impact, partly for this mild sense of familiar alien. At times the
poem “the lilt” in “What Genie Got”, “processed in discordor”, but there is a hint of almost parodic jadedness at the agreed-upon sub-
ject: the desire for such lyric discourse “Rhododendrons, she says, or something about capitalism”. One senses a poet chafing at her own bounds, at her best shooting off in new, unexicted directions, taking risks by
bringer in Biblical commentary, the language of philosophy or bot-
any and a real, unfeigned oddity which
speaks well of her capacity to
strike out on her own, appealingly idiosyncratic paths.

Poems such as “inimal inti-
macy”, with its clipped abbrevia-
tions, its slightly breathless onrush (“Now pr of men f'dled in yr endless strata & the wind combs hotly my mid eyes”), and “dog nose”, bouncier version of the degraded un-love poems which
up throughout, point to a more unfiltered and less clubbable Lafarge, her diction benefiting from
increased concision and pace. For all
the scientific terminology and larded jabs of anachronism and possi-
inous gases and suffocating atmos-
pheres, some of the most resonant
writing here is found in closely observed, artfully rendered descrip-
tion: “each of her limbs a spring of pale lavender, protruding / in a ges-
ture of genteele and outmoded frailty”.

Declan Ryan

SINGING / BREATHING / TREMBLING
JEN HADFIELD

In 1545 a Franciscan friar, Bernar-
dino de Sahagún, began a project to
preserve the Nahua’s world view
during two epidemics in Mesoamer-
ica. The Nahua responded to Saha-
gún’s questionnaires about their
culture with paintings, which were
then recast by Sahagún as texts in
the Nahua’s native language, Nahuatl. The collated material has
become known as the Florentine Codex. Jen Hadfield’s Singing / Breathing / Trembling is a modern interpretation of the Codex’s “rain-
bow lore”.

Singing, the first of three beauti-
fully produced pamphlets collected
in a small blue box, is an essay on
Sahagún’s work. The Nahua, Had-
field tells us, lived in a world where
nature was one with humans and
animals, and gods still resided among them, to all, of crea-
tion was sacred and new: “Every-
one had god on their hands. God
on your breath. God under your
eyelids. God grew like a weed”.
Painting was a ritual for the Nahua,
way of making the “unknown
appear and exist” and of conjuring
their world “one ‘thing’ at a time”,
even as it disappeared before their
eyes.

Appropriately, Breathing com-
prises a series of long-squared rain-
bow paintings in rich colours, initi-
tating those described in the Codex. The Nahua believed that a rainbow was a sign that the Tlalocs, the rain
gods, were leaving. The third book,
Trembling, is a translated poem with further accompanying paint-
ings. It is grounded and to some
extent restated in present-day Scotland by Hadfield’s occasional
use of Christian dialect: a rainbow “hisses and hammars and dr ozok-
ker”. Sometimes it reads like a child-
ren’s story, but lines as such “its
cut face is wet, like a quartered water-
melon” defy the merely facile.
The collection as a whole is much
concerned with the hope rainbows have come to signify. On one page, “We tell each other: that’ll put a
stop to / the rain. It isn’t going to
rain anymore”: on the following
page, “It does not still rain. / It is
sitting down. / It keeps on drizz-
ling”. The sparse words float
down, against a grey-blue watercol-
our of what looks like rain against a
window.

There is a sense of wonder, here,
in spite of the existence of pain
Singing / Breathing / Trembling, like a rainbow, is situated between sun-
shine and rainfall. The collection
obviously has some relevance to the
current pandemic, but Hadfield's
work also demonstrates poetry’s
ability to live and speak through the ages, just as it did for the Nahua,
when “language was green, bub-
bling out of things like sap”.

Carola Rosa Manfredino

RANDOMLY MOVING PARTICLES
ANDREW MOTION

Poems have poured out of Andrew Motion in the decade since his tenure as Poet Laureate: Randomly Moving Particles is his fifth collection in eleven years. Its two long poems and three shorter
ones return to several of his endur-
ing preoccupations. “I set my watch
five hours behind. Eventually I
sleep”, he writes near the start of the
title poem, waking to “Maryland
cost below my plane” (he moved to Baltimore in 2015), “suburbs work-
ning avenues into close-knit twed”,
and thoughts of “emails / stacked in thin air waiting for my
phone to wake up / as the facts of my
life are occluded within my life”. As
in Donald Davie’s “In the Stop-
ping Train”, “this journey will pun-
ish the bastard”. Motion’s coolly
impasioned poem in which “the question keeps arriving: What am I
done here?” juxtaposes vivid mem-
dories, desires and snapshots of
people who “wobble off with their
busy hams jostling” with political
reflections and facts about astro-
mony and physics, in a usually suc-
cessful attempt to comprehend the
human condition. Its many tiny
sections rarely stand up on their
own, but they aren’t designed to,
and the continual quantum leaps of
focus, and shifts between lyrical and prosaic modes, make a poem
perhaps more impressive than any
other he has published since earn-
ing “the butt of sack”. Ironically, the
de rigueur attack on Donald Trump,
“ininteligible / as explicit state-
ments” to “the new media informa-
cation”, works equally well as a
description of how this sequence of “particles” cohere.

What follows is relatively disap-
pointing. The shorter poems strike
a similar pose but feel like offcuts, too fragile in isolation for their
purpose, “the mortar of a surrended
narrative, to become more than the sum of its parts”. The third section, and long-
est poem, returns to the fractured
technique of the first, but concen-
trates more unequivocally on
another life: that of one “Major H”,
an eastern of wars in the Middle
East, now turned to rural Eases, from where he slips into the Under-
world in “a quicksand collapse”. Tale of a epic proportions with
thematic parallels to several of
Motion’s poems of the past decade,
including many of those in The
Customs House (2012). Predictably,
Major H is haunted by his military past, and ends up perpetrating tragedy. Sadly, this dull gas giant of a poem—summarized, for reasons
unknown, in a prefatory synopsis—
lacks the spookily magical of the
first, and is at least twice as long as it should be.

Rory Waterman

THE AIR YEAR
CAROLINE BIRD
64pp. Carcanet. £9.99.

The Air Year tells the story of
waiting. Its title refers to a time before commitment in a relation-
ship, “the anniversary prior to paper / for which ephemeral gifts are traditional”. Although the col-
lection was published last February
(earning a Forward prize in Octo-
ber), we will likely turn to it in the future when seeking words for the
stagnation and embattlement of
2020 as a whole: “yearning often paralyses me in my armchair” (“Loveborough”). Our experience
of time, too, is warped: “I might end up in the womb, shouting, ‘Has anyone / handed in a leather jacket?” (“Fridge”). In “Prepper”, a mother grieves her children’s deaths before they happen.

Caroline Bird is an expert story-
teller. Most of these poems have
a dramatic immediacy, full of
humour and the enjoyably bizarre, and evoke the hopes and fears of
liminal time: “A void dressed as a
dark digital kaleidoscope / com-
plete / with actual appointments” (“Fancy Dress”). There are fre-
nquent moments of sickening pain,
too: “Mother house is coming down
and you’re still / writing” (“The Red Telephone”). The mini-
narratives are not quite riddles and not quite parables, but they create
a powerful sense of mysterious
revelation.

The poems’ formal and narrative strengths are in their ability to
explain, and the ability to expose exactly those feelings such as constriction, claustrophobia and hamster-wheel repetition. In the opening poem “Dive Bar”, as she “navigates a 
corner of the city where the air
is soft resin”, a witty deictic gesture conjures stasis: “We made the mis-
take, the only mistake, of being there”. “Dive Bar” describes an imagined journey down a series of women’s
throats during a club night, each
written in a format notated instead of the one before: the language repeats again and again in concerted form. In “The Ground” (“TLS, March 29, 2018”), the speaker falls through the air, continually landing on ledges and objects and rejoicing at new-
found stability — “this is the ground, / I can bake that lasagne now”, “At
last / I can put up that shelf. Make that baby” — only to find that there is
further to fall. Bird’s expressive
use of form peaks in “Diving Ord-
ward”, a specular poem (a form
in which the first half of the poem
repeats, line by line, in reverse in
the second half) that sees the fantasized guide to her lover trans-
ition from suffocation to depend-
ence. Bird’s poems also humbly sug-
Suggest that there will be an end to
the waiting: “I could build a house on this, you think, / staggering off” (“The Ground”). This bears and bridges the thematic, in the same way, there is hope that one day love will bring completion, and the ground really will be the ground.

Mary Anne Clark
From clay pipes to plastic fish
Our relationship with objects, as revealed by our detritus

CLARE SAXBY
RAG AND BONE
A family history of what we’ve thrown away
LISA WOOLLET

"Even the meanest" broken fragment tells a story of this great city", Ted Sandling wrote in his beginner’s guide to mudlarking on the Thames in 2016. For Lisa Woollett, a photographer and lifelong beachcomber, they tell another story of the decades, generations of whom have lived in London's detritus, and of the far-reaching effects of what we consume and what we throw away. In Rag and Bone, she reveals the shoreline to be not just a museum of curiosities, but the site of a continuing saga of consumption and waste, where the line between present and past is eroded by inconvenient truths emerging from the mud, offering the crucial reminder that "there is no "away".

Woollett grew up on the Isle of Sheppey, before moving to London and later Cornwall: three places that offer rich opportunities for beachcombing. From fossils to "clay pipe detritus", she has accrued a vast collection of finds that now spills from cabinets, shelves and "dusty jars". Some finds are surprising. Among the endless pieces of bone and clay pipe on the Wapping foreshore, she spots Caribbean coral, collected as ballast to weigh down eighteenth- and nineteenth-century merchant sailing ships before their return journey to now-vanished docks. Across the river in Bermondsey, an unassuming metal ring turns out to be a Tudor leatherworker's thimble. For Woollett, some items are interesting for the way they evolve: clay pipes and teapots, for example, get larger through the decades in line with the falling cost of tobacco and sugar. The older a glass bottle is, the more uniquely flawed are its texture and shape: on Swale Marshes in Kent, Woollett finds one with "shoulder seams" that have "shifted out of place, like a hastily pulled-on shirt".

Can a passion for debris be inherited? Woollett's maternal great-grandfather, Tom Tolladay, was a scavenger and her grandmother (also Tom Tolladay) worked as a dustman in postwar Waltham. Although it was never a glamorous job, refuse collection did involve a degree of creativity. Like every member of the profession at that time, Tolladay had an eye for spotting "root": objects of value that could be salvaged and sold on. With the advent of "compactor trucks", this skill, and with it his pride in the job, were made redundant by 1970. Tolladay is one of a small number of survivors of the manual scavenging era, a time of mass production. Woollett traces the Tolladays through a changing city as waves of slum clearances sent them, along with much of its rubbish, outwards towards the suburbs.

"Rag and Bone" is more than a history in a hundred objects: it is a meditation on our relationship with objects themselves. Woollett's finds on the foreshore follow the "cultural drift" of the post-Victorian dustyard - where almost everything was reused or resold, including dead cats ("six-pence for a white cat, fourpence for a coloured cat") - to the "planned obsolescence" of twentieth-century consumer goods deliberately designed for short-lived use and frequent replacement. Her grandparents, who marvelled when their son brought home a prototype plastic comb from his job at Shell in the 1950s, were of a generation who had to be "taught" to be wasteful in the postwar years. Perhaps the best illustration of this era's cultural shift can be found on a beach on the Isle of Sheppey, where spark plugs from dismantled cars lie alongside video recorders and the leaves of plastic house plants. Hastily built bungalows like the one her toot-collecting grandfather retired to in the 1960s have since been swallowed by cliff falls; today, they slowly release their linoleum floors onto the shingle.

"For a sense of where the "evolution of our waste" has led us, and to complete her journey downstream to the sea, Woollett returns home to Cornwall. Here, on its plastic-strewn beaches, she finds the clay pipes of today: coffee stirrers, tampon applicators, toothbrushes, biro lids and millions of empty plastic fish (the kind that hold the soy sauce in takeaway sushi). Yet there is still joy to be found in unexpected novelities: a set of Monopoly houses, perhaps, or limited-edition Lego pieces lost from a shipping container off Land's End. Woollett's Rag and Bone contains pages of images that transform her washed-up debris into works of art: hundreds of tyres from toy cars arranged like a British seashore painting; a close-up of a sea-worn plastic figurine in the solemn guise of a classical statue. There is a strange mixture of absurdity and poignancy to these everyday objects, tempered by despair at our apparent absurdity - unlike the hidden treasures of the Thames, these plastics seem too ubiquitous to be valuable. Even for Woollett the scale of the rubbish can be too much to bear looking through upland slag heaps. It is the hidden atoll, "taking back" - for a short while, at least - all its clues, its treasures and its indictments..."

LIFE LINEN AND COFFIN
A cultural history of Colombia's principal river

OLIVER BALCH
MAGDALENA
River of dreams
WADE DAVIS
432pp. Bodley Head. £25.

The Magdalena River is no Nile or Yangtze, no Danube or Congo. In the global league of great watercourses, it is but a riverlet. At 949 miles, it is not even Colombia's longest river. That accolade goes to the Rio Putamayo, Orinoco, Negro and Caquetá. In the heart of all proud Colombians, however, the Magdalena reigns supreme. For one, it is the only river that remains true to its homeland, not skipping borders into foreign lands. Cleaving Colombia in two from south to north, the Magdalena is variously described by Wade Davis as the country's "main artery", its "life-line" and the "reason [it] exists as a nation".

Rivers have always lured writers - especially rivers like the Magdalena that criss-cross some of the most striking and biodiverse landscapes in the world. Rivers also carry centuries of myth and magic. As Davis observes, throughout Colombia's history, the Magdalena has served as "a river of hope, a source of food and fresh water, a muse of poets, the inspiration of song". Of all those touched by it, the best known is Gabriel García Márquez. It is along the Magdalena's muddy waters that Florentino Ariza's steamboats slowly chug in Love in the Time of Cholera.

Simón Bolívar follows the same course in The General in His Labyrinth. The young Márquez travelled the Magdalena eleven times as a university student. According to Davis, this experience taught him more than many academic subjects. The river itself would have been more revealing than the "screwdriver postcards of the early Victorian dustyard" - where almost everything was reused or resold, including dead cats ("six-pence for a white cat, fourpence for a coloured cat") - to the "planned obsolescence" of twentieth-century consumer goods deliberately designed for short-lived use and frequent replacement. His grandparents, who marvelled when their son brought home a prototype plastic comb from his job at Shell in the 1950s, were of a generation who had to be "taught" to be wasteful in the postwar years. Perhaps the best illustration of this era's cultural shift can be found on a beach on the Isle of Sheppey, where spark plugs from dismantled cars lie alongside video recorders and the leaves of plastic house plants. Hastily built bungalows like the one her toot-collecting grandfather retired to in the 1960s have since been swallowed by cliff falls; today, they slowly release their linoleum floors onto the shingle.

"For a sense of where the "evolution of our waste" has led us, and to complete her journey downstream to the sea, Woollett returns home to Cornwall. Here, on its plastic-strewn beaches, she finds the clay pipes of today: coffee stirrers, tampon applicators, toothbrushes, biro lids and millions of empty plastic fish (the kind that hold the soy sauce in takeaway sushi). Yet there is still joy to be found in unexpected novelities: a set of Monopoly houses, perhaps, or limited-edition Lego pieces lost from a shipping container off Land's End. Woollett's Rag and Bone contains pages of images that transform her washed-up debris into works of art: hundreds of tyres from toy cars arranged like a British seashore painting; a close-up of a sea-worn plastic figurine in the solemn guise of a classical statue. There is a strange mixture of absurdity and poignancy to these everyday objects, tempered by despair at our apparent absurdity - unlike the hidden treasures of the Thames, these plastics seem too ubiquitous to be valuable. Even for Woollett the scale of the rubbish can be too much to bear looking through upland slag heaps. It is the hidden atoll, "taking back" - for a short while, at least - all its clues, its treasures and its indictments..."

The scholarly nature of the book provides many illuminating insights (an anthropologist by training, Davis is especially strong on Colombia's colonial history and indigenous cultures), but robs it slightly of verve and narrative drive. It is not until page 82, for example, that David actually travels along the Magdala in a boat. "There wasn't much to see", he writes. When he writes about the Magdalena as the country's "biggest coffin", however, and about the bloated corpses carried in the river's eddies during Colombia's murderous civil war, his descriptions feel engaged and heartfelt. In one moving passage he recounts the story of the pariah community of Punta Berrio. Tired of seeing mutilated cadavers float by like driftwood, they defied the orders of the various combatants and began retrieving them for burial. Davis mentions how he hid from the bodies with the names of their own lost loved ones, "a reciprocity of grace and longing that brought much comfort to the living [and offered eternal life to the dead]."

Davis's anger at the degradation of the river, raw and emotionally intense, is lost in the etherealism of a dead sewage, speaks to a deep attachment. We cannot but join him in hoping that, like Mary Magdalene's own redemption, a rehabilitation of the river named after her might somehow inspire a wider renewal..."

"Rag and Bone is a freelance writer

"Her grandparents were a generation of people who had to be taught to be wasteful in the postwar years..."

"Rag and Bone is a cultural history of Colombia's principal river..."
The fourth, French, age of perfection

Voltaire’s ambitious, idiosyncratic history of Louis XIV’s reign

JOHN ROSTER

SIÈCLE DE LOUIS XIV

Seven volumes
VOLTAIRE

Voltaire Foundation. £700.

VOLTAIRE published his Siécle de Louis XIV in 1751, but he had been working on it since the late 1720s, and parts appeared in dubs and drabs in different places before that date. He conceived it not just as a history of France, but of Europe and even of the world. Its aim was to show the achievements of modernity at a time when the celebrated quarrel between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” was coming to a head. He wanted to describe the expansion of commerce, with its emphasis on what he saw as the necessity for luxury, along with the need for religious toleration and for the weakening of superstition. Among the traits of modernity he could not enough classify as classical aesthetics, scientific discoveries, the Cartesian and Newtonian revolutions. These were themes which he had already discussed in his Lettres philosophiques (1733), but he thought they could be crystalized in the form of history of Louis’s reign.

He began with the premise that France under that monarch had achieved a fourth “Age of Perfection” after that of Pericles, who had led the Italian Renais-
sance. France, his nation, rather than the monar-
chy itself, was destined for greatness on a universal scale. Despite innate weaknesses and the indisputable contributions made by other nations such as the English, the Italians or the Dutch, that French achievement remained supreme. Because Louis XIV’s reign had been so long, it was possible to divide it almost a century of time, and to dwell on that French century, “Le Grand siècle”, rather than on the monarch himself, although he often appeared as central to it. The task of writing this history as it presented itself to Voltaire was challeng-
ing, even daunting. Historiography had to be recast in content as well as in form.

Such is the view of the experienced French scholar Diego Venturino, who himself faced a similar challenge in producing a definitive edition of the Siécle de Louis XIV as one of the final works in the Oeuvres complètes brought out by the Voltaire Foundation. The price of the seven-volume set and its significance as a work of reference indicate that its likely destination will be national and university libraries or research centres. The text of the Siécle itself takes up four volumes (of the seven), and ordinary readers have had it at their disposal in a single volume, as in the Firmin-Didot “Classiques Français” unannotated edition of 609 pages).

Venturino’s excellent introduction takes up much of the first volume, which also includes an essay by Nicholas Cronk and Jean-Alexandre Perrons on one of the most interesting critical appendices which Voltaire compiled for his book, the “Catalogue de plusieurs écrivains”. The next volume contains an account of the MSS used and a list of the different editions of the work that appeared in Voltaire’s life-
time or just after his death. There are also lists of variants, of books borrowed or consulted by him in his task, and a general index. Voltaire’s lists of so-
creigns, marshals and leading figures, together with other appendices including the substantial “Cata-
logue des écrivains” make up a separate volume. Then finally we have the text of the book in the last volumes (VI-VII). Almost a dozen scholars have con-
tributed to the edition.

Voltaire lived with the Siécle de Louis XIV for much of his life in France, Germany and Switzerland. He circulated early drafts of it from 1739 onwards. The first four chapters appeared that year in the form of an Essai sur le siècle de Louis XIV published almost simultaneously in Paris (bearing the false date of 1740) and in Holland. The Paris edition was promptly seized by the police and destroyed. Having briefly become Royal historiographer in 1746, Voltaire re-ed-
ted the Essai with four additional chapters. He then published anecdotes on the life of Louis XIV safely in Dresden in 1746. It was after he had moved to the court of Frederick II in Berlin that a full version of the work appeared there in 1751. As new and different editions came out, he continued to make variants or additions to the text. Only with the completion of his complete works in 1768 did the Siécle de Louis XIV become a distinct work on its own. Even then, the restless author continued to make changes to an edition of 1775, brought out by Cramer and Bardin in Geneva. A copy of this edition containing his final manuscript improvements, and later owned by Catherine II, has been adopted by the Voltaire Foundation.

The composition of the work had been pro-
 tracted as its publication. From the late 1720s, Vol-
taire sought out his documentation widely, borrow-
ing old history books and soliciting materials. From his excellent training by the Jesuits at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, he had learnt how to test concepts of credibility and “vraisemblance” in tracing human motivation in events. He seems not to have read Mbillon’s treatise on authenticating medieval docu-
ments and remained incapable of any serious Quelli-
enkritik. Contemporaries could produce histories of Antiquity or the Middle Ages using source-based erudition in a way he could not. But they would not go for the broad picture as he did. He was exasper-
ated by their chronological framework, within which all facts became equal. “What do I care if Adelphodocus added King Agolfo in 616, and what use are the anecdotes of their court?” To the mathematician Jean Bernoulli he confided in 1739 that he had been shown forty-eight folio volumes of the Marquis de Tungour’s record of events at Louis XIV’s court, but had only used eight pages. He had been shown forty-eight folio volumes of the Marquis de Dangeau’s record of events at Louis XIV’s court, but had only used eight pages.

“Portrait of Louis XIV” by Hyacinthe Rigaud, 1701

He was a Corresponding member of the Institut de France. He is the author of Louis XV and the Parlement de Paris, 1995, and a critical edition (with Mireille Gille) of the Correspondence du président de Brosses et de l’abbé Niccolini, 2008

John Roster is a Corresponding member of the Institut de France. He is the author of Louis XV and the Parlement of Paris, 1995, and a critical edition (with Mireille Gille) of the Correspondence du président de Brosses and de l’abbé Niccolini, 2008.

He describes the creation of the various French academies with a cursory account of some scientific di-
coveries. English writers like Dryden, Waller and Addison get a mention alongside their French con-
temporaries. The weakness of these chapters is amply compensated by the “Catalogue des écri-
vains” to which he returned constantly, supplying his publishers with new observations.

Voltaire’s four chapters devoted to the arts and sciences are disappointing in their brevity. According to Venturino, Voltaire composed them in Berlin where he was cut off from many of his sources. He described the creation of the various French academies with a cursory account of some scientific discoveries. English writers like Dryden, Waller and Addison get a mention alongside their French contemporaries. The weakness of these chapters is amply compensated by the “Catalogue des écrivains” to which he returned constantly, supplying his publishers with new observations.

Finalement, a review of the variations and with straightforward accounts of the controversies about Calvinism, Jansenism and Quietism. He saw religious disputes dying down in Europe because, as in England, “la philosophie commençait à dominer”. Only in France did they persist. A new feature of the essay is the question of reason throughout different sections of society. A final, probably ironic, chapter on China explains that Christianity failed to take hold in that kingdom because of the “tragic” fate of the Jesuits. The influence of the Jesuits had been great in Europe. The last message of the Siécle de Louis XIV is one of hope in the ultimate triumph of reason over darkness, oppression and fanaticism, a cause that the monarch had not greatly advanced.
Fat suits and shell suits

THESAUREUM

The Athenaeum

More than just another London club

MICHAEL WHEELER


Last autumn, the founder of a lingerie business brought a high-profile lawsuit against the Garrick Club for refusing to admit women as members. The Garrick, being the haunt of lawyers and actors, the matter was perhaps bound to end in courtroom drama. How much more discreetly the Athenaeum, lunching spot for bishops, scholars and scientists, handled the issue of female membership. When the club, in answer to its nominations book to women in 2001, Michael Wheeler’s new history records, there was “no blood on the carpet, no publicity in the newspapers and a total of 10 resignations”.

The Athenaeum emerged amid the early nineteenth-century florescence of learned societies. It was established in 1824 as a “Club of Literary men & Artists”. Its founding father, the Rev. John Wilson Croker, averred that none should be admitted but Royal Academicians, directors of the British Museum and British Institution, judges and bishops, and individuals “who have either published some literary or professional work, or a paper in the Philosophical Transactions”. Athena, goddess of wisdom, was a natural choice for patron deity. Installed in Decimus Burton’s delicate neoclassical red-brick house on Waterloo Place by 1830, the club attracted the cream of literary London – Macaulay, Dickens, Thackeray – along with a raft of scientists and engineers. The chemist Humphry Davy was its first chairman. Michael Faraday, its first secretary, advised on illuminating the building.

Wheeler’s aim was not to produce a “traditional, insular” club history but rather “to place the influence of Athenians (as members are known) on public life. Their achievements are indeed bountifully recorded, along with their titles, joining dates and modes of admission (‘super eminent’ individuals fast-tracked under Rule II as a cut above). But the lure of the committee minute book evidently proved too strong for Wheeler to resist. So alongside accounts of James Dewar’s liquefaction of air and James Chadwick’s discovery of neutrons are passages on the purchase of coffee urns, the installation of the new staircase and the unexplained disappearance of teacups and napkins.

Buried among the almost endless lists of committee members, library accessions and menu changes are some delicious anecdotes. In 1924, Ramsay MacDonald, not long prime minister, was turned away by a waiter bringing a “stranger” on a non-guest day. John Betjeman flounced out of the club over the new wallpaper. John Tavener declined an invitation to join when he was told he could not substitute a cravat for the obligatory tie. Jimmy Savile was not so precious, keeping a jacket and tie in his wardrobe alongside his countless shell suits for much-cherished visits to Waterloo Place. This exhaustive history will answer every question aspirant members of the Athenaeum might have – except perhaps one. Will a review published in the TLS be taken into consideration?

David Gelber

Happy Princes

TO THE END OF THE WORLD

Travels with Oscar Wilde

RUPERT EVERETT


Rupert Everett is the author of two previous volumes of autobiography that have been acclaimed for their crafted sureness. His new book is equally gossipy but has more of a sequential narrative because it records a decade-long struggle to get his film about Oscar and Wilde, The Happy Prince, which he both directed and starred in, off the ground, onto location and into cinemas. Endless financial negotiations and a filmmaking version involve multiple journeys: to Naples, to Normandy, and to France in 1991, where the crew would finally recreate the Parisian hotel room in which Wilde died. As its subtitle suggests, this is a travel book, but of an unusual kind because it is also a professional’s log, a celebrity’s memoir and a fan’s notebook.

For decades the life story of Oscar Wilde was routinely described as a “tragedy”; more recently that term, with its aura of shame and inevitability, has seemed misplaced. We are now inclined to view Wilde as the object of institutionalized homophobia. Then again, it seems wrong to think of him as a hapless victim, given his unique authorial power and his deliberate provocations. As a consequence, Wildens have turned to the years following Reading Gaol as a period that, for all the labor of the text and its topographical squaring, were characterized by literary ambition and bursts of sexual euphoria. Along with David Hare’s play The Invisibles and in which Everett also appeared as Oscar, The Happy Prince is a notably creative contribution to that biographical emphasis.

In the face of moral contempt, the capacity to express heartfelt emotion becomes a kind of triumph, and it is in moments of bravura and pathos that Everett’s performance, in fat suit and false teeth, is most successful. The book, however, goes further and reaches for retrospective comedy, matching Wilde’s historic decline with Everett’s own pose of continual frustration. Fortunately, he relishes ruins and the ruined, remnants and revenants. He is a devotee of decay, an inhabitant of once grand, now shabby hotels, who drops forgotten names like overripe fruit. As a lover of trains, he is never happier than when settling into a carriage en route to somewhere way past its prime. If Everett’s Oscar is, as he has sometimes insisted, a “Christ figure”, saviour as seducer, his disciple is a tour guide who manages to turn the itinerary of a film-maker into a quest via dolorosa with whom the stages of production are an outrageous and often hilarious version of the stations of the cross. Despite all the evidence around him he keeps faith with the future: the film will get made, people may actually enjoy it. Everett’s spirit is so resilient, his writing so cheeky and plangent, that he emerges worthy of his master.

John Stokes

Goblins

NEW SELECTED POEMS

CHRISTINA ROSETTI

Edited by Rachel Mann


Christina Rossetti can sometimes seem overshadowed: by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood from one angle; by her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning from another. As Rachel Mann makes clear in her perceptive introduction to the New Selected Poems, however, Rossetti’s work has a variety that should place her properly in the Victorian limelight. Devotional poems sit alongside reflections on mortality. The tone is sombre, not wistful. But there is playfulness as well, the sense of something revealed and withheld in the same lines. Many of Rossetti’s poems, Mann argues, bear “a gift for simplicity, elusive-ness and discretion”. In any case, the poet in Rossetti remains robust. R. W. Crump’s Variorum editions, spanning 1880 to 1990, have been followed by a steady number of Collected and Selected volumes. C. H. Sisson’s edition in 1984, to which Mann’s is a welcome successor. This selection moves chronologically, from Goblin Market and Other Poems (1862) to Poems (1888, 1890), with a final section of privately printed and unpublished poems. Goblin Market reminds us, Mann writes, that “poems can escape the stated intention of the poet”. Ballad and homily, suffused with sensual-ity and menace, its power derives in part from its diction of interwoven metres and, at times, a delight in Skeletonic. The baleful goblins assure the world, the persecuted Laura, that their wares are All ripe together.

In summer weather, - Morns that pass by, Fair even that fly, Come buy, come buy. ....

A penchant for simultaneous revelation and elusiveness, meanwhile, finds voice in Winter: My secret: You want to hear it? Well. Only my secret’s mine, and I won’t tell. Or, after all, perhaps there’s none. ....

Here, the speaker echoes, perhaps, the relish of Emily Dickin-
son’s “Good to hide, and hear ‘em hunt.” Elsewhere, playfulness
yields to reflections on the capri-
ces of mortal love. In “One Day,”
two lovers meet in a still-raw
spring and part in a lush autumn.
Will they meet again? The speaker
cannot say, but through the thought
that “Beyond the sea of
death love lies” they urge genuine
consolation. Deceased poets are
under no obligation to be modern
from beyond the grave, yet
the speaker of “Morna Innominata,”
a “sonnet of sonnets,” passionately
articulates experiences of love —
how it “builds the house on rock
and not on sand” — in a way that
their times denied her counter-
parts, Dante’s Beatrice and
Petrarch’s Laura.

The selection concludes with an
abridged version of Maud’s “A story
for girls,” written when Rosetti was
“about eighteen.” Austen-eque
reaches here offset the central
theme of Maud’s religious strug-
gles and recovery of faith. The
poems are achievement enough,
but the reader is also left ponder-
ing what Rossetti the fiction-writer
might have created.

Michael W. Thomas

TREATS

MODERN TIMES

CATHY SWEENEY
160pp. Weidenfeld and

NURSES

THE COURAGE TO CARE

A call for compassion
CHRISTIE WATSON
272pp. Chatto and Windus.
£16.99.

Medical memoirs are monopo-
lized by doctors, even though
nurses in the NHS outnumber them
three to one. Christie Watson,
a nurse who specialized in paediatric
intensive care for two decades before
becoming a novelist and professor of
medical humanities, is helping to change
that. Watson injects into her account
mischief, self-doubt, the odd explo-
ration and deep understanding.
With Covid-19 hit, it felt “rusty” and
frightened about what might
lie ahead were she to re-register for
practice. “I am always uncomforta-
bly being seen as any kind of role
model,” she writes. But she turned
up, in her scrubs, ready to serve.
In “The Courage to Care,” Watson
reminds us that nurses are every-
where — in primary care, prisons,
parishes and patients’ homes. They
are the first to notice the city’s
cellular pain, and the last to
be thanked for it. If they are
unseen, nurse and patient
are both blameless. But when
the channel meant to
encountering other languages.

Sweeney’s stories stage battles
of attrition. In “Blue,” a woman
turns blue, a cing from the ankle.
The depiction of the creeping
onset of a depressive rut is
conscripting in its accuracy and
the stark, knowing way Sweeney
calls out the short
premature, every
sufferer through the ages.
The “sickness” in “The Palace” is similarly
insidious, a creeping decay that begins in
the monarch’s palace and spreads across
a small kingdom. The narrator is initially
afraid, but his anxieties are calmed by
the king’s railing speeches, “cooker
class” and “volunteerizing one
day a week at the cat sanctuary.”
The sense of rotting becomes literal in
“Oranges,” when a man fills
his marital home with oranges after
his wife has gone on holiday to “feel alive... real.”
The narrator of “The Woman With Too Many Mouths”
tells us how “the experience of loss
is not a sloped generation, it is
random black dots on an endless
linear,” before sloping towards loss
himself. Despite these sombre topics,
there is more than just comic relief.
“101 Disavowals and Reflections”
tales of modern times. Depression
is isolating, but Sweeney’s compendi-
unaccounted voices reminds us
that we are not alone.

Alice Wadsworth

NURSES

THE COURAGE TO CARE

A call for compassion
CHRISTIE WATSON
272pp. Chatto and Windus.
£16.99.

Medical memoirs are monopo-
lized by doctors, even though
nurses in the NHS outnumber them
three to one. Christie Watson,
a nurse who specialized in paediatric
intensive care for two decades before
becoming a novelist and professor of
medical humanities, is helping to change
that. Watson injects into her account
mischief, self-doubt, the odd explo-
ration and deep understanding.
With Covid-19 hit, it felt “rusty” and
frightened about what might
lie ahead were she to re-register for
practice. “I am always uncomforta-
bly being seen as any kind of role
model,” she writes. But she turned
up, in her scrubs, ready to serve.
In “The Courage to Care,” Watson
reminds us that nurses are every-
where — in primary care, prisons,
parishes and patients’ homes. They
are the first to notice the city’s
cellular pain, and the last to
be thanked for it. If they are
unseen, nurse and patient
are both blameless. But when
the channel meant to
encountering other languages.

Sweeney’s stories stage battles
of attrition. In “Blue,” a woman
turns blue, a cing from the ankle.
The depiction of the creeping
onset of a depressive rut is
conscripting in its accuracy and
the stark, knowing way Sweeney
calls out the short
premature, every
sufferer through the ages.
The “sickness” in “The Palace” is similarly
insidious, a creeping decay that begins in
the monarch’s palace and spreads across
a small kingdom. The narrator is initially
afraid, but his anxieties are calmed by
the king’s railing speeches, “cooker
class” and “volunteerizing one
day a week at the cat sanctuary.”
The sense of rotting becomes literal in
“Oranges,” when a man fills
his marital home with oranges after
his wife has gone on holiday to “feel alive... real.”
The narrator of “The Woman With Too Many Mouths”
tells us how “the experience of loss
is not a sloped generation, it is
random black dots on an endless
linear,” before sloping towards loss
himself. Despite these sombre topics,
there is more than just comic relief.
“101 Disavowals and Reflections”
tales of modern times. Depression
is isolating, but Sweeney’s compendi-
unaccounted voices reminds us
that we are not alone.

Alice Wadsworth

LINGUISTIC EXPERIENCE

THE GRAND TOUR

Linguistic experiences of travelling in early
modern Europe
JULIET DAVIES
318pp. Cambridge University
Press. £85 (US $120).

For God’s sake learn Italian as
fast as you can, if it be only
to read Ariosto,” Charles James Fox
wrote to a friend in 1767 that only
an understanding of Italian lan-
guage and literature would make him
“fit to talk to Christians.” For
travellers before and after him who
embarked on the continental pil-
grimage known as the Grand Tour, the
channel meant to encounter other languages.

SOME, like John Milton or Robert
Boyle, returned accomplished
polyglots, while the idleness and
incomprehension of others helped
build the modern image of
the monoglot English tourist.

Arturo Tosio’s Language and the Grand Tour is a welcome study of the role of language in elite Eu-
ropean travel from the late sixteenth
to the dawn of the nine-
teenth. Drawing on printed travel
accounts and tourists’ letters, he
explores how travellers learnt lan-
guages on the Continent, and how
their linguistic skill (or lack thereof)
shaped their interactions with
everyone from border guards to courtesans. Lorenzo da Ponte, the librettist of
later Mozart’s librettist, wrote a
romantic account of his first steps
in German with a female inn-
keeper. The only payment she
demanded for hours of German
conversation and grammar study
each day was that their lessons
finished with an “Ich liebe Sie!”: I
love you.

In recent years, one welcome
turn in histories of the Grand Tour
has been the incorporation of
women’s perspectives on travel
and touring, and Tosio brings
in accounts written by well-known
figures including Mary Wortley
Montagu and Hester Piozzi Thrale.
Montagu was scathing about the young Englishmen she met in Ven-

e, “‘all the greatest blockheads in

nature,” most of whom had “kept
an inviolable fidelity to the langua-
ges their nurses taught them”.

“The Grand Tour revisits the
concept of the Grand Tour as a
very different place, and an
insecure one,” notes Chris
Swain (1789) noted the language
she overheard in everyday use, like
a Milancian woman telling a runaway
slave, “that his conduct had put all
the town into orgiastic
grandeur.”

The Grand Tour emerged, Tosio
argues, in a time of “cultural curi-
sity and linguistic exuberance.”

Travellers encountered a some-
times bewildering variety of local
dialects and national languages on
the increasingly well-worn routes
through France and Italy. Edward
Lhuyd, a traveller and keen lin-
guist, observed that the Balkan lan-
guage was so similar to Welsh “that
in a months time at farthest a
Welshman may understand their
writings.” Tosio’s narrative some-
times loses sight of questions of
language and strays into more gen-
eral discussions of aspects of
the Grand Tour, as in the discussion
of travellers’ shock at its sexual
moralities and at the figure of the
castrato. But this first book-length
study of language and the Grand
Tour is a welcome addition to
discussions of ideas and
approaches that can come from
a multilingual approach to
theories of the English abroad.

John Gallagher
In next week’s

 DAVID GALLAGHER
Meetings with Borges

Editor MARTIN IVENS (editor@the-tls.co.uk)
Managing Editor ROBERT POTTS (robert.potts@the-tls.co.uk)
Assistant to the Editor VICKY WILLIAMS (victoria.williams@the-tls.co.uk)
Editorial enquiries (queries@the-tls.co.uk)

Managing Director JAMES MACMANUS (deborah.keegan@news.co.uk)
Advertising Manager JONATHAN DRUMMOND (jonathan.drummond@the-tls.co.uk)

Correspondence and deliveries: 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF
Telephone for editorial enquiries: 020 7782 5000
Subscriptions and subscription enquiries: UK/ROW: feedback@the-tls.co.uk 0800 048 4236; US/Canada:
custserv@timesonline.com 1-844-208-1515
Missing a copy of your TLS: USA/Canada: +1 844 208 1515; UK & other: +44 (0) 203 308 9146
Back issues: 020 7640 3888 tls@ocsmedia.net (website: www.ocsmedia.net/tls)
Syndication: 020 7711 7888 enquiries@news syndication.com

TLS CROSSWORD 1360 BY TALOS

ACROSS
1 Gas masks provided by chap with injured leg (5, 5)
6 Trask family member is a fanatical revolutionary (4)
9 You might say Gorgons crushed free spirit (10)
10 Murdoch newspaper title to be brought back (4)
12 “Let me endeavor with a tale to chase / — shadows of the time and place” (Longfellow) (3, 9)
15 Financiers such as Magwitch arrange top-drawer backing (9)
17 Go on at the Queen about problematic princess (5)
18 Saint-Simonian writer is hit with editor on the rebound (5)
19 Use dragon to fly around? That might be that (9)
20 King in city beneath sea ultimately is an émigré author (5)
24 Maria’s Halloween tale is cold and not professional (4)
25 In Manchester tonight you can see a Catholic literary revivalist (10)
26 Medium-sized dog collars for a penner of pious poems (4)
27 Might one appreciate The Luminaires or regal Roots novel (10)

DOWN
1 See Bond, perhaps, chasing after enemy leader (4)
2 What Carson Wells carries out of hotel exists outside of time (4)
3 “You may wear her in title yours: but, you know, / strange fowl light upon — ponds” (Cymbeline) (12)
4 Grieving university dons that Tolkien made fellows go after? (5)
9 Spot wagon transporting bit of tech for Mississippi documentarian (4, 5)
7 Treasure time working for Lord who tried to stop a war (10)
8 Is it my song upset one such as Patrick Bateman? (10)
11 Socialist soldier earl found in ravine with men in good health (6, 6)
13 Acclaimed criminal steals bit of aconite belonging to Hogwarts? (10)
14 Beasty sort with authority has female in work by 11 (6, 4)
16 After a bit of argy-bargy, thug heeds linesman (3, 6)
21 Nurse Ratched is one person who gets things done without morals ultimately (5)
22 As a changed man, Actaeon volunteers to stop speaking hollowly (4)
23 Old note found in cobblestone road (4)

SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD 1356

The winner of Crossword 1356 is Alison Peck, of Haverfordwest

The sender of the first correct solution opened on February 12, 2023, will receive a cash prize of £40. Entries should be addressed to TLS Crossword 1360, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF
Only just

One of the more dubious rituals of the year in literary journalism is the newspapers’ annual puffs on behalf of the major publishers. This habit has never seemed to us to be a truly valuable use of the limited space that the press devotes to books in this (sputter, sputter) day and age. But there it is. Some readers will undoubtedly find it helpful to be told of the imminence of Beyond Orders: 12 more rules for life, the new opus by Jordan Peterson. The Times warns us that Peterson is a “charismatic Canadian academic”; the Guardian warns us that he is a “controversial Canadian psychologist”. The two papers agree that he is published by Allen Lane.

The first newspaper, meanwhile, has run a piece trumpeting “75 of the best books for 2023” on April. Sarah Hughes, the author of this abruption, eschews the criticism with which such presumptions are customary. “This unexaggerated edition promises to be eye-opening” and so on for a tone that implies she has read pretty much everything on her list. “If this addictive slice of Edinburgh Gothic isn’t on all the lists,” Hughes cries of Jenni Fagan’s novel Lucidboots, “there is no justice.” Well, perhaps Ms Hughes has read all seventy-five of these books already, in advance copies. Her words are certainly beginning to appear on some publishers’ websites as if excerpted from reviews.

Academic presses and smaller publishers are mostly excluded from the puffery. We now know that Blake Bailey’s 800-page authorized biography of Philip Roth is due from Jonathan Cape in April. Will we also have room enough on the shelf for Ira Nadel’s 500-page Philip Roth: A courier’s life, published by Oxford University Press in a month later? It may be a separate set of readers who are waiting for Sarah LeFanu’s Dreaming of Rose: A biographer’s journal (MaCaullay being the Rose in question) and Frances Bingham’s Valentine Ackland: A transgeneric life, both to be published later this year by Handheld Press. Pictured here is the Ackland profile as drawn by Eric Gill, c.1928, and as featured on the cover of Bingham’s book.

Founded last summer, meanwhile, Renard Press is readying fresh editions of Stephen Leacock’s (Fictioned Fiction) and Saki (his early vignettes, The Westminster Alice). Dedalus Books is reissuing two novels by Liane de Pougy. Tramp Press will publish a selection of lost Irish fantasy stories, It Rose Up, in the autumn. And if The Other Jack: A book about books, mostly (CB Editions) by Charles Boyle and White Spines: Confessions of a book collector (Salt) by Nicholas Boyle are not on all prize lists, there is no justice.

Talking of academic press: the still art of the academic book review is under attack. This time round, the trouble has been started by Professor Paul Musgrave, who teaches political science at the University of Massachusetts. In his essay “Against Academic Book Reviews”, published in the Chronicle of Higher Education earlier this month, Musgrave recalls some of the standard accusations levelled against book reviews in general – that they may be “too nice, too polite, too tepid” – and applies them to what he calls the “standard book review in an academic journal”. He does not mean those “review essays”, thousands of words long, published by “dedicated periodicals like the New York Review of Books”. He means “the traditional, citable, 2,000 word scholarly volume running about 500 to 1,000 words”, published in the specialized journals in which specialists confer among themselves. These pieces, publishedmultidisciplinary, means, he finds to be maddeningly monotonous. All too redundant and generic in their demurs, they are also too right to approve almost every book as “groundbreaking, meticulous, original, and [worthily of] serious scholarly consideration”.

What to do? Make academic reviews fewer but longer, Musgrave suggests. “It’s easier to find ways to productively criticize a book in 1,500 words than in 500.” Around the length of one page of the TLS, then. Dare to imagine a world in which academic journals publish more polemical review-essays – pieces like Musgrave’s own, perhaps – and in which reviewers “address several related books at once”. They wouldn’t have to describe everything as “groundbreaking”, either.

In the November 27 edition of the TLS appeared Phil Baker’s review of 1,400 words long of a book called Russian Roulette: The life and times of Graham Greene by Richard Greene (no relation). This month, the book is publishing in the United States, by W. W. Norton. Only now is it called The Unquiet Englishman: A Life of Graham Greene by Richard Greene (still no relation). As ever, each transatlantic transformation reveals how different publishers in different countries set about trying to sell, in their different ways, the same book. British readers of Russian Roulette have been learning about “probably the greatest British novelist of his generation”: American readers of The Unquiet Englishman are just now starting to learn about “one of the twentieth century’s greatest novelists”, the author of The End of the Affair.

While we’re here, by the way, may we note that noble word “unquiet” as one of the most egregiously overworked in the book title business? Linn Ullmann’s novel Unquiet was reviewed in the TLS two weeks ago. Recent decades have yielded numerous novels called The Unquiet (by John Connolly, Patricia Matthews et al), as well as various Unquiet Housies, Earths, Minds, Daughters and so on. Library: An unquiet history by Matthew Battles may be a case of the title being superior to the book. A couple of illustrious predecessors to this lot come to mind, courtesy of “Pulmonary” (aka Cyril Connolly), with his book of epigrams The Unquiet Grave (1944), and Robert Bernard Martin, with Tennyson: The unquiet heart (1980). Does the trend predare the new Greene’s alternative word was “Quiet” – as in “American”. Perhaps Richard Greene’s biography is merely following the example set by its subject: several of Graham Greene’s books had to be rechristened for publication in the US. Stamboul Train became Orient Express (in keeping with the Hollywood adaptation). England Made Me became The Shipwrecked (the author “eventually reverted to the original title”, as his latest biographer notes), A Gun for Hire became This Gun for Hire (also filmed under that name), The Power and the Glory became The Labyrinthine Ways (although the earlier name stuck), and his early travel book The Lawless Roads became Another Mexico. Is this a record among the twentieth century’s greatest novelists’?

A last word, for now, from John le Carré. Last summer, David Cornwall was “in the very middle” of writing a new book; but he could still find time, word has it, to reply to a request from a stranger seeking advice about redacted secret service files held in the National Archives at Kew. The culmination of his helpful letter, over four pages long, went, “What time? The past dead, the future unborn. Will it be the same old stuff, or will we get a fairer, less greedy world? Will we get men and women who are competent and capable of leadership? Or re-treads who are neither?”

Le Carré/Cornwell died on December 12. “My England would be the one that recognizes its place in the EU”, he had said in interview. “The jingoistic England that is trying to march us out of the EU – that is an England I don’t want to know.”

M. C.
Fine Books, Manuscripts and Works on Paper*
Auction: Thursday 28th January, 1:00pm | Conducted Live ‘Behind Closed Doors’
Bidding and information: info@forumauctions.co.uk | +44 (0) 20 7871 2640
For illustrated catalogues and detailed condition reports, please visit: forumauctions.co.uk

*Buyer’s premium (plus VAT if applicable) applies to all lots at 25% of the hammer price.