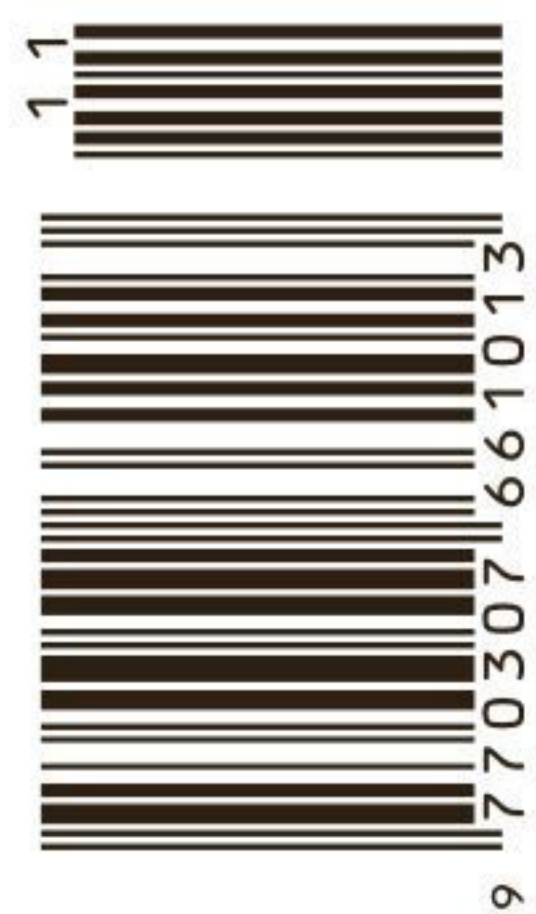


TLS

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Nicola Shulman A founding's story | **Pat Rogers** The poetry of Phillis Wheatley
Ian Buruma Spies like us? | **Claire Lowdon** Vivian Gornick's essays



Three centuries of diversity

Paul Mendez on The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing



Cover image: A coloured illustration of Phillis Wheatley, from a drawing by Nata Silina © Supercoloring.com/CC 4.0

In this issue

This week the *TLS* celebrates Black and Asian British writing. Two of our reviewers, however, have their reservations about the enterprise. Paul Mendez argues in his cover feature that *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (edited by Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein) feels like “a missed opportunity to celebrate Black and Asian British scholarship”, given the preponderance of white experts and the paucity of Black academics who contributed to it. Mendez also believes that the category BAME is becoming redundant. Black and South Asian Britons have their own identities.

Pat Rogers’s doubts are more fundamental. He begins his assessment of *The Writings of Phillis Wheatley* (edited by Vincent Carretta) with the bald statement that “Identity politics have long beset literary study”. Rogers is not the only writer to worry about shooing “an individual into the right squad”. In a recent *TLS* essay (October 11, 2019) the Black historian and writer Colin Grant also lamented modish attitudes to literary work by ethnic minority writers.

What is a British writer anyway? The poet Phillis Wheatley, author of one of the first books published by a Black person in the UK, was enslaved in West Africa, educated in British Boston and died an American Patriot, despite the attitudes of the Founding Fathers to race. These reservations notwithstanding, there is still much to celebrate about the wealth of Black and Asian literary talent. The contribution of Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Caryl Phillips, Kazuo Ishiguro, Monica Ali, Bernardine Evaristo and many, many more has been immense.

Upper-class traitors continue to interest us because we want to know why they rejected their membership of the establishment club. Outsiders receive less attention. Ian Buruma looks at *The Happy Traitor*, the biography of George Blake, who was sentenced to forty-two years in prison for spying for the Soviet Union. John le Carre disliked Kim Philby because he was “born inside the fortress”, but he sympathized with the Dutch-born Blake who had “gone to great lengths to gain acceptance”. The reviewer and the author Simon Kuper have Dutch heritage too.

Nicola Shulman looks at the life of another outsider seeking acceptance in *The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames*, written by Soames’s daughter Justine Cowan. The author found out that her hyper-critical mother had been brutalized by her upbringing as a ward of the famous Foundling Hospital where “the children were made to feel apologetic for being alive”. Acceptance and rejection comes in many forms.

MARTIN IVENS
Editor

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Here to stay, come what may

The long story of Black and Asian British literature

PAUL MENDEZ

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF BLACK AND ASIAN BRITISH WRITING
SUSHEILA NASTA AND MARK U. STEIN,
EDITORS

700pp. Cambridge University Press. £99.99 (US \$130).

A *CAMBRIDGE COMPANION to British Black and Asian Literature* appeared in 2016. Why publish a *Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* a few years later?

Well, for one thing, the earlier *Companion's* editor, Deirdre Osborne, was constrained to the years 1945-2010. The newer collection of essays reaches well back into the eighteenth century to survey the content, context and impact of Black and Asian British writing. Edited by Susheila Nasta (of Queen Mary University of London and the founding editor of *Wasafiri*) and Mark U. Stein (of the University of Münster), it “draws on the expertise of over forty international experts” - white experts, for the most part. Only two out of forty-two contributors are of African heritage, one of whom, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, is restricted to co-authorship with Nasta. Jarrett-Macauley wrote *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65*, about the Jamaican founding editor of the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*; yet she is not allowed to stand alone.

While there are twelve contributors of Asian origin (and I feel grubby for having to count), the marginalization of Black academia this book seems to represent is troubling. There isn't a dearth of Black academics and scholars working in Britain. White contributors from Germany, Denmark, Austria, Australia and Belgium are all to be applauded for the quality of their scholarship (even if one has Andrew Salkey on adjacent pages being born in both Jamaica and Panama), but what is their cultural memory and experience of living with or actually being Black or Asian British people? J. Dillon Brown, a white American writing about the years following the Second World War in London, tells us he finds it “disheartening” that the experience of disillusionment seems to remain unchanged across the three generations of Black British writing since Windrush. I sighed at the understatement and condescension.

Reading through this *History*, I longed to hear about Black British writing from the likes of Bernardine Evaristo, Hazel Carby, Anthony Joseph, Anthony Appiah, Suzanne Scafe, Paul Gilroy, Joan Anim-Addo and Kehinde Andrews. Not all of these experts in the field are professors, true; Anim-Addo, who co-convoked with Osborne the MA in Black British Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, the only degree of its kind in the UK, retired last summer after the academic career of twenty-six years that she began and ended as Britain's sole black female literature professor. In the age of Black Lives Matter, however, this *History* cannot help but feel like a missed opportunity to celebrate Black and Asian British scholarship - work that is “for us, by us”, examined and contextualized by us.

Back in 2015 when Nasta and Stein began work on this anthology, the world was quite a different place - Britain couldn't possibly be leaving the EU, and Barack Obama was the sitting forty-fourth President



Left to right, sitting: Venu Chitale, M. J. Tambimuttu, T. S. Eliot, Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, Christopher Pemberton, Narayana Menon; standing: George Orwell, Nancy Parratt, William Empson, at the BBC, December 1942

of the United States of America. Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, was still married to her first husband. Only three years earlier, an apparently post-racial Great Britain had appeared to the world in full multicultural regalia at its home Olympics. Neither Nasta nor Stein - based respectively in England and Germany - could have expected the result of the EU referendum of 2016 to initiate such a dark reorientation of the way Britain sees itself in the world, in relation to Europe and to its immigrants, particularly those from countries belonging to its former empire. The “hostile environment” explicitly introduced during Theresa May's time as Home Secretary was, by then, busy hustling out Caribbean-born British taxpayers for not being able to prove their citizenship status, after the Home Office destroyed their landing cards of the 1960s and 70s. The police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 triggered a revolution, empowering activists to tear down statues of slaveowners and launching a worldwide campaign to identify and dismantle structural racism. There was also a hope that those who donated to Black Lives Matter, marched with placards up and down the country, and posted black squares on their Instagram accounts would feel a new (or renewed) interest in Black British history, not least as witnessed by Black British authors. This *History*, then, has ended up being timely.

The development of Black and Asian British literature falls into several distinct periods, defined by the changing political circumstances. The first of those periods begins in the late eighteenth century, when the writings of slaves and freemen were published to plead the case against prejudice. One of the first books published by a Black person in the UK was the American slave Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). Both that volume (discussed opposite) and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's God-fearing *Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars* (1772) - Britain's first slave narrative - were dedicated to the evangelical Calvinist Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. They opened the door for other, more radical writers.

“The fact that people of African descent wrote”, Vincent Carretta notes here, “was almost as significant as what they wrote”. Olaudah Equiano, as an educated former slave with impressive rhetorical and writing skills, was a white abolitionist's dream. He was certainly the highest-profile person of African descent living in Georgian London, becoming the first Black person ever to be appointed to a position in British government, albeit to organize the repatriation of London's Black poor to Sierra Leone (during a period fictionalized in S. I. Martin's brilliant novel *Incomparable World*, 1996). Equiano quickly saw this exercise for what it was, and allowed himself to be dismissed. His *Interesting Narrative* - published in 1789 and sponsored by every-

one up to and including the Prince of Wales, the future George IV (up pops the Countess once more) - combines travelogue, autobiography, slave narrative and polemic in a key contribution to the abolition of transatlantic slavery in 1807. *The History of Mary Prince, a Slave, As Related by Herself* (1831), the first autobiography published by a Black British woman, had a similar impact on emancipation in the British-controlled Caribbean in 1833.

Asian British writing, meanwhile, began in earnest with the writings of the Indian author and businessman Sake Dean Mahomet: *Travels* (1794) and *Shampooing* (1822). Mona Narain slightly awkwardly compares Mahomet's writings with those of the Black British grocer Ignatius Sancho, “to demonstrate similarities between the Asian and Black experience in eighteenth-century Britain”. Mahomet “used the trope of the exotic ... as an entrepreneurship strategy to sell his immigrant status in England”, overtly addressing “a British reading public”. In Sancho's posthumous *Letters* (1782), Britain's first Black British businessman and voter - a denizen of London's beau monde, a Mayfair resident who also wrote plays and musical ditties - figures as a prolific and eloquent correspondent. Of hybrid identity, being both a British citizen moving in higher social circles and a person from the African diaspora who was born a slave, he successfully influenced public figures such as David Garrick and Laurence Sterne - bidding the latter to “consider slavery” - to use their fame to effect political change.

This first period of Black and Asian British literature, to my mind, ends in 1919 with the passing of a piece of anti-immigrant legislation: the Aliens Act, which required foreign nationals to register their details with police and gave authorities unilateral powers to deport them. It was renewed annually until it was replaced by the Immigration Act of 1971, and invoked most intensively during the first half of the twentieth century, when Britain's seaports relied on the labour of foreign nationals from China, South Asia, West Africa and the Caribbean. Nineteen-nineteen saw riots in numerous port cities after white servicemen returned home to find Black and Asian men in their jobs and in “their” beds. Similarly, in 1946, some 300 Chinese nationals, many of whom were in relationships with white women and were the fathers of British children, were deported in the wake of overnight police raids in Liverpool, never to be seen by their families again. As subjects of the British Empire, South Asian men were exempt from the Aliens Act, but because they were not white, they were judged on the streets as Black, and persecuted.

The interwar years meant modernism and the first all-Black West End stage productions. The League of Coloured Peoples staged Una Marson's play *At What a Price* in 1934. Paul Robeson played the lead in C. L. R. James's play about the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804, *Toussaint Louverture* (1936), an early treatment of *The Black Jacobins* (1938), James's seminal study of the creation of the world's first Black republic outside Africa. The BBC, with its services directed towards the West Indies, India and Africa, became the centre for British cross-cultural encounter. According to Jarrett-Macauley and Nasta, “alliances formed between Britain-based colonial writers and intellectuals, and the prominent figures of the left-wing British intelligentsia”. Elsewhere, racism was thriving, too. In turn, nineteen publishers made Mulk Raj Anand's social realist novel *Untouchable* (1935; now a Penguin Classic) true to its title - until Anand's friend E. M. Forster agreed to write a preface for it.

In 2000, to accompany a review of the seventh volume of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, the *TLS* reprinted a cropped version of a famous photograph from 1942 - a photograph that also figures repeatedly in this *History*. Marson, the presenter of the radio programme *Calling the West Indies*, later renamed *Caribbean Voices*, is seated centrally in the original image, flanked by the poet Venu Chitale, M. J. Tambimuttu (the founder of *Poetry London*), T. S. Eliot, George Orwell (who had set up the picture), Orwell's secretary Nancy Parratt, Mulk Raj Anand, William Empson, and the BBC producers

Christopher Pemberton and Naryana Menon. (The *TLS* captioned the cropped image “among others, from left to right: T. S. Eliot, George Orwell and William Empson”, even while Marson remained centrally seated. Nasta’s letter, published the following week, seethingly called out the omissions.) In this new *Cambridge History*, James Procter notes that Marson, along with other women writers and producers of colour of this period, was the victim of prejudice from white (and Black male) colleagues asked “to answer to a black woman”, and of an active colour bar that “denied [her] accommodation at hotels”. Other Commonwealth factions accused her of bias towards Black speakers, arguing that her broadcasts “thus fell short of the egalitarian aural community they were purported to represent”; the complaints effectively ended her BBC career.

Anna Snaith defines Marson as “highly unusual as a woman within pan-African circles of the 1950s”, while her “racial identity set her apart within feminist organisations”. Echoing Buchi Emecheta’s autobiographical novel *Second Class Citizen* (1974), J. Dillon Brown says she therefore suffered from a “double displacement”; yet her legacy was assured. As the founding editor of *Caribbean Voices*, Marson was indirectly responsible for launching the careers of, among others, V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Edgar Mittelholzer, E. R. Braithwaite and Andrew Salkey. Which brings us to the next phase of Black and Asian British writing, a period book-ended by two further interventions by the British government.

Between the Nationality Act of 1948, which awarded instant British citizenship to any Commonwealth subject, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which Hugh Gaitskell called “cruel and brutal anti-colour legislation”, over half-a-million West Indians came to live in the UK. Among them were middle-class, highly educated, artistically ambitious islanders, such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming, who travelled on the same boat together (Mpalive-Hingson Msiska, the other Black contributor to this *History*, observes them “on a literary pilgrimage to a country they have hitherto only imagined through books”). Their respective magna opera, *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Emigrants*, as well as Lamming’s essay collection *The Pleasures of Exile*, are considered classics of the era. In particular, *The Lonely Londoners* has returned to prominence in the wake of the Windrush scandal, with its suggestion of nostalgia for postwar London, that quickly burns away to reveal disillusionment and suffering. One reason for its success was Selvon’s use of what he called “nation language”: a fusion of standard English and Trinidadian Creole through which his immigrant subjects hollowed out a space for themselves in the unloving metropolis.

Later Black British authors drew on other Creoles: Linton Kwesi Johnson, in defiance of sus laws, police brutality and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA)’s institutional racism against Black children in British schools; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who broke down the pentametric rhythms of English for a poetry of migration that slipped easier off the West Indian tongue, as the founder of the Caribbean Artists’ Movement (CAM). Too many other works from this period are unfairly forgotten. As Nasta and Stein say, “One can tell a lot about a nation by the stories it invents, by what books it chooses to treasure. ... Yet, as Anthony Appiah reminds us in his recent study of contemporary identities, creeds and colour, *The Lies that Bind* (2018), one can learn even more about a nation by what it chooses to forget”. (Allegedly, in a speech during the Second World War, Winston Churchill quoted lines from the Jamaican writer Claude McKay’s sonnet “If We Must Die”, 1919, to rouse patriotic feeling; the claim, treated almost as fact by Nasta and Stein, has been greeted with a cold wall of denial by authorities on Churchill.)

The Windrush era was a golden age in Black and Asian British writing. “In terms of literary production”, Dillon Brown observes, “between 1950 and 1962, Caribbean writers published over seventy novels in the United Kingdom”, giving them “a

reasonable claim to prominence”. The second half of this *History* catches up with the myriad forms Black and Asian British writing have taken to date, from television, young adult and popular fiction, film and music forms such as grime, as well as the new infrastructures that have been put in place to support Black and Asian British writing - retailers, led by New Beacon Books, and publishing imprints such as Allison and Busby, Bogle L’Ouverture, Jacaranda and Dialogue Books. (The Black Writers’ Guild was formed last year, too late to be included here.) A footnote unwisely allows for tokenism when it comes to children’s literature, in the case of white authors “producing representations of Black and Asian children and teenagers”. Another volume published, say, in five years’ time, would incorporate further study into the contributions of queer writers of colour - Kate Houlden notes in her essay that although “increasing scholarly attention has been paid to Black and Asian cultural production over the last fifteen years, sexuality has not featured predominantly in many studies” - but would it be relevant in this form?

As can be seen from the widespread abandonment of the catch-all term “BAME”, the idea of Black and Asian British Writing as a singular thing is going rapidly out of fashion. While South Asians, in the white British gaze, were once defined as Black - “Black” being, for a long time, the catch-all term for non-white immigrants - and so were implicated in the waves of resistance that met each injustice against Black people on British soil, this is no longer the case. South Asian Britons have their own identities, religions, art, traditions and cultures. The one tie that binds Black and Asian British writers is their shared experience of the chasm between the harsh realities of British minority life and, as Alison Donnell has it, the “fictional England” that “every schoolchild growing up in a British colony was imprinted with ... imagined via Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Dickens”. Post-Windrush writers of South Asian origin, following the Indo-Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul, have used magical realism to examine the intersection of race, class and religion, in the case of Salman Rushdie; given Britain a classic of queer cinema in Hanif Kureishi’s *My Beautiful Laundrette*; an enduring TV comedy staple in *Goodness Gracious Me*; and a universal tale of love, family and belonging in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*.

The Indian-born Farrukh Dhondy, meanwhile, was a prominent member of the British Black Panthers; Southall Black Sisters was founded in 1979 and remains an all-Asian women’s group. Linton Kwesi Johnson’s poem “It Dread Inna Innglan” (1978) captured Bradford’s Black and Asian communities united in outrage at the arrest and sentencing of George Lindo, who had been wrongly accused of robbing a betting shop. Johnson recited the poem through a megaphone as he led a march on the Tyrls Police Station. As Thatcherism flooded every corner of British life, radical new collectives emerged in resistance to the anti-immigrant hostilities that many felt reached a nadir with the New Cross Massacre of January 1981 and the subsequent nationwide protests. Black theatre groups, such as Talawa, and the Theatre of Black Women, who produced Jackie Kay’s early play *Chiaroscuro*, were among those who took advantage of Ken Livingstone’s progressive Greater London Council policies (before Margaret Thatcher abolished the GLC). Novels by Andrea Levy, Caryl Phillips, Fred D’Aguiar and others resurrected forgotten voices from the past.

Britain needs to come to terms with its colonial and immigration histories as part of its mainstream narrative, including the teaching of Black and South Asian histories as distinct strands in schools. The continued lumping together of the two diasporas keeps them othered from the white majority, while the public discourse around race remains restricted to questions of identity. Still, this *History* testifies to Johnson’s words from 1978: “African / Asian / West Indian / an’ Black British / stan firm inna Innglan / inna disya time yah / far noh mattah wat dey say, / come what may, / we are here to stay”. ■

Paul Mendez’s novel Rainbow Milk was published last year

Poet without precedent

The ‘first international celebrity of African descent’

PAT ROGERS

THE WRITINGS OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY
VINCENT CARRETTA, EDITOR

226pp. Oxford University Press. £95 (US \$125).

I DENTITY POLITICS HAVE LONG beset literary study. All too readily, we fall back on any old descriptor that will position a writer within some familiar category. It’s natural that this lazy habit does not go down well with authors themselves, who often reject the label that has been pinned on them, as when Kathleen Jamie complains about her “tribal” sticker. But we still go on describing X as the pre-eminent working-class novelist, Y as the master of the Irish short story, or Z as the outstanding woman practitioner of confessional poetry. Along with race, class and gender, we enlist other determinants - age, generation, region, nation, continent, religion and political affiliation - to shoos an individual into the right squad. Not that the terms are necessarily inaccurate: rather, they draw too much attention to specific attributes at the expense of wider quality, and replace the essentials of creativity with what are often contingent factors.

What chance then for Phillis Wheatley ever to get a fair hearing? Her claims to immortality have always been based on considerations that can’t altogether explain the merits of the poems as we encounter them on the page. Indeed, the tags that are attached to her name in reference books go only a limited distance to define the nature of her achievement. In this new edition of her work, Vincent Carretta reminds us more than once that she was “the first person of sub-Saharan ancestry to publish a book, and consequently the first international celebrity of African descent”. It’s a point he has made before in his distinguished contributions to the literature of transatlantic writers, including Olaudah Equiano, and amplified in his “biography of a genius in bondage”, *Phillis Wheatley* (2011). Does it matter that Wheatley was a Black African? That she came as a child and a slave to a society overwhelmingly white in composition? That she was female in a patriarchal world? That her new home was a colonial possession, only just then freeing itself from the political, economic and cultural dominance of Britain? These things unquestionably do matter, in each case; but it is quite another thing to suppose that they can account for her entire literary identity. She could not help the fact that she had to write in standard English and ape classical diction - but that was the case.

The girl arrived in Boston from West Africa in 1761, aged about seven or eight, frail enough to be looked on as a “refuse slave”, one of the “small Negroes” unable to do much by way of hard labour, and so offered as “cheap for Cash”. We can’t say how much or little her new owners paid for her, nor what her family had called her before she was dragged away from her homeland, but one of their immediate acts was to supply her with a first name after the ship on which she had crossed the ocean. They were John Wheatley and his wife Susanna, a middle-aged couple engaged in transatlantic trade and well established in the city as Congregationalists. One reason

the half-naked child was chosen instead of a more robust specimen might be out of some tenderness that the Wheatleys felt after losing their own much-loved girl before her eighth birthday. Certainly Susanna treated her servant with exceptional kindness - almost, but not of course quite, like a daughter. Two generations on, a descendant reported that she once sent her carriage to bring Phillis home in inclement weather, lest the cold and damp should affect the girl's delicate health. When Susanna died in 1774, Phillis wrote to one of her few Black female friends that "I was a poor little outcast & a stranger when she took me in".

The main service that the Wheatleys did was to encourage her evident bent for learning, and strong urge towards religion. By the time that she was baptized at eighteen, she had written a considerable amount of poetry, some of it already in print. The local Congregational churches had more than once welcomed George Whitefield, the most electrifying preacher in the growing Methodist movement, who may have stayed with the Wheatleys on the last of his missionary tours. He moved further up the Massachusetts coast to Newburyport, where he died in September 1770. Within two weeks Phillis, still a teenager, had produced an elegy on "that Celebrated Divine, and eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the late Reverend and Pious George Whitefield, Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Countess of Huntingdon". Embellished on the title-page with black rules and a grisly silhouette of Whitefield in his coffin, the poem was published as the work of "Phillis, a Servant Girl of 17 years of Age, belonging to Mr. J. Wheatley of Boston: - And has been but 9 Years in this Country". It can truly be called an epoch-making moment. The poem brought Phillis her first rave review: according to the *New Hampshire Gazette*, "it would have done Honor to a Pope or Shakespere". As versions of the elegy quickly appeared in Whitefield's home country, Phillis was now embarked on her rise to international fame.

She was already a practised exponent of elegy, but the most surprising feature of the poem is her readiness to adjure her fellow Blacks, "Take him, ye Africans, he belongs to you", not to mention her boldness in addressing Lady Huntingdon on the loss of her spiritual adviser in an obscure corner of the New World. From now on, Phillis would commit an audacious act with virtually no precedent in identifying the Countess as her chosen patron. That was not the sort of thing aspirant writers of her race would be encouraged to do. Subsequently she pursued her quarry with laudable assiduity. Not only did she dedicate her volume of poems to Lady Huntingdon, but when she came to England in the summer of 1773 her two respectful letters brought her an invitation to a personal meeting. Regrettably this could not be arranged before she had to curtail her brief visit. The collection opens with lines addressed to Maecenas, referred to as a male friend. Carretta suggests this is just a cover for the real patron, and that Phillis used masculine terms since she had "no classical models of female patrons available to her" (largely true), and anyway "as an aristocratic widow, Huntingdon had virtually the authority and power of a man" (a less convincing explanation).

The six-week trip to Britain was made for more than one motive. It was to prepare the launch for her book by a London publisher, after Bostonian booksellers found reasons not to take it on - even though it was garnished with the endorsement of major figures from her adopted homeland, notably Thomas Hutchinson, the currently besieged governor of Massachusetts. This group naturally included slave-owners, as well as opponents of the system. Among the members were important figures in New England culture, like the poet-cleric Mather Byles, his cousin Samuel Mather (son of Cotton) and the famous signatory of the Declaration of Independence, John Hancock. Last named on the list, and the only mere "Mr.:", is John Wheatley, sufficiently identified as "her Master". Phillis also hoped the change of scene would do something to repair her prevailing ill health. Her most pressing reason was to meet



Phillis Wheatley by Meredith Bergmann, Boston, 2003

up with local abolitionists, especially Granville Sharp, the man who had initiated the court case ending with Lord Mansfield's ruling that slaves could not be returned in captivity from British soil. Phillis was determined to take advantage of this seeming loophole, and she obtained her freedom only weeks after she got back to America.

During her sojourn in London, Phillis faced a whirlwind of novel experiences. As Carretta describes in his biography, she must have been overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of a metropolis thirty times the size of Boston. Equally, Londoners doubtless found her a perplexing anomaly, someone who had first crossed the Atlantic as "an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa", but was now invited to hobnob with persons of the greatest distinction, not least the secretary of state Lord Dartmouth, and that eminent resident of the capital, "Benjamin Franklin Esq. FRS". She also met the botanist Daniel Solander, now back from his journey on Cook's first voyage. A year later, many must have thought back to Phillis's descent on the city when they encountered the even more exotic Tahitian, Omai, who had accompanied the explorer on returning from his second voyage, to be shown the sights of the town.

The most productive networking in the course of the trip involved John Thornton, a merchant and Evangelical who supported Lady Huntingdon's Connection. His son was a friend of William Wilberforce (a cousin), became one of the founders of the Clapham Sect, and like Thornton senior had links with prominent humanitarians. In particular John was a patron of John Newton, who certainly knew of Phillis if he did not meet her. In one of her letters to Thornton, there is a reference to "the envenom'd Sting", a set phrase that turns up six years later in the *Olney Hymns*. We may wonder what the ex-slave and the ex-slaver would have made of each other, especially in the company of Newton's colleague William Cowper, who went on to write "The Negro's Complaint". Certainly, the poems of Wheatley are pervaded by the language of eighteenth-century hymnology, most obviously the work of Isaac Watts.

When Phillis reached Boston and became a freed woman in late 1773, the prelude to the War of Independence had already begun. Some of her work had always had a political cast - she had, for instance, written premature thanks "to the King's Most Excellent Majesty" in 1768, when the repeal of the Stamp Act raised the colonists' hopes of reconciliation for a time. She actually composed lines, now lost, on the Boston Tea Party, which the publishers understandably omitted from her collection. When hostilities started in earnest, her loyalties turned decisively towards the Patriot side. During the siege of the British forces in Boston, lasting for some months in 1775 and 1776, she took refuge in Rhode Island. From there she sent the commander of the besie-

ging army, George Washington, a letter together with some fulsome panegyric verses, ending with the adjuration, "Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side". She even saw in his future "A crown, a mansion, and a throne". She meant heavenly rewards, not the mansion that would later be built on Pennsylvania Avenue. Astoundingly, Washington got around to replying from his encampment, to thank her and apologize for a few weeks' delay caused by "a variety of important occurrences". Soon Thomas Paine reprinted the poem in a magazine. By this date Wheatley's name had become familiar to people round the world, including Voltaire and John Wesley.

Her output slowed in the few remaining years left to her. This may have been due in part to her health, but also to her marriage in 1778 with an improvident "free black" gentleman who dabbled in medicine and law. Her proposed second volume, to be dedicated to Franklin, never appeared. She died, aged no more than thirty-one, in December 1784, widely mourned in the public prints. Her work had naturally attracted admiration by reason of its forthright claims for the equal merits of the "Ethiopians" for whom she explicitly spoke. It involved a reclamation exercise, comparable to the restitution of the term "queer" in our own times - she must have been aware of the baneful proverb about washing the Ethiop white, deriving from the Book of Jeremiah, institutionalized in the *Adages* of Erasmus, and quoted in such Black-friendly works as a version of the popular song "The Desponding Negro". Her support for the Revolution, whatever the stance of its founding fathers on race, has further endeared her to many Americans. How good a poet was she then? Competent and versatile across genres, certainly, as a conventional writer in the best sense, that is one who exploits the potentialities of the modes and idioms that she inherits.

This edition, prepared by the outstanding scholar in the field, supersedes previous collections from Julian D. Mason (1966; 1989), John C. Shields (1988) and Carretta himself (Penguin, 2001). It is the fullest in scope, with abundant bibliographical detail, and it takes advantage of the steady growth in secondary literature. Two minor flaws concern excess repetition and verbal glossing. Several passages in the introduction are reiterated word-for-word in the annotation, while there is a great deal of cutting and pasting from the Penguin edition and from the editor's 2011 biography. The notes are patchy on classical allusions and very sparse on the pastoral diction that Phillis regularly employs - modern readers need help on misleading words such as "resent" (take revenge on), "liquid" (shining), "genial" (generative), or "complaisant" (obliging). A dozen or more Miltonisms and uses of epic formulas pass unremarked: the pompous "circumfus'd", beloved by both Milton and Pope, lacks any explanation. Among allusions overlooked is the line "While living lightning flashes from her eyes", surely a conscious echo of Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*. Much more remains for students of Wheatley to fill in along these lines. They will, however, be doing this on the foundation laid by the most generally informative and revealing edition that has ever appeared. ■

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Pat Rogers is the author of *The Poet and the Publisher: The Case of Alexander Pope, Esq., of Twickenham versus Edmund Curll, Bookseller in Grub Street, which will be published in May*

Guy Davenport

I was delighted to see Harry Strawson draw attention to the formidably learned and indubitably eccentric Guy Davenport (In Brief, February 26), although I'm saddened to hear him described as "little-known".

In thirty-five years of reading and re-reading him, I've never failed to be startled and stimulated by the cascade of erudite and unlikely connections and etymologies Davenport summoned forth in his essays and stories. Reading him has been an education from a wonderful teacher who manages to convey an almost sensual love of ideas. A remarkable anthology of his essays can be found in *The Geography of the Imagination*, while there are many collections of his "fiction", for want of a more suitable label. *Tatlin!* is notably strong. These are stories of a sort, often assemblages or collages of cultural synchronicities from various periods in history, polyphonic in their diversity of voices, permeated by myth and fable (he had a special empathy for the Dogon cosmology of West Africa). He was always keenly alert to the timeless influence of the archaic, including cave art and the Pre-Socratic philosophers, particularly on western culture of the past century.

For Davenport, literature and the visual arts were an interwoven unity, and although Strawson lists several aspects of his literary talents, he omits the fact that Davenport was also a highly gifted amateur painter. (He often illustrated his own books, using a raven's quill.) An excellent selection of this striking work can be found in *A Balance of Quinces: The paintings and drawings of Guy Davenport*, by Erik Anderson Reece.

He lived an unfussy life, teaching for several decades at the University of Kentucky. He refused many more lucrative academic posts over the years, claiming he would never take a job where he couldn't walk to work. For Davenport the automobile was the greatest curse of modern civilization ("the mechanical cockroach that has eaten our cities"). Though he rarely travelled far, he did visit Pound in Venice, Beckett in Paris and Kierkegaard's tomb in Copenhagen.

Modest to a fault, he said of his legacy: "I am not writing for scholars or fellow critics, but for people who like to read, to look at pictures, and to know things".

■ **David Whittaker**
Charlbury, Oxon

Elizabeth Bowen

Patricia Craig (February 26) describes Headington, where Elizabeth Bowen lived from 1925 to 1935 and again from 1960 to 1965, as in Oxfordshire. Partially true. When Bowen moved to Old Headington in 1925 it was in Headington Rural District but in 1929 became part of Oxford. As someone who spent his teens in Headington the 1960s, I have vivid memories of Bowen -

Said, Orientalism and facts

Reading Robert Irwin's review of Edward Brennan's *Life of Edward Said*, and particularly Irwin's consideration of Said's *Orientalism* (March 12), I recall most vividly the muscular comments of Hazhir Teimourian about Said when discussing Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West: A critique of Edward Said's 'Orientalism'* (2007). In his review in the *Tablet*, Teimourian referred to "Said's astonishing main claim that ... every European ... was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric". Teimourian points out that this means (and I paraphrase here) that members of any one culture have no right to research the habits and circumstances of another to satisfy their curiosity. And here are Teimourian's prophetic words: "in case the fruit of their knowledge is one day used by a tyrant against those other peoples".

I recalled Teimourian's marvellously germane words for two reasons. Firstly, because of his defence in acknowledging the inherent right of scholars to comment and take a different view. Secondly, for those last words which go to the heart of an informed debate in both the public and private sector, most notably in the universities, on virtually everything from politics to history and beyond, to allow in my view the most important rule of natural justice to apply, namely, "audi alteram partem".

■ **Alastair Conan**
Coulsdon, Croydon

In his review of Timothy Brennan's *Places of Mind: A Life of Edward Said*, Robert Irwin writes that Said was "usually cavalier with facts" and that in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Said "made so many factual mistakes". Irwin goes on to make known the "huge number of factual errors" which he "noted". The reader is then told that he "turned up many more". Irwin proceeds to give one example from "among many".

The problem is not so much that the determiners "many" and "huge number", which appear in four consecutive sentences at the outset of a paragraph, are

Mrs Cameron - not least when she helped coordinate Christmas dances for the young in St Andrew's Church Hall. Few of us knew of her writing but we did know how strict she could be if we failed to meet her high standards of etiquette and decorum.

At a Christmas dance in 1963, dressed in an oversized dinner suit and squeaky patent leather shoes, I was making a complete hash of a dance with my partner. As I was stumbling around the floor, I could see that Mrs Cameron was becoming increasingly impatient. When we passed close to where she was standing, she blew up. Dressed in silks and bedecked with beads, she stammered "stop", so we stopped and she made it clear I had to show respect for my dance partner. I thought I was doing just that!

■ **Bruce Ross-Smith**
Headington

An early atheist

In her review of *Godless Fictions in the Eighteenth Century* by James Bryant Reeves (February 12), Alison Shell writes that the author "tells us there were no self-described atheists in England before the 1780s". It may be helpful to enquire into the life of the Revd Dr Sir James Stonhouse (1716-95). Stonhouse studied

followed by only one pedantic example; but that the overstressed determiners seek to lay too much positivist emphasis (without meaningful examples) with a view to discrediting Said's work - which, admittedly, is not without flaws. By making these statements, however, Irwin, without his realizing it, seems to be substantiating Said's model for the way in which Europeans view Orientals. In *Orientalism*, Said, who was a Palestinian, stated that to Europeans "want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness, is in fact the main characteristic of the Oriental mind". The absence of ratiocination, philosophy or analysis in Irwin's attacks on Said's attitude towards facts may be seen as an example of Said's formula in operation. It is not enough to cite Said's view on how a "naive insistence on 'the facts' reveals a contemptuous dismissal of opinion and interpretation". That a person may sometimes show idealist leanings does not mean that they are averse to facts. The idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce thought that history will always to some extent be seen falsely. "Error is not a 'fact'", he wrote, "it is a 'spirit'." It is possible that Said was showing his idealist side in the cited paragraph. The point is that it is more beneficial - and indeed equitable - to try to understand Said's words through philosophical and intellectual terms and ideas, not simplistically dismissive ones.

Irwin's review is stippled with words such as "failures", "mistakes" and "errors", all of which he associates with Said without proportional qualification. This tendentious reading and understanding of Said is highly misleading. Said's work, for all its importance, is filled with facts, and if the word "many" will be used about errors, let "exceedingly many" be used about facts. Among the most important of those facts is one which Said courageously broached: orientalism had a politics.

For all that, "error is valuable and good", as R. G. Collingwood wisely observed.

■ **Samir Saad**
Amman, Jordan

at St John's College, Oxford (1732), where as an undergraduate he wrote a pamphlet against religion, which went to three editions. (Unlike Shelley, he was not sent down for this.) He came to Northampton in 1743 and underwent a profound religious conversion. Stonhouse was the major force behind the establishment of Northampton Infirmary (opened 1744), now the Northampton General Hospital. He was ordained in 1749, later becoming Rector of Cheverell Parva in Wiltshire. From "A Friendly Letter to a Patient" (1743) to the end of his life, he wrote extensively on religious matters.

■ **Andrew N. Williams**
Northampton General Hospital

Bridgerton

Anne M. Thell's disappointment with *Bridgerton* (Arts, March 5) is centred on its attempt to critique an epoch and value system which through its plot, characters and drama it ultimately endorses. Specifically, she argues that an accomplished, forthright and influential principal female character, such as Daphne Bridgerton, settles for the dull and conventional trope of marriage with a handsome, physical and alluringly mysterious duke with whom to produce heirs. By the

lights of literary criticism, Thell's regret may be just so; however, *Bridgerton's* dramatization of the wider historicity is perhaps closer to the mark.

Regency England for a debutante such as Daphne Bridgerton was a vertical society socially, economically and by gender. Blessed, therefore, with the forthright character traits that Thell identifies, Daphne, rather than selling out to the historical context, negotiates the stratification to secure the marriage she seeks, preserves and enhances the status of her family and safeguards the future of the union she entered into with the duke. In this respect, *Bridgerton*, for all its luminous gaiety of Regency social mores, might be considered a historical exposition and celebration of the sexual and societal power of upper-class women.

■ **K. A. J. McLay**
University of Derby

Proscribed words

Simon Everett's letter about using the term "Jewish people" rather than "Jews" and "enslaved people" rather than "slaves" when teaching his students is a model of old-fashioned, and admirable, liberal sensitivity (Letters, March 5). Everett finishes his letter in a similarly

tolerant vein by suggesting that it might be "difficult to achieve a consensus" on the better words to use in such cases. But what strikes me about this is not that a teacher should use language he judges to be more respectful, of which most of us would approve, but that his thoughtfulness is the gentle beginning of a journey to a less liberal compulsion by those less liberal than he. How long before "slave" and "Jew" are added to correct society's proscription list? I suspect that they might already be on it.

No doubt each generation develops such a list, but it would be interesting to hear readers' views on whether the present register is already a bit long, and whether it might be worth guarding against a world in which others decide for us what words we may and may not use, particularly when the words or phrases in question are used without malice.

■ **David Harris**
Poole, Dorset

The Whitsun Weddings

I was interested to read Andrew Michael Hurley's reflections on teaching Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings* (March 12), for last year I was teaching it to some A-level students in a very multi-ethnic part of London. It is an excellent set text, accessible and thought-provoking: I was impressed by their engagement from the first. Then I made the slight mistake of showing them A. N. Wilson's excellent documentary *Return to Larkinland*: once they were more biographically informed, some students were a bit less sympathetic to the poems. As Hurley observes, there is nothing clearly offensive in the poems (though one student found "Essential Beauty" misogynistic, not accepting my claim that it was a critique of misogynistic advertising). This raises a fascinating point about Larkin: his poetry is an outlet for his gentler, softer side. In some of his very best poems ("Deceptions", "Faith Healing"), he empathizes with female passivity, even in sexual terms. It seems that when he was not writing poetry he increasingly wanted to make up for this, and show that he was one of the lads, even one of the bigots.

■ **Theo Hobson**
London NW10

Heterogeny

Nathaniel Hawthorne did not coin the term "heterogeny" in 1868 (N. J. Stallard's review of *Crap* by Wendy A. Woloson, February 12). Hawthorne died in 1864, and his use of the term in notebooks goes back to 1838. "Heterogeny" in its biological sense was in use before 1868.

■ **Hershel Parker**
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But what I, myself, decide is not the point. The point is the question of 'what a decision is and what making a decision means.' The answer is 'never stop asking.' Ask yourself. Ask FDR, JFK, LBJ, or a Vietnam War veteran of your choice. Ask Nixon, Kissinger—Trump! Never mind Trump! Biden just 'decided' to unite the country! A decision. Foe is friend! Ye great decision-makers, have you ever asked yourselves *what a decision is and what making a decision means!* That is the question. *The Empty Shield* asks it. Repeatedly, repetitiously, abysally, and, possibly, once and for all.

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Essays on culture, literature, and feminism in our time

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304pp. Verso. £16.99.



Vivian Gornick, 2020

IN 1920, WHEN Vivian Gornick's mother was eighteen years old, she regularly received letters from an unhappily married older colleague called Mr Levinson. "Often he ended by telling my mother that he was now going down to the corner to mail this letter so that she would read it at eight in the morning before they met an hour later at work." Back then, there were five mail deliveries a day in New York.

Reading Vivian Gornick often feels like watching someone paint: you're not sure, at first, what it's going to be, but you're happy to follow her brushstrokes as the picture emerges. In "On letter writing", the essay that gives us this glimpse of her mother as a desired young woman, Gornick teases out a surprising, delicate meditation contrasting the letter with the telephone call. Rather than crudely arguing that one is superior to the other, or fretting about the pace of change, Gornick places each mode of expression in its own shifting temporal context.

It's a decision now to write a letter whereas when I was a girl it was a way of life. It's a decision to pick up the phone as well - I must deliver on the phone too - but one I make with ease and regularity. Given the alternative between making a call and writing a letter I'd have to conclude that I prefer the call because that is what I opt for nine times out

Claire Lowdon's novel *Left of the Bang* was published in 2015

of ten. But I don't prefer it. It is simply what I do. It is what everyone does: the habitual response of the world I find myself in, that which does not require an active will.

This is Gornick's USP: her ability to stand back and look at the world in which she finds herself, and then set it down calmly on paper. Luckily for us, she's been doing so for more than half a century. Gornick is now eighty-five, which means you can dip into *Essays in Feminism* (1978) and eavesdrop on a Women's Lib group in the heart of second-wave feminism. Or you can pick up her exquisite memoir, *Fierce Attachments* (1987): watch her walk the streets of her beloved Manhattan with her difficult, ageing mother, while recalling her childhood in a crowded Bronx tenement - "a building full of women ... Shrewd, volatile, unlettered, they performed on a Dreiserian scale". Gornick's mother was devoted to the twin gods of Communism and Romantic Love; after her husband's sudden early death, she took up mourning professionally. "Widowhood provided Mama with a higher form of being." "On letter writing", meanwhile, appeared in an essay collection, *Approaching Eye Level*, in 1996. Already the essay is a window onto a vanished world: that brief period when the phone had displaced the letter, but email (the current path of least resistance) was yet to come. Yet it doesn't feel dated, because Gornick is so temporally nimble. Her great subject is the way meaning changes over time. A letter in 1918 is not the same as a letter in 1950 or 1996. This is also true of Communism, feminism, marriage, love.

The End of The Novel of Love (1997; reissued last year by Picador) is an elegant collection of critical essays arguing that romantic love as a literary metaphor for success and self-understanding is no longer valid. The essays themselves each focus on a single writer, many of them lesser-known figures such as Kate Chopin and Grace Paley. Gornick's metric is simple yet exacting: a writer should respond to the world in which they find themselves. "In great novels", she says,

we always feel that the writer, at the time of the writing, knows as much as anyone around can know, and is struggling to make sense of what is perceived somewhere in the nerve endings if not yet in clarified consciousness. When a novel gives us less than many of us know - and is content with what is being given - we have middlebrow writing. Such writing - however intelligent its author, however excellent its prose - is closer to the sentimental than to the real.

Gornick thinks deeply about each text in its own time. She never crassly dismisses the past, but fits each work into its own context, then links those contexts up so that we might see where we have come from, and maybe even where we're going.

The title of her new collection, then, is a perfect fit. *Taking a Long Look* is a retrospective, with essays on literature, culture and feminism from the 1970s to the present day. They are arranged in reverse-chronological order, so that the last essay - "Toward a Definition of the Female Sensibility" - is the earliest. In it, Gornick reviews books by Joan Didion, Anne Roiphe, Lois Gould and Margaret Drabble, and finds all of them wanting. She is persuasive and tough, but she takes longer to make her case than she does in more recent work. Gornick's later style is crisper, marked by an authority that comes from having read and re-read a vast amount. She makes it look easy, but it isn't. You can write a perfectly decent essay focusing only on the book or writer under review. Gornick repeatedly goes further, looks longer, risks more. For example, a piece from 2004, on the writer Lore Segal, begins with this bold summary of the American immigrant novel:

Only rarely do these novels have a life beyond the one given them on publication day. Even when well written, they are, all too often, claustrophobically enclosed by a tale of survival beyond which America remains an abstraction ... Yet the genre is a resilient one. To read an immigrant novel of, say, 1910, one conceived in social realism and sentiment, as contrasted with one written fifty years later, in the wake of Modernism and the Holocaust, is to see how stubbornly it has kept itself alive - and every now and then harbors a piece of work that bursts the bounds of its own conventions.

A significant pleasure is the pithy, chatty biographical detail Gornick provides for her subjects. On Alfred Kazin: "Until the very end [he] was haunted by the conviction that somewhere a marvellous party was going on to which he had not been invited". Many of her subjects are writers and thinkers you'll have heard of but will be glad to learn more about, especially when the guide is so entertaining.

There are two "New York Stories" from the early 2000s in the retrospective, neither as tight nor as memorable as the life-writing in *Fierce Attachments*. In general, in this category, I'd rather re-read Gornick's contemporary Dorothy Gallagher's two wonderful books of memoir-essays, *Strangers in the House* (2006) and *How I Came Into My Inheritance* (2001). The two women share some biographical details: New Yorkers of Jewish, Communist, Ukrainian heritage, writing about the city, disillusionment in love, living alone, learning to write. Gallagher's New York is rendered more vividly. She is also much funnier.

In the critical essays, the broad gaze does entail a privileging of content over form. Gornick illustrates her essays with ample quotation, but she rarely takes a close look at sentences. In her own prose, description of the physical world is serviceable but seldom inspired. There are some unfortunate repetitions - "rag doll" is used a lot for limp female forms, and too often (we're talking double figures) something leaves Gornick with "the taste of iron" in her mouth.

I didn't know Gornick's work before reading for this review. Encountering it has left me enlivened and educated. My desk is covered in reading lists. When Zadie Smith or Martin Amis or Jonathan Franzen publishes a new collection of essays, it's big news - yet there's comparably less fanfare for someone who has made the essay their life's work. "I berate myself tremendously for not having written all that I think I should have written, and not having written more important books", Gornick told the *New Yorker* last year. I can't agree. Her wide-ranging oeuvre is one of sustained attention, a daily practice, accretive, full of precious, hard-won insights.

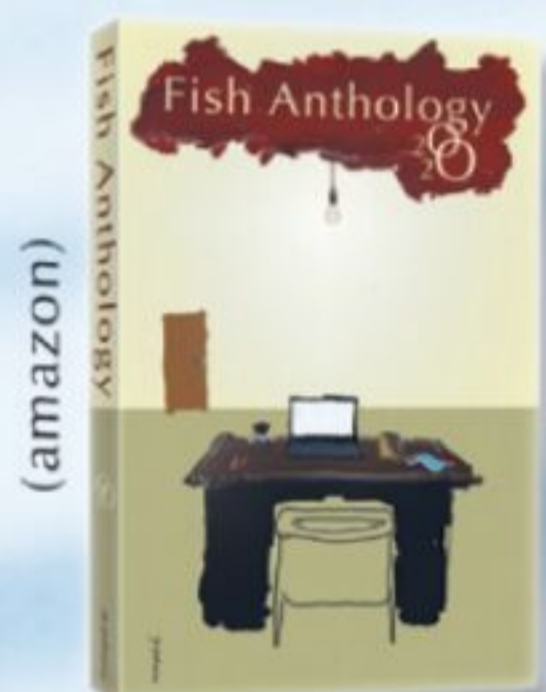
Alfred Kazin: "The value of a critic can be defined by the extent to which he remembers that he is a reader and by his cleverness and passion in applying that remembrance to the service of his readers". By that standard, Vivian Gornick deserves to be much more widely read. ■

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A story not heard

How a daughter tried to ignore a mother's tragic memoir

NICOLA SHULMAN

THE SECRET LIFE OF DOROTHY SOAMES

A foundling's story

JUSTINE COWAN

320pp. Virago. £20.

THERE ARE TWO WAYS of keeping a secret: don't tell, or don't listen. In the case of so-called "secret lives" - long, arduous deceptions like the second family in Aylesbury, the other job that brings in money and makes the phone ring at odd times of day - secrecy becomes a shared responsibility, reliant on the people around you not really wanting to know. The strangest thing about *The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames* is that it wants to be the tale of a story not told, but it's really an egregious example of a story not heard.

Justine Cowan, who has written it, grew up in a lovely house in a prosperous district of San Francisco, where she lived with her sister and her two parents. Her father was a "real gentleman", a "brilliant and honourable" lawyer in the mould of Atticus Finch: "a man whose vote was not for sale", and who was accordingly beloved. For as long as she can remember, Cowan hated her mother, Eileen. Eileen was given to mysterious rages and fault-finding, always on the alert for a crunch from the eggshells that, her daughter felt, sprang up liberally in her wake. Justine grew to loathe her life of privilege, which seemed to her of a piece with her mother's social aspirations, her "blind idolatry of wealth and status", her relentless good taste and checklist of social shibboleths, the aggravating way she harped on her "posh" upbringing in an upper-class British family. She kept her British accent and tried to inflict it on her daughter. "It's not bud-d-d-er," she would mock, drawing out the 'd,' her face ruffled with disdain. "Say it again, but *properly* this time." As Cowan grew to maturity, she realized that the further she was from her mother, the better she felt. A lawyer, like her father, she took posts in distant states. Then she instituted a rule of taking telephone calls from home only on

Sundays. Back in California, Eileen began to lose the language she'd been so picky about. After a while, she died.

Five years later, Cowan found herself inexplicably drawn to finding out more about her mother. She'd known Eileen was illegitimate, but had felt that the atmosphere at home did not encourage enquiries. "My mother had a secret", she writes. "She guarded it fiercely, keeping it under lock and key." Now, with her mother dead and safely beyond any feelings of gratification that might ensue from this sudden interest, Cowan set herself to uncovering the truth. She found that, as a lawyer, she possessed the skills for it: "Digging for gold amongst dusty files and combing through volumes in search of empirical evidence was second nature to me".

Be that as it may, she could have saved herself the detective work if she had not decided to ignore the fact that, for years, her mother had been making frantic efforts to share her secret with a daughter thousands of miles away who never answered the phone. Resorting to the postal service, Eileen then wrote to Justine saying she wanted to tell her "about (my) life as a foundling". Cowan registered the word as unusual, "but it soon slipped my mind as I tucked my mother's letter under a stack of unopened mail". Next through Cowan's distant letter-box came Eileen's memoir of her childhood, unambiguously entitled "Coram Girl". Cowan put it away unread. Clearly, the thing under lock and key isn't Eileen's secret: it's her daughter Justine, who has retreated behind a bolted door with her fingers in her ears. "I didn't want to know her secrets", she writes. "I feared that knowing the truth would give her a power over me that I couldn't bear." What does she mean? That any intelligence requiring sympathy for Eileen would collapse the framework of her own emotional life. If her mother had a tragic past, she would win at what Cowan saw as the one game left to her - to be top in the victimhood rankings. Her noble father was not beyond exercising the same right: when Cowan asked him why he'd never protected her and always sided with his wife, he hissed, "I had it worse".

As things were, fragments of her mother's story did have to be extracted from the archives of the

The Foundling Hospital, 1941

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To deprive a child who has no home of the means to find a friend is a refinement of cruelty

Nicola Shulman is a writer and reviewer whose books include Graven with Diamonds: The many lives of Thomas Wyatt, 2011

Foundling Hospital in London, where her mother had indeed been raised under the name Dorothy Soames. The sad correspondence Cowan obtained told her how Eileen came to be there. She had been born, between the wars, to a young woman called Lena Weston, who lived with her brother on his farm in Shropshire, and a man she met in a café in a local market town. When her pregnancy became apparent, her brother kicked her out; and her sole remaining option was to apply for the child to be taken in by the Foundling, or Coram Hospital in London, established for "The Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted children" in 1739. The process was long and freighted with insult, as each mother had to prove herself against the standing presumption that she was a woman of bad character. The conditions of success were equally harsh: the mother must resign all rights to her child and agree never to contact her again.

From here, Eileen/Dorothy's memoir takes over. The Hospital placed its baby charges with foster parents, paid to raise them out of infancy and then, at five, to return them to the Institution. Dorothy's foster parents weren't so great, but they were a lot better than what followed. She had the misfortune to be a ward at a time which, as a much later director of the hospital admitted to Eileen, "seems to have been the nadir of the Foundling Hospital". It drew its female staff from the eternal spinsters of the First World War: lonely, angry women who perhaps saw and resented, even in these most wretched of little girls, the chance for future love and marriage that for them would never come again. This may also explain the persistent emphasis on placing them in domestic service, where such prospects would be limited, at a time when demand for domestic servants was on the wane. "I suspect", Eileen wrote in her elegant and beautifully controlled narrative, "that the staff was chosen selectively, able to turn us into the unquestioning, obedient servants we were destined to become. It is clear to me now that the entire system was designed to prevent opportunities for us to deviate from our destinies."

The regime was brutal, and seems more so to Cowan who, as a girl brought up in 1960s California, has no context of British institutional life in which to locate it. The daily routine of "Get up. Get dressed. Line Up. Brush. March. Pray. Eat. Poop. March" would be familiar to any pupil of an elite boarding preparatory school in those years, as would the spite, the random punishment and the singling-out of individual children for extra savagery. You sometimes wish Cowan had taken a crash course in school memoirs as part of her research, so she could know that the inspection of morning stools and the scarily named "crocodile formation" where children walk in twos, were not, as she believes, barbarisms unique to the Foundling Hospital. This matters because her failure to discriminate detracts from those things that were, such as the way all instruction was devised to make the children feel apologetic for being alive. Such as the enforced silence, the stingy crumbs of playtime to discourage friendship and alliances. And then, there was no going home. To deprive a child who has no home of the means to find a friend is a refinement of cruelty.

This is a double story: Eileen's and her daughter's. As Cowan feels her way along it, she makes an impressive attempt to record her own responses, even when ungenerous. To understand all is not, here, quite to forgive all, but you sense she is relieved, in the end, to be able to feel some compassion for her mother and to learn it was not unlovability that made her unloved. And there is also the matter of the Foundling Hospital, operating at its supposed "nadir" - or did it just get caught doing business as usual? It's a museum now, closed like all of them. There is nothing in its publicity material to make one think it has been anything other than a lucky break for the children it received. When it reopens, one wonders if the giftshop will be stocking this book. ■

Unbearable lightness

Essays that trade in image rather than argument

BECCA ROTHFELD

LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I MEAN
JOAN DIDION

192pp. Fourth Estate. £12.99.

I HAVE ALWAYS STRUGGLED to articulate why Joan Didion, patron saint of female essayists, leaves me cold. No one could deny that she is a crisp stylist, or that she is drily and drolly hilarious, or that her prose is somehow remote and vivid at once. As Hilton Als puts it in his deft introduction to her new collection of essays, her non-fiction has “the metaphorical power of great fiction”. She writes, for instance, that inside a Las Vegas hotel it is “perpetually cold and carpeted and no perceptible time of day or night”; that sitters in Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs have “skin like marble, faces like masques”. Each sentence paints a concise yet telling portrait. “Style is character”, runs the oft-quoted Didion adage. Not much unifies the twelve pieces in *Let Me Tell You What I Mean*, which treat everything from

underground newspapers to a reunion for Second World War veterans, except their glossy style - and the fact that they have all gone previously uncollected. Originally published over the span of Didion’s prolific career, the first in 1968 and the last in 2000, they appear chronologically but could be rearranged into thematic clusters: a somewhat self-important cluster about the art of writing; a cluster of canny essays in reportage, clawing at the smooth façades of power, and including a quietly scathing profile of Nancy Reagan and an unexpectedly sympathetic homage to Martha Stewart; and a miscellany, including a moving reminiscence about a dead friend and an excellent meditation on Ernest Hemingway.

Didion is, by her own admission, not much of a philosopher. “I am not an intellectual, which is not to say that when I hear the word ‘intellectual’ I reach for my gun, but only to say that I do not think in abstracts”, she confesses in a short piece titled “Why I Write”. Its informal sequel is “Telling Stories”, an essay about what Didion is, namely a keen observer. The piece can be tediously personal - Didion reproduces rejections she received from various magazines for a full five pages - but it also sheds light on her method and, ultimately, on her strengths. It treats her formative years at *Vogue*, where she wrote captions for photographs and learnt that “less was more, smooth was better, and absolute precision essential”.

By far the most successful essays in *Let Me Tell You What I Mean* are, in effect, captions that serve to invoke their attendant pictures. Didion is not an analytic but a visual writer, trading in image and insinuation more than argument. Her withering register works best when she is attacking naive



mythologies, as in her profile of Nancy Reagan, who has “the beginning actress’s habit of investing even the most casual lines with a good deal [of] dramatic emphasis”. Of William Randolph Hearst’s famously extravagant mansion, she writes that it is “exactly the castle a child would build, if a child had \$220 million and could spend \$40 million of it on a castle”.

Didion’s studious aloofness is less suited to moral instruction, and she flounders when she attempts to dispense advice or muster sympathy for those who lack poise or composure. In “Getting Serenity”, she scorns gambling addicts for their reliance on the bromides of self-help, rebuking them for speaking as if they hail from “some subverbal swamp”. But they are more concerned to battle their illness than they are to compose captions that would satisfy the exacting staff of *Vogue*, and it is not their responsibility to offer eloquent accounts of themselves to a judgemental journalist. In “On Being Unchosen by the College of One’s Choice”, she displays similar callousness, scolding teenage hopefuls for placing too much stock in acceptance without any thought for the real, material advantages that certain name-brands confer.

But whether Didion is at her sharp best or her haughty worst, her touch is light - not superficial so much as glassy, free of density and effusion. She reports that the main thing she learnt at *Vogue* - to value prose that was clean and bracing - was a “tonic, particularly to someone who had labored for years under the delusion that to set two sentences side by side was to risk having the result compared widely and unfavorably to *The Golden Bowl*”. One reason Didion leaves me cold, I suppose, is that I continue to prefer something heavier, which is to say that I still labour under this delusion. ■

Becca Rothfeld is a PhD candidate in philosophy at Harvard University



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Doing the heavy lifting

The women who raised Civil Rights leaders

LADEE HUBBARD

THREE MOTHERS

How the mothers of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and James Baldwin shaped a nation

ANNA MALAIKA TUBBS

272pp. HarperCollins. £18.99.

THREE MOTHERS IS A BIOGRAPHY of the primary caregivers and first teachers of three of the most important Black male figures of the US Civil Rights Era. It is also a confrontation with erasure. In presenting the stories of Alberta King, Louise Little and Berdis Baldwin, Anna Malaika Tubbs emphasizes how little attention has been paid to these lives. She sees the lack of interest as part of a more general and persistent disregard for Black mothers, itself a manifestation of the racial and gender violence that had such a deep impact on each woman.

The broader implications of this disregard are in some ways most apparent in the case of Louise Little, because her confrontation with violence was so direct, its consequences so unequivocal. Louise was born to a Black mother in Grenada in 1897 and,

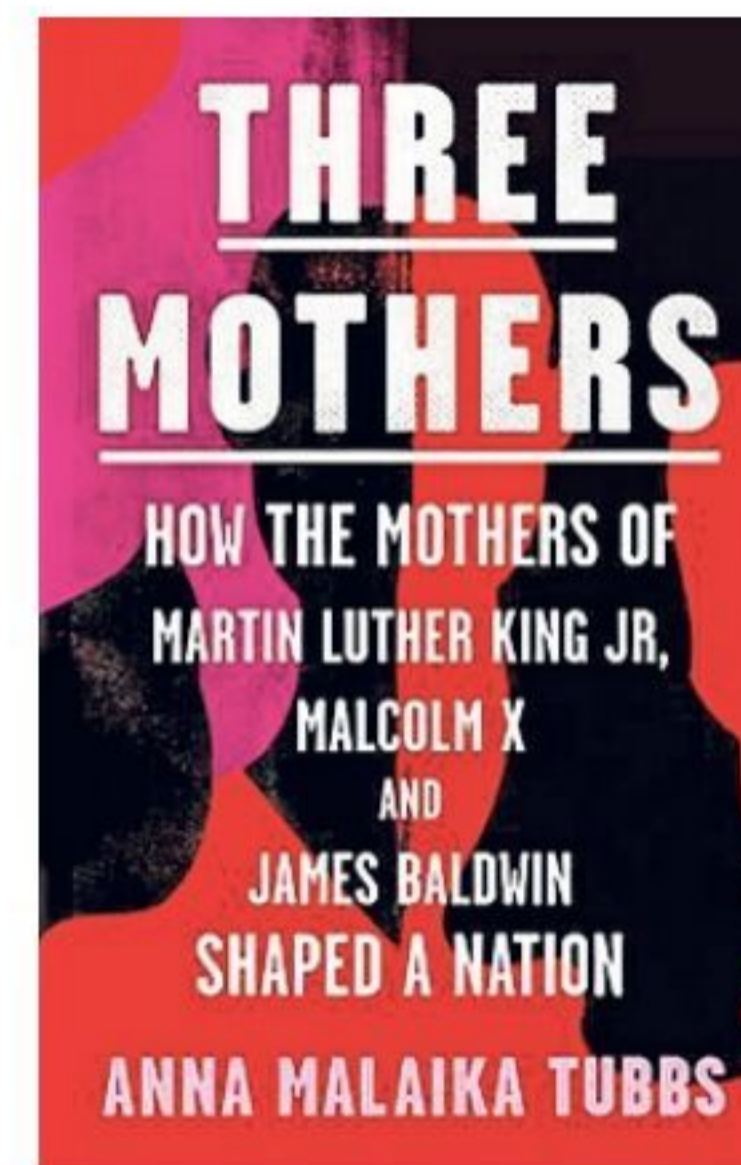
because of her “nearly white” complexion, was rumoured to have been the product of rape by a white man. After emigrating to Montreal at the age of twenty, Louise became an influential member of Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, serving as a reporter for the UNIA journal, the *Negro World*. It was through her work with the organization that she met the Georgia-born Earl Little. When the two married in 1919, she moved to the US Midwest and committed herself to the life of a field organizer in a country that was not only foreign but hostile. In 1931, after numerous confrontations with white supremacists who resented their Garveyite message of Black pride and self-determination, Earl was killed by a streetcar in suspicious circumstances. Louise, aged thirty-four, became the sole support of eight children.

Tubbs constructs a vivid portrait of Louise’s struggle to maintain her family, as well as her determination to ensure that her children knew their worth in a society intent on its denial:

When the Littles came home from school, Louise would reteach them what they had been taught by their white teachers. She made sure they knew how Black people were standing up for their rights not only in the United States but also around the world. Louise always had a dictionary on the kitchen table alongside the daily newspaper clippings she made her children study.

In 1939, Louise was forcibly committed to a mental institution, the evaluation of her sanity based in part on her history of “maladjustment”, “paranoia” and “claims that she has been discriminated against”. Despite her children’s efforts to secure release, she was confined for twenty-four years.

Malcolm X’s autobiography begins with a description of Louise, alone, confronting members of the KKK while pregnant with him, yet the influence of Garveyism is usually traced back to his father, a pattern of disregard that plays out in many biographical accounts of all three sons’ early development. As Tubbs observes, when “Malcolm X was assassinated, when Martin Luther King Jr., was killed shortly after,



and even when James Baldwin died from stomach cancer years later ... their fathers were mentioned, while their mothers were largely erased”.

The implications of this absence are felt throughout *Three Mothers*. Tubbs frequently acknowledges that details about particular passages in the women’s lives cannot be known because they were not deemed worthy of record. In an attempt to better understand her subjects’ choices, or lack thereof, Tubbs’s focus often shifts to reflections on the impact of racism and sexism on the lives of Black women more broadly. Alberta King’s upbringing in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, is fleshed out by descriptions of the pressures brought to bear on the Black elite and the work of organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women, “made up of prominent women whose motto was ‘Lifting as We Climb’”. As a young girl from a well-educated family, Alberta would have been all too aware of the need to always be polished and well-spoken in order to combat demeaning representations of her people”. These wide-angle shots are important if we are to fully appreciate the significance of individual experiences. But at times the shifts in focus are distracting, the women’s specific identities lost in generalizations that threaten to replicate the pattern of erasure Tubbs is attempting to correct.

As a group, the three mothers had many things in common, but they were also, clearly, very different women. In bringing together these stories - of Louise, the passionate and fiercely confrontational immigrant struggling to survive in the Midwest; of Alberta, the product of the precarious Black southern middle class; and of Berdis, a poetic and sensitive working-class woman raising her children in Harlem - Tubbs seizes a powerful opportunity to reflect on the complexity of the Black experience in the US and the pervasive yet diverse impacts of racism and sexism on all Black women’s lives. The book is also a potent reminder of how deeply the unique strategies Black mothers devise in order to survive prejudice can contribute to the work and world views of their equally unique children. ■

Ladee Hubbard is the author of the novels *The Talented Ribkins, 2017*, and *The Rib King*, published earlier this year. She lives in New Orleans

Our man on the Twitter

How not to be a foreign correspondent

LOUIS AMIS

UNPRESIDENTED

Politics, pandemics and the race that Trumped all others

JON SOPEL

368pp. BBC Books. £20.

WHAT IS THE POINT, really, in 2021, of a British journalist in the United States? With no language barrier to straddle, and all the cultural cross-pollination of the internet - including easy access to the work of the US’s own, better-funded and more knowledgeable journalists - what can these interlopers add to the picture? Perhaps they are simply there to ask some narrowly UK-focused questions. When Jon Soper, the BBC’s North America Editor since 2014, was called on for the first time by the Biden administration’s press secretary, he challenged her on the whereabouts of the White House’s bust of Winston Churchill.

As a reporter-at-large, however, a foreign correspondent might have some advantages. In theory, he observes with “fresh” and more impartial eyes. There is also something more tangible (and a little less clichéd), which is that foreign reporters can wear the mantle of their presumed neutrality in the information-gathering process itself, in a way that domestic journalists, in a country mired in hyper-partisanship and paranoia, no longer can. No news organization enjoys broader credibility inside the US, and especially its hinterland, than the BBC. This constitutes an opportunity to make an original contribution, however marginal, to the host society’s understanding of itself - to the benefit of audiences everywhere.

On the evidence of his latest book, *Unpresidented: Politics, pandemics and the race that Trumped all others*, Soper has missed that opportunity. The author is primarily a broadcaster, as well as a member of the White House press pool, that bubble within the DC bubble. During the Trump years, this must have been a difficult, even traumatic place to work. But it is hard to accept how little attention the book, which is presented as an “election diary”, pays to the views, voices and lives of the voters who are busy deciding the election in question. Throughout, Soper shares his assumptions about the thoughts and feelings of such groupings as “the African American community”, “the Hispanic population” and, above all, “white, college-educated women”. But actual, ordinary Americans appear in individuated form on only about fifteen of these pages. We find “one man” here, “a woman with her kids” there; and they deliver around one remark each. Meanwhile, Soper attends dinner parties given by five different US and foreign ambassadors - events he describes in considerable detail.

Soper no doubt sees loitering in the vestibules of



Louis Amis is a British journalist based in the United States. He can be followed on Twitter, @LouisAmisStuff

power as his main service to the public, but it is not as though he breaks any news there. His two highest-profile interviews are with former officials who each left office more than a year previously. It seems that, for journalists like Soper, news isn’t really something you go out and gather: it is something that “comes” or “drops”, when your “phone lights up”. “A new factoid has emerged which is getting a lot of traction”, he writes in a typical moment. News then becomes something you go out to perform - by “doing a live”, or a “stand-up”, or a “two-way”. At best, this involves speeding into an unfamiliar district; finding, as quickly as possible, the type of person you were expecting to find there (e.g. “for a piece we want to do on disaffected Trump voters”); and then speeding away in possession of soundbites.

Soper’s excursions into history are equally brief and rare, as are his discussions of policy. After mid-March 2020, around a quarter of all the diary entries refer to tweets sent by Donald Trump: “You have to give it to Trump - when it comes to invective on Twitter, boy, can he deliver”. Apparently, the point of a British journalist in the US is to relay viral controversies, and embrace and enable the reality TV-ification of government (“All I can say is that Season 2 is nothing like as much fun as Season 1”). There is no sense in this book of what Trump has meant for the country, besides his being a boorish loudmouth who causes a big fuss - in the media.

If a reporter’s “diary” is going to contain such little trace of real life, it could at least include some of the self-evaluation that all pundits of US politics should have been carrying out since 2016. Jon Soper never wonders whether he might be out of touch. But a media that doesn’t listen with interest and empathy to ordinary citizens cannot hold or win back their trust, or understand what is coming next. ■



Class and the Cold War

Spies in search of a cause

IAN BURUMA

THE HAPPY TRAITOR

Spies, lies and exile in Russia: The extraordinary story of George Blake

SIMON KUPER

270pp. Profile. £14.99.

KIM AND JIM

Philby and Angleton: Friends and enemies in the Cold War

MICHAEL HOLZMAN

342pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £20.

THE “CAMBRIDGE SPIES” are a bit like the Bloomsbury Group. They never cease to fascinate a large number of enthusiasts, especially in England, and for many of the same reasons. A love of gossip keeps the cult alive of Bloomsbury and the Cambridge Five (Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt and Cairncross), and gossip has a lot to do with class: who belongs, who doesn’t, who does what to whom, and who harbours the guilty secrets. It surely is not for nothing that the double agents we remember (and still gossip about) went to public schools. The ones who didn’t, such as George Blake, have received far less attention.

Concealment is an essential part of the cult. Who can belong, and who will be blackballed, is a vital question in clubland, almost always dealt with in the greatest secrecy. The reason upper-class traitors are still of such interest is that we want to understand why they did it. They were never blackballed, after all. So why did these men who were valued, if sometimes eccentric, members of the club, betray their fellows?

A common answer is that they may have seemed to be bona fide members, but were in fact misfits, because they were gay, or secret Communists, or hated their fathers. The late George Blake (he died last year), the subject of Simon Kuper’s absorbing book, was not only not upper-class, but rather foreign to boot. His mother was Dutch, and his father, although a British citizen, was a Jew from Constantinople, named Albert Behar. George, nicknamed “Poek” as a child, later anglicized his family name.

Blake was treated harshly after his exposure as a Soviet agent in 1963. Unlike the more clubbable “Kim” Philby, he was not offered immunity in exchange for a confession. He was convicted under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced to forty-two years in prison. Even Harold Macmillan found this a “savage sentence”. Luckily for Blake, he escaped from Wormwood Scrubs in 1966.

Kuper quotes Chapman Pincher on why Blake was treated so severely: “Officers of both MI5 and MI6 ... have told me that he was ‘a real outsider, greatly disliked by his colleagues’, and that this was the reason why there were no internal moves to save him from prosecution”. John le Carré, that great connoisseur of British class consciousness, disliked Philby precisely because he was “born inside the fortress” and undermined it from within, while he sympathized with Blake who had been born “in the wastes of foreign and ethnic disadvantage” and had “gone to great lengths to gain acceptance”. Le Carré himself always felt like a misfit in the club. The son of a conman, he liked to say that he spent his lifetime “pretending to be a gentleman”.

When asked why they became communists, the Cambridge spies invariably brought up their anti-fascism in the 1930s. When they were students, the communists seemed to be the only serious opponents of the fascist scourge then sweeping across Europe. Anthony Blunt, looking back at his career much later, summed it up more cynically as “cow-boys and Indians”. Michael Holzman, in his book on Philby and his friend and later enemy, the CIA counter-intelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, comes up with a slightly different angle, one that explains the behaviour of many activists, whether they become double agents or not.

Class is far from absent in US society, but it is more fluid than in Britain. The Angletons jumped up in one generation from being nobodies in rural Illinois to the polyglot opulence of life in an Italian palazzo. But “Jim” was a misfit, too, dreaming of poetry, moving to and fro from Italy to the US, and looking for “some sort of myth” to give sense to his life. He dabbled in the fascist fancies of Ezra Pound’s poems and studied literary theory at Yale. Then, in the course of the Second World War, he found his myth, in London, as the American protégé of Kim Philby. He now had a cause to fight for. He said that once he met Philby, “the world of

Kim Philby (left) and George Blake at Blake’s home in Russia, 1975

“**Even living in Moscow, where he taught Soviet agents his craft, Blake decorated his flat with Russian Orthodox icons**”

Ian Buruma’s most recent book is *The Churchill Complex: The rise and fall of the Special Relationship*, published last year

intelligence that had once interested me consumed me”.

It was the Cold War that really consumed him, however, which is why he took Philby’s betrayal of British and American secrets so personally. He had learnt all he knew from his English “friend” and would spend the rest of his life trying to repair the damage which he saw as “Kim’s work”. Angleton is usually portrayed as a drunken paranoiac, whose obsessive searching for “moles” was more destructive than the secrets exposed. One fresh aspect of Holzman’s rather dense and plodding book is a more positive assessment of the man. He believes that Angleton had good reason to be obsessive and his zeal did more good than bad.

What was George Blake’s myth? As was true of all people of his generation, of all classes, his life was shaped by the war, during which he discovered his adventurous spirit as a young member of the Dutch resistance. Later, when he served as an officer for the SIS in the Korean war, he had a conversion. He was supposed to be fighting for the rather brutal South Korean government, but he saw this Western ally as a bunch of fascists. Their leftist opponents in the South seemed to him like the wartime Dutch resistance. And after being captured by the North Koreans, he went the whole hog. If he was going to die, he thought, it would have to be for a cause he could believe in. Communism was his new faith.

Blake, in Kuper’s telling, did not become a Soviet spy for the thrill of it, or because of the Nazi menace, which no longer existed, and certainly not for the money, but as a true believer. He always was the believing type. Kuper makes much of Blake’s maternal Calvinist roots. Even living in Moscow, where he taught Soviet agents his craft, Blake still decorated his flat with Russian Orthodox icons. “Communism”, he once said, “is the same as Christianity, only put on a scientific basis.”

Kuper spoke to Blake at length in an attempt to figure him out. He concludes that Blake’s Dutch upbringing was more important than his feelings about Britain, which were affectionate but rather detached. Oddly for a double agent, Blake found it hard to lie. Philby did not confess to his interrogators at MI5 when he was suspected in 1951. Blake, in a similar situation, found he could not hide his commitment to the Communist cause.

Kuper thinks that the Calvinist insistence of professing one’s belief explains Blake’s confession. A Dutch friend of Kuper’s told him about Protestant resistance fighters who would spill the beans to the Gestapo “because their faith would not allow them to lie”. I wonder. Having one’s fingernails ripped out may have had more to do with it. But Blake’s life certainly illustrates the common phenomenon of believers who can change from one faith to another without losing any of their zeal.

One thing all the British spies had in common, once they were forced to settle in Moscow, was a refusal to repudiate their faith in the Soviet Union. It would have destroyed “the myth” that held their lives together. And yet, as Blake makes clear to Kuper, they were all disillusioned by the dreary, decrepit, oppressive country they had dedicated their lives to. Some managed this better than others. Philby never learnt to speak Russian, drank heavily, and combed late copies of *The Times* for the cricket scores. Maclean assimilated into Soviet society more successfully. Blake seems to have adapted best of all. A fluent speaker of Russian, a man without a country but with profound beliefs, he was relatively content with his Russian wife and his dacha. Despite Simon Kuper’s best efforts to draw him out, he still comes across as a bit of an earnest bore.

The Cambridge Five are more colourful. Blake doesn’t quite make it into the Bloomsbury/Cambridge cult. In *An Englishman Abroad*, the wonderful film about his Moscow life written by Alan Bennett and directed by John Schlesinger, Guy Burgess (Alan Bates), the most flamboyant of the lot, is asked what he misses most about England. “The gossip”, he replies, “I miss the gossip.” ■

Unlikely coup

A tale often told - not always accurately

RODERICK BAILEY

THE LOCKHART PLOT

Love, betrayal, assassination and counter-revolution in Lenin's Russia

JONATHAN SCHNEER

368pp. Oxford University Press. £25.

ON A WARM Moscow evening in August 1918, twenty-eight-year-old Fanny Kaplan, an embittered and hard-bitten revolutionary who felt that Bolshevism had betrayed the socialist cause, gunned down Lenin as he left a factory meeting. One bullet went through his neck and a lung. Another lodged in his shoulder. The Bolshevik leader survived, though the wounds possibly contributed to the strokes that eventually killed him six years later.

What died almost instantly was a conspiracy among French, British and American agents and diplomats, in collaboration with anti-Bolshevik Russians, to overthrow the fledgling communist regime and re-harness Russia to the Allied side in the First World War.

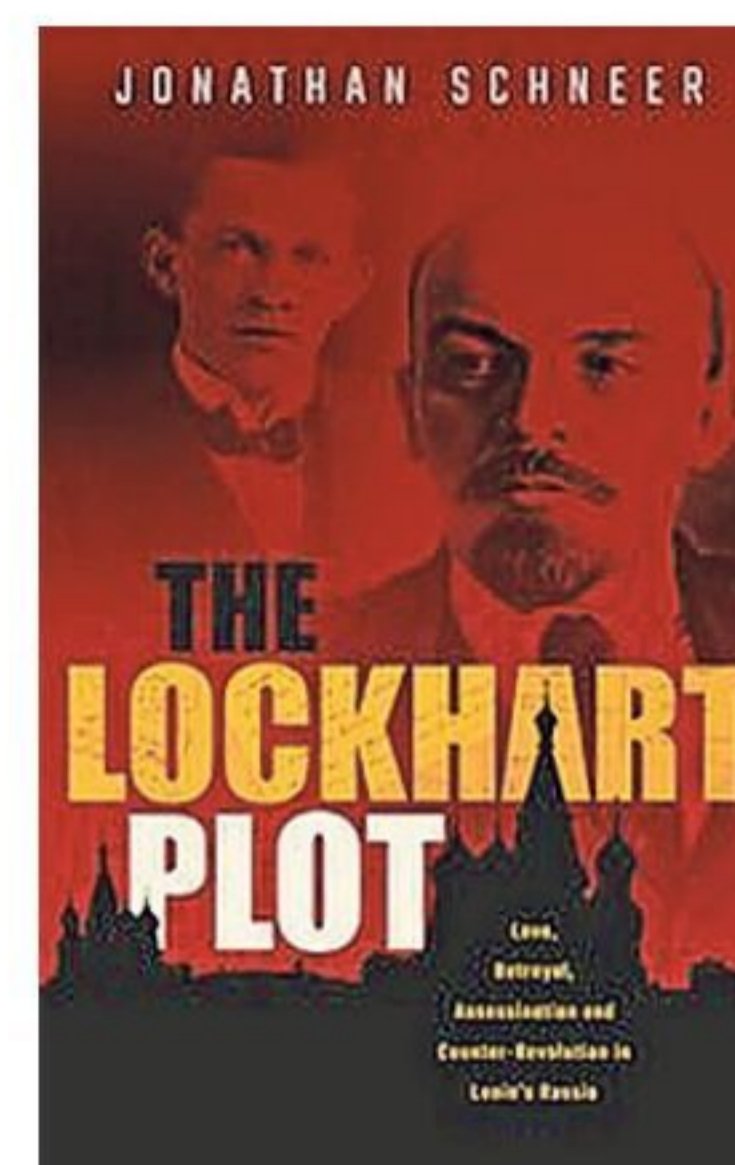
The plot, in essence, went something like this: coordinated with British landings in Russia's northern ports, Latvian soldiers and Russian counter-revolutionaries aided by a 40,000-strong legion of

Czech ex-prisoners of war would move quickly against the Bolsheviks, liquidating their leaders and installing a new government ready to return to fighting Germany.

The planning was as amateurish as it was ambitious. As Jonathan Schneer recounts in his new narrative of the scheme, the Cheka - the early incarnation of the Soviet secret police - was well informed about what was afoot, and very well placed to crush it. One trump card was that its carefully placed agents included the very Latvian officers whom the conspirators considered key to a successful coup. Other advantages included the planners' over-confidence that bribery and force would be enough to deliver. Precipitated by Fanny Kaplan's failed attempt on Lenin's life, which, as likely as not, had nothing to do with the plot, the Cheka efficiently extinguished the conspiracy with a rapid roundup of its principal protagonists. One of them, the British naval attaché in Petrograd, died in a shoot-out in the Embassy.

The Lockhart Plot - so-called for the role that the British agent Robert Bruce Lockhart played in it - is a story that journalists, propagandists, historians and one-time participants have told and retold for a century. Schneer's technique is to tell it through the experiences of a wide cast of contemporary characters concerned intimately with what took place. Principal among these is Lockhart, a Fife-born adventurer of undoubted talents undermined by vanity and a touch more self-confidence than the situation demanded. We also get a selection of Lockhart's British and American co-conspirators as well as his Russian lover, Moura von Benckendorff. A refreshing feature is Schneer's blending of their perspectives with those of senior Bolsheviks charged with countering subversion.

It is a pity that the French - decisive architects of the plot - appear so little in Schneer's telling of this story, to the extent that one wonders what future researchers might find in French archives, apparently untouched by him, to add to the tale.



Roderick Bailey is a Research Fellow at the Wellcome Centre for Ethics and Humanities, University of Oxford

Certainly some details of the plot remain impossible to unpick, as Schneer acknowledges. For example: the degree to which Western governments encouraged those who did the plotting and the extent to which the Cheka controlled Moura von Benckendorff. As is often the way with histories of underground work, available records of the time are thin. So long as relevant Russian archives stay closed to outsiders, many are likely to stay that way. For decades this has left space for lurid conspiracy theorizing, which, in turn, goes some way to explaining why the episode has for so long attracted so much attention.

Schneer's solution to the enduring problem of missing facts is to present his audience with a range of possible interpretations of each opaque turn of the tale. While the novelty that he claims for this approach may make some historians of the same events bristle, a more serious effect of his commendable concern for thoroughness is the impression left on the reader of the distinct unlikelihood of the plot ever succeeding.

This is a problem purely because it is so at odds with the author's closing comments and the book's breathless jacket-blurb. Lockhart "nearly achieved world-shaking results", Schneer tells us. "One of the great 'What Ifs?' of Twentieth-century history", declares the publisher. "At stake: the fate of the Russian Revolution", offers a back-cover quotation from Marc Mulholland. But it is hard to credit the plot with such potential when, as Schneer notes, it was prepared so haplessly and with such little feeling for the Bolsheviks' popular appeal, at a time - summer 1918 - when Western enthusiasm for confronting communism by force and steering Russia back into the war was waning fast. We are left, then, with a well-researched and well-written reminder of the pitfalls and bear-traps that governments can encounter when attempting, clandestinely, to interfere in other countries, and a lingering sense of regret that this is not the main message that the book seeks to put across. ■

History of violence

The Communist terror apparatus

KIERAN WILLIAMS

SECURITY EMPIRE

The secret police in communist Eastern Europe

MOLLY PUCCI

392pp. Yale University Press. £45.

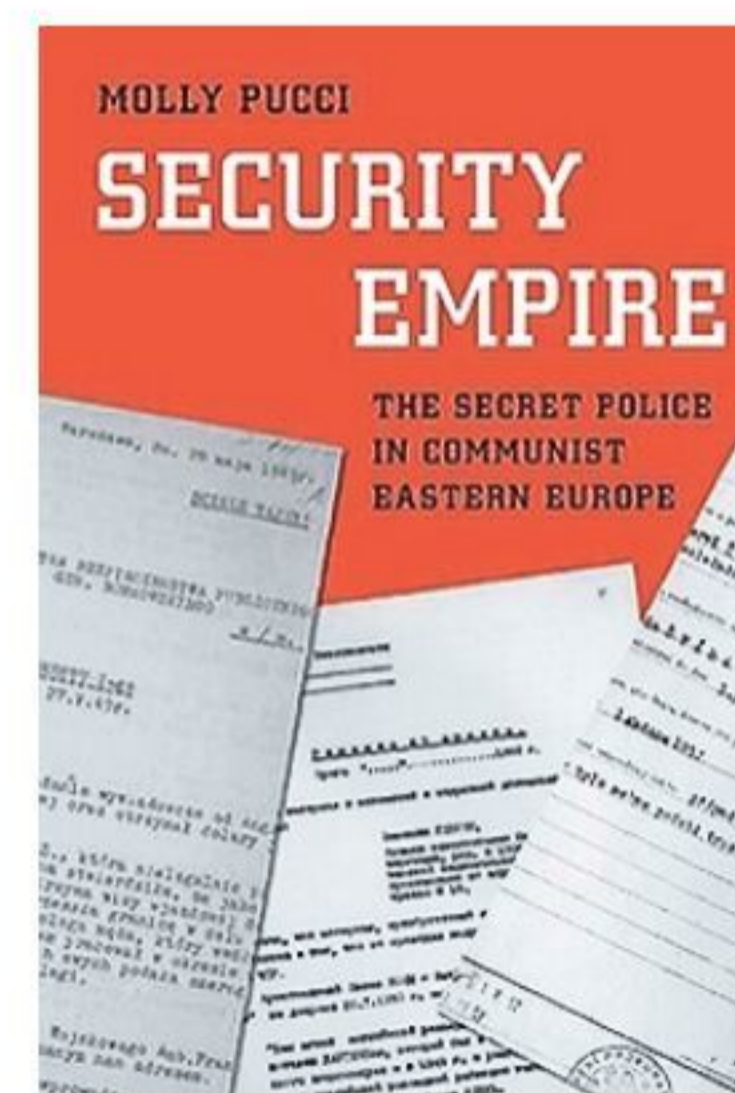
THE SECRET POLICE were vital components of communist regimes yet are surprisingly difficult to write about. In many ways they were anything but secret, engaging as they did in a kind of public relations campaign to mythologize their exploits and create the illusion of omnipresence. They themselves controlled the information needed to assess their own performance and - particularly in the regimes' final days - they routinely shredded files to make room in archives. Much of what survived is chaff, detailing the bureaucratic minutiae of institutions that could just as easily be ministries of agriculture or industry. In short, there is a very real danger that studies of the secret police will be dull.

To avoid this, we need to find ways to work with the services' materials but not let them drive the narrative. In *My Life as a Spy* (2018), the anthropologist Katherine Verdery powerfully deconstructed the file amassed on her by Romania's Securitate, but

single case studies leave us wondering how representative they are of operations in general. Molly Pucci's *Security Empire* overcomes this problem by using groundbreaking archival research to compare the postwar origins of the communist security services in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Like Verdery, Pucci focuses on the human beings who worked within the whirling kaleidoscope of directorates, asking not only "how violence impacted society but also how it impacted those who carried it out". For the men (and few women) who joined, it was a matter of "who they were and who they became while in the service".

Contextual differences aside, the three countries faced a common challenge: figuring out who could be trusted to make society more orderly, and how those officers could themselves be made more orderly. In the early days, joining a secret police or becoming an informer was often the result of happenstance, venality, score-settling, nationalism, self-reinvention, location, friendship or kinship, but rarely of ideological conviction. Pucci graphically reports the wildness of the first security officers, such as one in Poland who was found fabricating reports, sleeping and drinking on the job, and requisitioning the apartment of someone he was supposed to arrest. With weapons and alcohol easily to hand, random shootings, revenge killings and looting quickly followed. Over the next decade, the services underwent a process of professionalization, as it was understood at the time: they shifted to plans and quotas, built up informer networks in offices and factories, and discouraged protest or dissent through "prophylactic" methods such as pulling someone aside for a cautionary chat, perhaps with the help of a manager or teacher. In outlook and operations, the secret police became intimately bound to the command economy.

By the mid-1950s, the aims and methods of the three countries' secret services had converged under



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the tutelage of Soviet "advisers" who periodically disrupted local conditions to keep everyone on their toes, pitting police against Party, workers against intellectuals, and faction against faction. East European officers had always used force, especially in those parts of Poland that were essentially war zones until 1947, but the Soviets instructed them in what Pucci calls "a standardized system of violence based on battle-tested methods of interrogations, torture, and psychological pressure". At the same time, East European communists egged each other on, with Hungary's show trial of its foreign minister László Rajk in 1949 providing a template that could be applied across the bloc. The system of surveillance and punishment by which the regimes disciplined their unruly societies was in fact diffuse and cannot be simply traced to Moscow.

As the Soviet bloc underwent abrupt course changes between 1945 and 1956, cohorts of security officers whose intakes were separated by only a few months or years suddenly found themselves locked in rivalry. The impeccably loyal men who built the services were arrested and brutalized after 1949 by ruthless new recruits, some of whom would in turn be scapegoated for the excesses of Stalinism during Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw, while others would serve until quiet retirement decades later.

If such switchbacks of fate seemed bewildering at the time, they also make for overwhelming reading. Fortunately, Molly Pucci's conclusion provides an astute perspective on the longer-term legacy of the services' founding years. Today, as in the past, security services rarely confine their policing efforts to a single unpopular, marginal group - say, the German minority of Poland or Czechoslovakia that initially drew those regimes' wrath after the war's end. Instead, they go looking for other targets to justify the expanse and expense of their organization. As many communists learned, it can be very hard to switch off terror once it has been set in motion. ■

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Greetings and warnings from the north

The relationship of people to the land in the Arctic - and how it is under threat

NANCY CAMPBELL

IN WHAT WAS DUE to be the final week of *Arctic: Culture and climate* at the British Museum, a news item appeared in the *Barents Observer*, the global significance of which was almost lost amid coverage of the pandemic. A Russian icebreaker had made the first transit of the Northern Sea Route between China and Yamal in February, confirming that there was no multi-year ice left on these waters. The ice, which historically cut off the circumpolar regions of Greenland, Canada, Alaska, Russia and parts of Scandinavia from European shipping, and imperilled explorers who sought passage through these seas, forms not a barrier but a bridge for indigenous peoples, who have made warm and hospitable homelands out of this ecosystem for over 30,000 years. The sea ice represents nourishment, shelter and connection for the 4 million people who inhabit the Arctic today.

Some of these contemporary polar voices could be heard in *Arctic*, which its lead curators, Jago Cooper and Amber Lincoln, described as a “collaboration” with hunters, herders, scholars, political advisers, seamstresses and storytellers in the north. While commercial shipping may benefit from the loss of sea ice, the museum has partnered with organizations addressing the human consequences, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council, and the Erosion and Site Expansion Coalition in Shishmaref, Alaska, where unprecedented storms are eroding coastlines and destroying homes. Thresholds are important in the circumpolar north; the doorway, rarely locked, is the place to shout a greeting or a warning. Arriving at the Sainsbury Gallery from the museum’s rotunda, that microcosm of the globe, visitors found themselves in a small circular gallery reminiscent of other architectures - the snow *iglu* of the Inuit or the reindeer-hide *chum* of the Nenets. The floor was covered in a map, with the North Pole at the centre, not at the “remote” edge where those from elsewhere too often perceive it to be.

I visited in November, the day before the museum closed for lockdown, and the map was obscured by the footwear of warmly-dressed visitors. Their bodies were mirrored in the vitrines by those of

mannequins that modelled clothing from the Sami, Inuit, Chukchi and other ethnic groups of the circumpolar north. A heavy cloak of reindeer skin decorated with iron and copper plates, imbued with spirits for assistance and protection; this, and a reindeer-skin drum belonged to a shaman of the Evenki of Central Siberia (the term is from Evenki *šamán*, “one who knows”). From the ancestral homelands of the Gwich’in in the taiga forests of North America, comes a caribou-hide summer outfit, fringed with porcupine quills. A pair of snow goggles from Russia, a band of reindeer skin to cover the eyes, with a narrow incision to see through. These were worn on long journeys in the hope that they would be enough to prevent the sun’s glare from damaging the retina and causing snow blindness.

The lighting shifted continuously through the spectrum of polar twilight from indigo to mauve, and tinted a sloping ice-white dais which ran the length of the main gallery and on which were displayed the kayaks, sleds and skidoos that traverse the region’s vast expanses. At the furthest point, or horizon, stood what might be taken for a cairn. The *inukshuk* is “a voiceless land marker”, an enigmatic stone figure which identifies a place of cultural significance, or a seasonal hunting or fishing area. This “Silent Messenger” was commissioned for the show as a means of connecting London and the Arctic. The artist Piita Irniq (b. 1947) knows “what kind of an inukshuk it’s going to be” by listening to the stone, whether basalt from his home in Repulse Bay, Nunavut, or (in this case) pale ragstone quarried in Kent.

The empathy with materials from the land, seen in the work of Irniq, is historically evident in artefacts from the sea: walrus ivory and relic whalebone. In a place of sparse materials, all parts of the animal were employed in innovative and sophisticated ways, making everything from kayaks to drums to buckets to boots to fishing lines. A series of four snug rooms, in which installations were constructed with elements of rusted metal and weathered wood, nested off the edge of the main gallery like temporary dwellings on the ice shelf. In one, the dim lighting shone golden through a vast nineteenth-century sail sewn entirely from translucent gut-skin, brittle as a chrysalis. An exquisite Yup’ik bag over a century old is patched together from

“*Umiaq and north wind during spring whaling*”, by Kiliiii Yüyan

“**‘Oh boy! That messed everything up!’ the Inupiat Elder Delano Bar says ... ‘It’s still summertime in October’**”

Nancy Campbell’s most recent book is The Library of Ice: Readings from a cold climate, 2018

salmon skin, with caribou throat fur embroidery, and detail of seal oesophagus skin. The people who made these valuable and beautiful artefacts believed they had an obligation to use the animal in a respectful manner, making the most of the gift of its life. A reindeer’s foot becomes a spoon, birch-bark and reindeer fur combine to form a saddlebag, a small sealskin transforms into a map on which the vast outline of the Bering Strait has been painted. In a self-referential touch that underscores the cycle of materials, in the centre of the yellowed skin a man is standing, harpooning a seal at its breathing hole. A three-masted ship is also visible, making this map a record of Europeans coming to the region in the 1850s and 1860s.

The long history of encounter was introduced with sixteenth-century colour lithographs depicting Martin Frobisher’s violence towards Inuit people (titled “Englishmen in a skirmish with eskimos”) in the pursuit of land and gold for Elizabeth I. More recently, printmaking has emerged as a deeply political medium in the north, in the graphic work of artists such as Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) whose deadpan and candid representations of contemporary life in Cape Dorset, Nunavut reference painkillers, domestic violence, supermarkets and TV shows. During the 1950s and 60s, Arctic Peoples in Canada were placed in administrative villages; Pootoogook’s “Interior and Exterior” (2003) recalls her impressions of growing up in a modest pre-fabricated dwelling in the settlement of Kingait. Conveniences like running water and electricity made life easier, but loss of life on the land and generations of colonial rule have caused widespread addiction and depression. Pootoogook responded to this complex legacy by depicting kitchen cabinets and snowmobiles in the luminous rose and blue tones more commonly associated with polar skies and ice. These colours still shine out, in a more idealistic vision of Arctic life, from Bryan Adams’s (b. 1985) monumental lightbox photographs from the series “I am Inuit”, which depict the continuation of traditional activities like tomcod fishing and the preparation of *mumtuk*, frozen whale skin and blubber. The traditional cycle of seasons is presented in the circular lithograph “Nunavut Qajanartuk” (“Our beautiful land”, 1992) by Kenojuak Ashevak, in which tiny

vignettes - of polar bears and owls, summer tents and winter *iglu* - surround a sun and moon. Ashevak's polar wreath was commissioned to commemorate the Inuit Land Claim Agreement of 1990, which created the Canadian province of Nunavut in a significant moment for indigenous rights.

Short film interviews (a particularly apt medium for communicating cultures in which the oral tradition is still often vital) were presented on small screens embedded on the ice dais, close to the relevant artefacts, over which the visitor could peer as if looking deep into a seal's breathing hole. In one such film, playing on a loop alongside his "Messenger", Irniq describes the *inukshuk* as a symbol of human resilience: "When I am around inuksuk I am never scared because I know my ancestors survived here for thousands of years and will continue to survive for thousands more." What might preclude survival now? The region has long been characterized by mutability: the ice edge forms an unfixed boundary between land and sea, glaciers advance and retreat, animals migrate, and daylight hours diminish to zero in winter. But traditional knowledge of the seasons has been disrupted by global climate change. "Oh boy! That messed everything up!" the Inupiat Elder Delano Bar says, in another two-minute video, filmed at his home in Shishmaref, Alaska against a backdrop of oil-cans and laundry, the bric-a-brac of the contemporary hunter. "It's still summertime in October."

Continued survival is dependent on the adaption



An *inukshuk* by Piita Irniq

and flexibility which has always been evident in Arctic cultures. The ice shelf supports a sled, its driftwood struts split from bumping over sastrugi, repaired over and over with rawhide straps and antler splints. The wooden frame of kayaks and umiaks was designed to mimic the skeletons of sea mammals, and covered with the skins of those same animals. The form of the vessel works with the sea-

water rather than against it. Humans are an integrated part of the ecosystem; it is widely believed that animals would choose to be caught by a hunter they respected. Hunting tools operate at the boundary between human and animal: with a seal scratcher (resembling a back scratcher made with seal's claws) the hunter emulates the sound of a seal moving over the snow, to disguise their approach. Yup'ik and Inupiat ("people of the whales") use harpoons with a whale-shaped point to charm the animal. The short documentary film *Anaiyyun, prayer for a whale* (2017, directed by the distinguished photographer Kiliü Yüyan) records the celebration - dancing and praying - of the nourishment provided by a single bowhead whale in the Utqiagvik community, a ritual which demonstrates deep respect for the creature.

I was among the last to leave the galleries before the lights were dimmed. Suspended from the ceiling at the exit, like birds in flight, were ten translucent *silapaas*, thin parkas made from fragile Japanese paper. An Embassy of Imagination project, these garments were painted with images of a transforming world by schoolchildren in Cape Dorset, Nunavut. The parkas suggest a point at which tradition might meet the future, and how the resilience of historic Arctic peoples might teach us how to live with catastrophic climate crisis. ■

Videos and images from Arctic: Culture and climate are available at britishmuseum.org

Reggae culture at its peak

A portrait of a vibrant, troubled Kingston in the 1970s

IAN THOMSON

ROCKERS

The making of reggae's most iconic film

TED BAFALOUKOS

315pp. Ginko Press. £59.99.

JAMAICAN POPULAR MUSIC would not have flourished in the 1960s and 70s without the presence of Studio One. Situated on Kingston's Brentford Road, the recording studio was set up in 1963 by Clement "Sir Coxsone" Dodd, the Jamaican jazz enthusiast who took his nickname from the Yorkshire cricketer Alec Coxon. From his sound-proofed rooms with their linoleum floors, Sir Coxsone (sometimes spelled "Coxon" or "Coxson") helped to launch the careers of, among others, Desmond Dekker, Alton Ellis, the organist Jackie Mittoo and the late Toots Hibbert of the Maytals. Studio One was the foundation label of Jamaican reggae.

No film did more to advertise the Studio One sound than *The Harder They Come*. Jamaica's first (and still finest) home-grown film, it was released in 1972 with the reggae singer Jimmy Cliff in the role of the country boy Ivan Martin, who becomes a Robin Hood-like outlaw amid the ganja-yards and urban alleys of downtown Kingston. The film's director Perry Henzell, a white Jamaican who had been sent to board at Sherborne school in England, was self-confessedly influenced by the gritty "news-reel" school of Italian neo-realism (*Bicycle Thieves*, *Obsession*), which aimed for a documentary immediacy off the street. The soundtrack, assembled by



Eric Clarke, LeRoy "Horsemouth" Wallace, Bongo Herman and Theophilus "Easy Snapping" Beckford, in *Rockers*

Henzell in under a week, effectively introduced reggae to white college audiences abroad. Without the soundtrack album, it is fair to say, reggae would not have taken hold outside Jamaica in the way it did. Fashionable dinner parties in mid-1970s Britain often had a Studio One musical accompaniment in the Maytals' "Pressure Drop", Desmond Dekker's "007 (Shanty Town)" and other hits from the soundtrack. Henzell's film paved the way for Bob Marley's success in Britain soon after.

Theodoros "Ted" Bafaloukos, a New York-based photographer, screenwriter and director, was so impressed by *The Harder They Come* when he saw it in New York in the 1970s that he decided to make a reggae film of his own. *Rockers* premiered at the San Francisco Film Festival in 1978. Filmed in Jamaica at a time of murderous gang warfare and political upheaval, Bafaloukos's film was originally intended to be a documentary, but it soon became a full-length feature that starred a number of well-known reggae singers and musicians, among them the drummer Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace, Winston Rodney of Burning Spear, Gregory Isaacs, Big Youth and Jacob Miller. In the spirit of neo-realism, no professional actors were used. Made on a budget of \$250,000, *Rockers* showed reggae culture at its

peak before DJ-based dancehall music (the digitalized reggae that Jamaicans sometimes call "ragga") introduced computerized keyboards and pre-set drum machines.

A diehard "reggaeophile", Bafaloukos first visited Jamaica in 1975 in his capacity as photographer. "Something was going on in Jamaica", he writes in *Rockers: The making of reggae's most iconic film*. "I wanted to know. I wanted to go there and see for myself". The book contains previously unseen photographs taken by Bafaloukos in both Jamaica and New York's Jamaican quarters. The accompanying text, a hybrid of reportage and memoir, was written by Bafaloukos in 2005. In 2016, at the age of seventy, Bafaloukos died. Fortunately the typescript found its way to the French reggae historian Seb Carayol, who urged publication. From start to finish, *Rockers* engages with its warm good humour and razor-sharp observation. A fine writer, Bafaloukos introduces us to the Kingston melodica-player Augustus Pablo, whose great studio album *King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown* (1976) provided Bafaloukos with a title for his film. In pages of vivid prose, Bafaloukos describes the petrol-fumed traffic of Kingston and the zinc-fenced shanties downtown, where Rastafarians preached an Afro-centric politics of redemption and the wickedness of the white man.

With its righteous spirituality, 1970s reggae offered hope of deliverance to poor, "downpressed" Jamaicans and encouraged a generation of British-born black West Indians to confront a part of their heritage - Africa - that their parents had often shunned. With his adored Leica camera ("a small black miracle of German engineering"), Bafaloukos photographed revivalist Baptist preachers, Kingston market women, and nattily-dressed youths in their tracksuits and Rasta tams. He called on Bob Marley at his Kingston home on Hope Road, where a group of hangers-on accused him of being a CIA spy and reduced him to tears of frustration. Steel-helmeted soldiers were seen to patrol the political borderlines downtown. Only music had the power to "unite" the Jamaican people, Bafaloukos seems to be saying. The incantatory qualities of the engineer-producer King Tubby's dub reggae ("The bass, maxing out, is like a lazy jackhammer") is vividly conveyed. Bafaloukos photographed the little wood shacks and shops selling reggae vinyl along Kingston's Orange Street, while the city's torrid, hothouse decay overwhelmed. This is an altogether fascinating book. ■

Ian Thomson's books include *The Dead Yard: Tales of modern Jamaica, 2009*. He is Senior Lecturer in Creative Non-Fiction at the University of East Anglia

Goodbye Kampala

Tales of moving on, in - and from - Uganda

JEROME BOYD MAUNSELL

THE FIRST WOMAN

JENNIFER NANSUBUGA MAKUMBI

448pp. Oneworld. £16.99.

KOLOLO HILL

NEEMA SHAH

352pp. Picador. £14.99.

WE ARE ALL BIRDS OF UGANDA

HAFSA ZAYYAN

384pp. Merky. £14.99.

THE FIRST WOMAN - Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's second novel - opens in Uganda in the 1970s. In the small village of Nattetta in Bugerere county, on the wall of a shop, there is only one picture of President Idi Amin on display, surveying the sacks of dried beans, rice and flour, the pancakes and samosas on the counter. "Recently, women had stopped cursing it when they came to buy things, because walls had grown ears." Amin has been in power for several years, since the military coup in 1971.

Makumbi's main character, Kirabo, is twelve at the outset, and motherless. She doesn't even know her mother's name. In Nattetta, she is brought up by her grandparents and, less so, by her young, slightly errant father, Tom, who works for the Coffee Marketing Board in Kampala. Whenever she asks who her mother is, the family denies all knowledge "in that never-mind way of large families". But Kirabo's curiosity grows and grows, as she uncovers ever more of what becomes an intricate web of half-concealed family history. Overheard conversations in the village initially provide much of her information, alongside her visits to the village witch, Nsuuta.

Where Makumbi's first novel, *Kintu* (TLS, February 23, 2018) crossed several centuries in its retellings of Ugandan myth and folklore, reaching back to 1750, the time span in *The First Woman* is tighter - though a long, wonderful late-middle section diverges from Kirabo's life to the story of her grandparents and Nsuuta in the 1930s and 40s, which gives the reader a glimpse of pre-Christian traditions (and polygamy) in rural Uganda. As in *Kintu*, a supplementary cast list comes in very handy as the relationships proliferate. But the essential point of view remains that of Kirabo, as we follow her through her teenage years into the 1980s. Early on, she falls for a boy, Sio, before she has to leave Nattetta for Kampala to live with her father. There she discovers that Tom has two other, younger children. Her stepmother is extremely unwelcoming. "In Kampala, a child belonged in her parents' home. The way she saw things, she could never have a home in that sense." Kirabo is packed off to a girls' boarding school, several hours drive from the capital.

The First Woman feels more joyful and intimate than *Kintu*; Makumbi revels in the female perspective of this unusual, richly detailed coming-of-age story. In Nattetta, Nsuuta tells Kirabo about the myths of "the first woman". Women were once "huge, strong, bold, loud, proud, brave, independent. But it was too much for the world and they got rid of it". "We began to persecute our original state out of ourselves." She also warns Kirabo about



Idi Amin attending a military parade, accompanied by his wife. c.1979

kweluma, "when oppressed people turn on each other or on themselves and bite": "the day you catch your man with another woman, you will go for the woman and not him". Makumbi twists the motif of "the first woman" as the novel continues. At boarding school, Kirabo learns from Sister Ambrose that "the first woman lawyer, doctor, the first woman minister, the first woman pilot in Uganda were old girls. When she said the school would produce the first woman president of Uganda, everyone laughed". In yet another twist, the novel's love plots turn on which of two women was the first, and most important, in a man's affections.

Amin's regime creeps in around the edges. By Christmas 1978, even with Kirabo sheltered away at boarding school, political matters encroach more explicitly, with some of her classmates' families going "on the run", and with "the prevalent disappearance and murders of fathers". Sio's father is among the disappeared, though "no one mentioned the word *abduction*". As the story moves through Uganda's war with Tanzania, and the change of regime after Amin is ousted in 1979, Makumbi keeps it all in the background; we only witness things unravelling as Kirabo does, incompletely. All the same, the massacre of so many Ugandans under Amin, when "houses became deathtraps at night", still haunts these pages.

In Neema Shah's debut novel, *Kololo Hill*, Amin's expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972 is pivotal. The loss of home, on this account, is brutally institutionalized by political decree. Shah closely depicts a small family unit of Ugandan Asians: the married couple Asha and Pran; Pran's brother Vijay; and Jaya, the boys' mother, who came to Uganda from Gujarat. Pran and Vijay work in the family "dukan", or general store. They all live in Kampala, in the enclave of Kololo Hill, where fortune is almost topographically stratified:

Your place on the hill was directly connected to your wealth, with the richest at the very top. Below them all, the poorest Asians lived in cramped old apartment blocks and crumbling houses, and at the foot of the hill were the cement blocks and corrugated-iron roofs where many of the black Ugandans lived.

As the novel opens, Amin's soldiers are a constant presence in the streets, accompanied by the sound of night-time gunfire. Kampala is under curfew. When Amin declares that Ugandan Asians have "ninety days to pack up and go", the family, Pran especially, can't really believe it: "they can't just throw us out of the country we were born in". They are forced to split up, as Asha, Vijay and Jaya depart for England, where the second half of the

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Amin's soldiers are a constant presence in the streets, accompanied by the sound of night-time gunfire

Jerome Boyd Maunsell is the author of Susan Sontag, 2014, and Portraits from Life: Modernist novelists and autobiography, 2018

novel unfolds. Pran, without a British passport, plans to go to India separately. In 1970s England, the odd uprooted trio, stripped of nearly all their possessions in their exodus, try to assimilate, settling in a North London far from the "magnolia trees, the white houses and terracotta rooftops" of their former home. Here they find another divided society, seared by different faultlines of race and wealth. *Kololo Hill* asks some hard questions about identity, society and belonging, both in the Ugandan and British contexts, and Shah writes in clear and direct prose that is nonetheless full of subtle moral ambiguities.

Another debut, Hafsa Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda*, the winner of the first #Merky New Writers' Prize, tackles similar themes from different generational perspectives, and takes us into the twenty-first century. Zayyan's central character Sameer, a city lawyer in his mid-twenties, is the son of East African Asians: his father came to Leicester from Uganda as a twelve-year-old in the early 1970s. Sameer's parents have prospered in Britain, running a chain of restaurants called Kampala Nights. His own trajectory has propelled him from grammar school to Cambridge, then into "one of the top law firms in the world". But his life is marked by an emptiness and social anomie - not quite loneliness - which Zayyan conveys very well, along with his sense of the constraints of family security and his ambivalence towards his Muslim upbringing. For all Sameer's academic success, his parents still expect him to help with the family business. But Sameer, offered an attractive position in Singapore by the law firm, is torn, wishing that "his decisions - London or Singapore, Leicester or London, lawyer or businessman - did not have to feel like sacrifices".

Zayyan alternates chapters about Sameer with another narrative thread that, as in Makumbi's account of Kirabo's grandparents in *The First Woman*, takes us into Uganda's deeper past, helping to reframe the novel's more contemporary events. Beginning in 1945, Hasan writes letters to his now-dead first wife Amira, on his second wedding night. Like Pran and Vijay in *Kololo Hill*, he runs a "duka" in Kampala - in this case a shop and tailoring service, Saeed and Sons. His father came to East Africa from Gujarat in the early 1900s, but Hasan was born in Uganda and has never been to India. His interweaving letters sweep forwards through the 1950s and 60s, telling of the worsening situation for Ugandan Asians long before Amin took power. Hasan fears independence; and as colonial power wanes, Africans begin to boycott Asian shops. Hasan becomes stateless, with neither Ugandan nor British (nor Indian) citizenship.

The account of the microaggressions, assumptions and physical violence of racial prejudice is particularly well handled by Zayyan in both narratives, and this is complicated by Hasan's prejudices, which become increasingly apparent, for example, in his opinions on interracial marriage. In the contemporary strand, Sameer's friend Rahool is the victim of a racially motivated attack in Leicester, and falls into a coma, while in Uganda in the 1970s all business and property is seized from Ugandan Asians by Amin. Zayyan's depiction of the tension between African and Asian Ugandans feels especially acute. When her story reaches contemporary Uganda itself, though, the prose and plotting wobble, even as her two narratives connect. In the second half, Sameer decides to visit Kampala rather than go to Singapore. Guided by Google Maps, he walks to his family's old house in the capital.

We have come full circle - a conclusion that is in some ways extremely satisfying, though it does leave many matters somewhat frustratingly unresolved. Sameer, in Kampala, feels almost like a stranger repeating mistakes in "a country to which he doesn't belong". Familial and political betrayals and affinities from years ago still resonate, never quite forgotten, in this thematically bold, fresh and thought-provoking novel, which nevertheless provides a glimmer of hope for the future. ■

Sow, reap, destroy

A tangled past disturbs the idyll of rural life

ALICE JOLLY

HARVEST
GEORGINA HARDING
 204pp. Bloomsbury. £16.99.



WE TEND TO AGREE that the aftermath of trauma often cannot adequately be explained in words but how, then, can the literature of trauma achieve its effects? This question is central to the work of Georgina Harding. Her new novel *Harvest* concludes a cycle of three books which started with *The Gun Room* (2016) and was followed by *Land of the Living* (TLS, November 23, 2018).

All three books focus on the same family, and circle around the same central events, but there is no consistent chronology and they do not need to be read in order. This latest one takes place on a Norfolk farm in the 1970s. Richard runs the place with his widowed mother Claire. His younger brother Jonathan has been working as a war photographer in Vietnam. When Jonathan returns to the farm he brings his Japanese girlfriend with him.

Initially, the girl's visit seems to reanimate the sleepy life on the farm. Claire looks at her and wonders whether she herself "had ever been so free" but soon the girl's presence reopens unhealed wounds. Although this rural life may appear idyllic, "the

petals spoil and begin to rot even in the bud". The power of a tangled past is suggested by "the anaemic whiteness of bindweed drawn up endlessly from deep underground".

Questions are opened up about the boys' father, Charlie, who is "still present in all of them". Claire remembers her husband as "a man who did not speak" and is mystified that he could have "sown and not stayed to see his seeds grow". Charlie was once a prisoner of war and Claire has allowed herself "to blame it on the Japs", but she admits that there was always "some silent weight in him ... ugly and intractable".

Claire is beautifully drawn in her permanent, peaceful bemusement. Other continents, cultures and characters cannot be imagined by her; gender is a bridge that can never be crossed. As children, her sons would say, "Don't listen, Mummy, these are boy's stories. They won't work if you listen". Even the seasons are gendered: "Summer wasn't hers. It was theirs, the men's". Claire feels that it is her role to say "trivial kinds of things which required no

answer". Such talk is "a kind of oil a woman offered ... that smoothed the days". She worries that "there is nothing at the end to show for it but only what hadn't happened, the frictions and breakages that had never occurred".

As the harvest draws closer, vivid descriptions of landscape illuminate the troubled family dynamics. Claire's domain is the garden, which she created in the difficult early years of her marriage. "Bounded by the hedges which she herself had planted" she is shielded from "the wide empty space beyond". But the farm is ruled by the silent and watchful Richard. While Claire tenderly ties back her roses, the advance of modern farming techniques come to seem "like a kind of violence". As a boy, Richard protested about the selling of his father's herd, but soon he is pulling down the old cart shed and ripping up hedges. "A farmer could not afford to be sentimental about his land."

Jonathan initially seems to bring light and life to this brooding, silent world but, like his father, he is inhabited by the endless restlessness of those who have left and returned. The limits of his own craft also trouble him. He worries that photographs only capture surfaces, "never who we are". He is both critical of Richard and envious. "There was something so solid, real, about Richard and his work." To Jonathan, Richard's world is glorious in its simplicity. "He saw what he saw, a plain world, he didn't have anything hidden." But Jonathan has failed to understand something crucial: Richard's awareness that "a steady man is not always steady". And as the older brother comes under pressure, frictions and breakages can no longer be avoided. Claire must admit that they "were cowards, all of them".

Harvest is an old-fashioned novel in the best possible sense - small, intricate, quiet in its dramas, its revelations partial. The reader must excavate rather than receive, take soundings rather than seek for certainties. The rewards are many. The heartbeat of the book continues to echo long after the last page has been turned. ■

Alice Jolly's novel *Mary Ann Sate, Imbecile* was runner up for the *Rathbones Folio Prize* in 2019

A mother's lies

A novelist with a keen eye for how things fall apart

KATE McLOUGHLIN

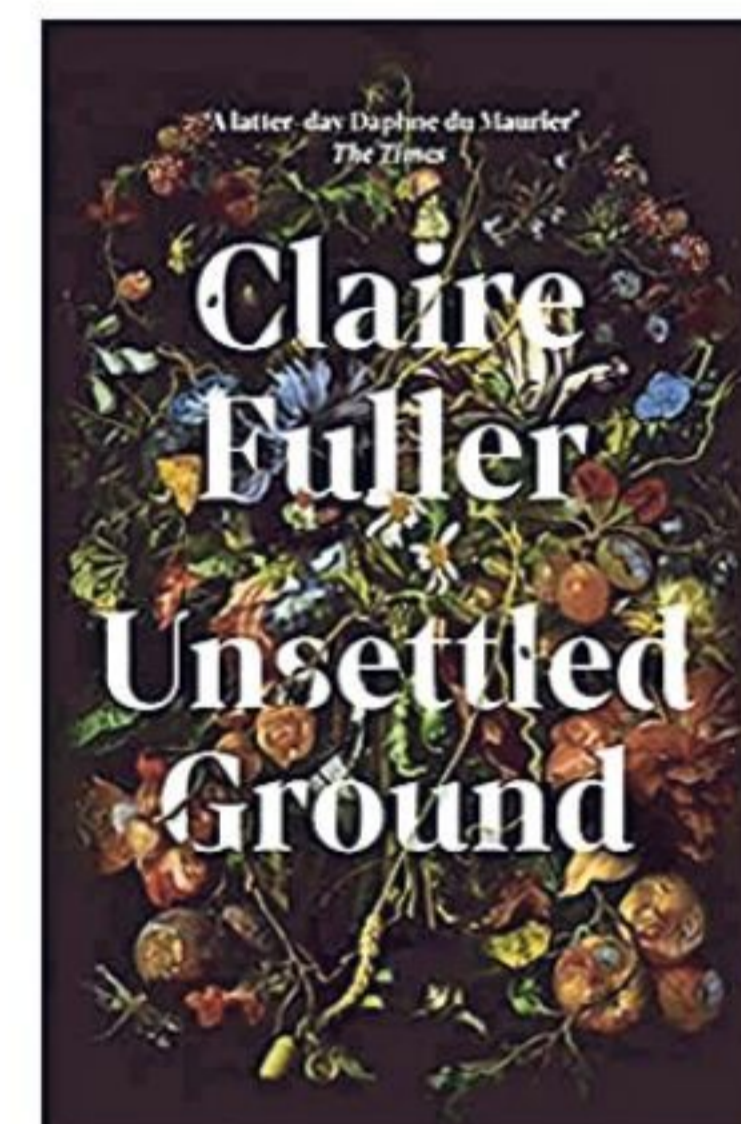
UNSETTLED GROUND
CLAIRE FULLER
 304pp. Fig Tree. £14.99.

PARENTS LIE. They tell small lies and big lies - sometimes so big that a grown-up child's entire life can turn out to have been based on a falsehood. Parents also go missing. Some die, some walk away without explanation, and their absences, too, are lies of a kind that have a malevolent influence on their children's futures. Parental lies, absences and manipulation are Claire Fuller's speciality. In her first novel, *Our Endless Numbered Days* (2015), a survivalist father convinces his young daughter that the entire world has been destroyed, except for the patch in the Bavarian forest in which he forces her to live with him for nine years. In her latest, *Unsettled Ground*, a mother's lies keep her children at home until they are in their fifties, fettered by the myths she has fed them.

Fuller's novels are ambitious. Making those nine years in the forest credible was a technical challenge that she brought off with extraordinary vividness. *Unsettled Ground* takes on other singular existences with equal adroitness. The fifty-one-year-old twins Julius and Jeanie Seeder still live with their mother Dot in a rundown Wiltshire cottage, growing their own vegetables and playing folk music

together. Their father Frank was killed in a tractor accident when they were twelve, and they believe the supplier of the tractor, the cottage's owner Spencer Rawson, to be responsible for his death because the vehicle's hitch-pins turned out to be faulty. Their mother, they understand, came to an arrangement with Rawson to allow them to live in the cottage rent-free in exchange for not bringing legal action against him. Dot's death in the first chapter requires all this to be revisited.

As in her other novels, Fuller explores what founding myths look like from other perspectives. Her understanding of the stories we tell ourselves in order to keep going, of the details we see but refuse to look at, allows her to produce complex, layered fictions that teach readers to be wary. Here, the treacheries of telling underpin a novel that makes the texture of poverty and homelessness palpable. If you can't read and can't drive and can't afford a taxi and the volunteer driver from the hospital-visiting charity can't do afternoons, what do you do when the doctor can only discuss your comatose brother's case after lunch? If you can't charge your mobile phone when you're working as a temporary milker because everyone's got their eye on you, how do you phone for help when local louts come round threatening? We watch Jeanie in the village shop deliberating between buying washing-up liquid and toilet paper because she only has enough money for one of them, and plumping for the former because it does for soap, detergent and shampoo and you can always use old newspaper for the latter.



A sculptor by training, Fuller has a keen eye for how things fall apart. Ruinous living is a theme in all her novels: there is the forest cabin in *Our Endless Numbered Days*, the swimming pavilion in *Swimming Lessons* (TLS, May 5, 2017), the crumbling old manor in *Bitter Orange* (2018). In *Unsettled Ground* there is the ramshackle cottage, but even this appears palatial once Jeanie and Julius have been forced to move to a dilapidated caravan. Here are horrors: the workman's glove left in the sink that looks like a severed burnt hand, the "four tiny pink creatures" that fall out of a splitting cushion, gobbled up in an instant by the dog. These derelict dwellings are not romanticized. Julius and Jeanie are cold, scared and uncomfortable. But ruination is also the scene of patching up, as Fuller's characters deploy their skills of brushing, mending, sewing and painting. The same goes for parental manipulation. In *Unsettled Ground*, it is only when the big lie is revealed that renovation can commence. ■

THE EDWIN MELLEEN PRESS

One Hundred Poems by
Shizue Ozawa

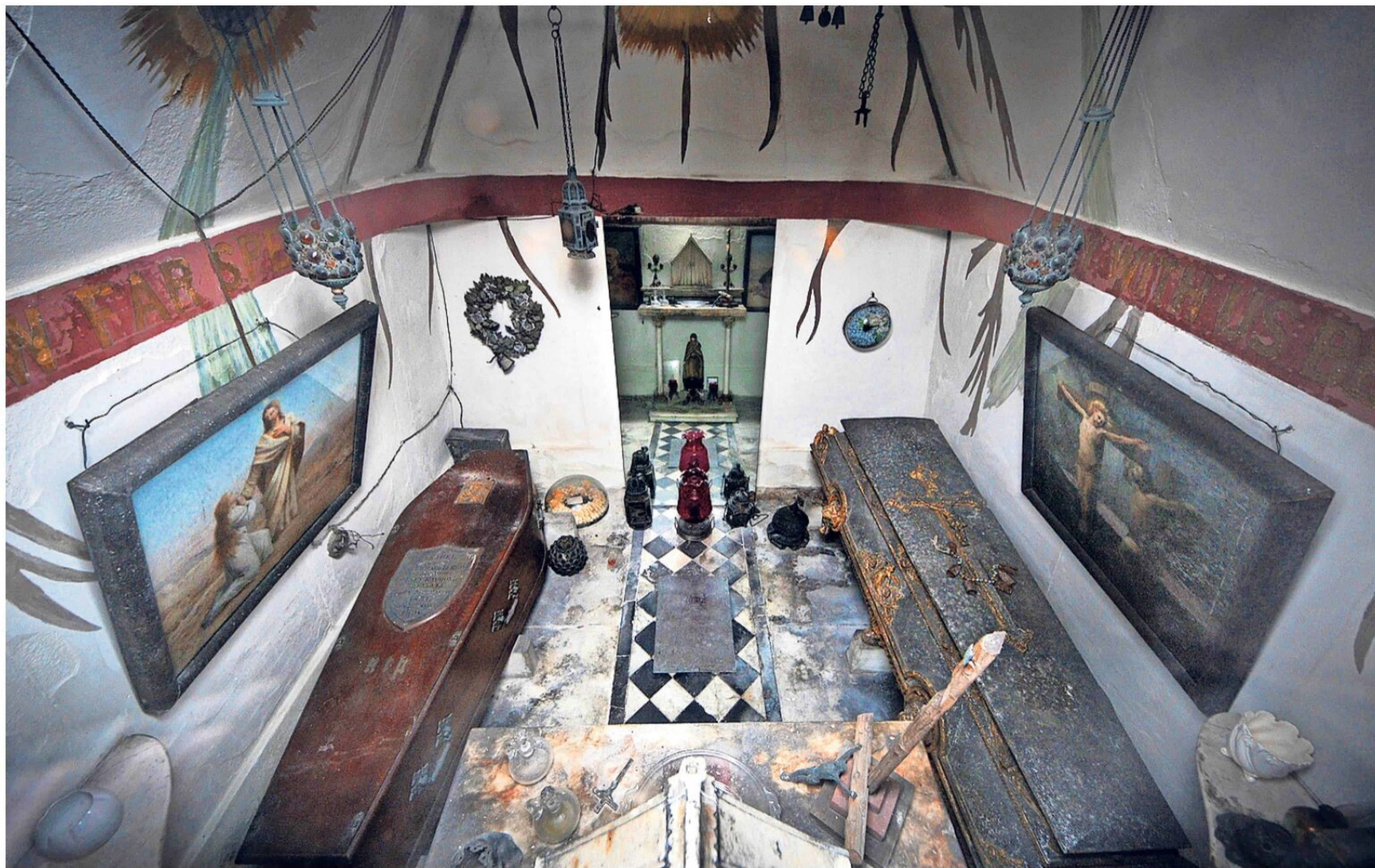
by

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 Bristol University
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Kate McLoughlin is a Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Harris Manchester College. She is currently writing a literary history of silence, funded by the Leverhulme Trust



The man who let the genie out

Richard Burton's radical, 'uncastrated' version of the *Thousand and One Nights*

RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN

IN HIS INTRICATE NOVEL *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami has his hero Kafka ponder his experiences with the *Thousand and One Nights*: The Burton edition has all the stories I remember reading as a child, but they're longer, with more episodes and plot twists, and so much more absorbing that it's hard to believe they're the same. They're full of obscene, violent, sexual, basically outrageous scenes. Like the genie in the bottle they have this sort of vital, living sense of play, of freedom, that common sense can't keep bottled up ... Slowly, like a movie fadeout, the real world evaporates. I'm alone, inside the world of the story. My favourite feeling in the world.

It is hard not to read this brief meditation as a key statement by Murakami about the novel or perhaps even about his work as a whole. It indicates that the *Thousand and One Nights* permeates his novel as one of the main intertextual sources, and that there is a remarkable difference between the various translations. As his description of Burton's version shows, there is no such thing as an "innocent" translation.

Of course, Richard Burton, who was born in Torquay on March 19, 1821, and died in Trieste in 1890, was a controversial figure throughout his life. As a notorious diplomat, explorer, polyglot, erotologist and social critic, he stirred up trouble wherever he appeared; and although his translation of the *Nights* was well received by a select audience after it appeared in 1885-8, in sixteen volumes, it was from the outset beset by difficulties. It was published in a limited edition "for subscribers only" by the so-called Kama Shastra Society in Benares, to avoid censorship, and it was immediately banned in the United States. Burton was suspected of having plagiarized the version published by John Payne in 1882-4, a decent and elegant translation in Pre-Raphaelite style, probably based on a German translation. But it was above all Burton's uninhibited fixation on sexuality connected with a kind of primitive barbarity among "Orientals" which shocked sensitive Victorian minds.

In his procedures as a translator, Burton consciously distanced himself from his predecessors, especially the French translation of Antoine Galland,

which appeared between 1704 and 1717, and the English translation by Edward Lane, which appeared between 1838 and 1840, which were both heavily bowdlerized and purged of improprieties. He rejected these translations as "anaemic" and inauthentic; they failed to do justice to the red-blooded "temperament" of the Arabs. His "uncastrated" version would restore the work to its authentic rawness. He aimed to achieve this by accentuating and even extending passages of a potentially erotic purport, and imbuing the *Nights* with an image of the Arab as a "noble savage". To support this interpretation, he decided to invent an idiom which would represent the language of the Arabs as if English had been their mother tongue. The result is a strange and often bizarre outburst of archaisms, neologisms, barbarisms, arabisms and imitations of Arabic syntax, such as "despite the nose of thee" or "jolliest and joyousiest", combined with highly expressive similes. He also added a story of his own, titled "How Abu Hasan Brake Wind", and a large apparatus of footnotes and appendixes, mostly explaining erotic and anthropological details based on his own observations.

Burton's translation of the *Nights* has often been discarded as indigestible, obscene, racist or plainly bizarre, but it has always had its staunch admirers, too, and it has not failed to leave its imprint on the world of letters. The first significant author who was intrigued by it was James Joyce, whose work contains many references to the *Nights*. According to his notebooks, Joyce was reading Burton's translation while he was working on *Finnegans Wake*, and it seems plausible to surmise that he was especially attracted by Burton's suggestion that the English language could "contain" a completely different, exotic, language, which shimmered through it and produced a complex, perhaps sometimes even monstrous hybridity. It is attractive to think that Burton paved the way not only for a new sexual freedom explored by Joyce, as a response to Victorian restrictions, but also for his radical linguistic and stylistic experiment.

Another author who greatly appreciated Burton's *Nights* was Jorge Luis Borges, who in his famous essay "The Translators of the *Thousand and One Nights*" gave his assessment of the rich tradition of translations of the work. Borges here calls the *Nights* "the work of a thousand authors" - a kind of free-floating, amorphous cluster of writings - defying the accepted

The interior of the tomb of Sir Richard Francis Burton at St Mary Magdalen Roman Catholic Church, in Mortlake, England

“According to his notebooks, Joyce was reading Burton's translation while he was working on *Finnegans Wake*”

Richard van Leeuwen is Lecturer in Islamic and Arabic Studies at the University of Amsterdam. In 2020 he won a Sheikh Zayed Book Award for *The Thousand and One Nights in Twentieth-Century Literature: Intertextual readings, 2018*

conventions of literature. He praises Burton's version because of its "barbaric colour", which represents the genuine "ribald" taste of the Cairo middle classes in medieval times. He situates the translation in the tradition of Coleridge, De Quincey, Tennyson and Poe, as a semi-original work of literature rather than a translation, and sees its intentional subjectivity as an asset: Burton "recreated" the work to suit his literary ambitions. It was part of a conscious effort to immortalize himself and to create his own legend. Borges honours this legend by attributing a story to him apocryphally, titled "The Mirror of Ink".

The *Nights* in general, and Burton's translation more specifically, became foundational to Borges's oeuvre, mainly because it represented the dynamics of literary works as the driving force in the history of human civilization, and a portal to a world of mystery and magic. He was less interested in the erotic aspects of the work, but, inevitably, these did not remain unnoticed. Vladimir Nabokov, for instance, refers to Burton's *Nights* in his sultry novel *Ada, or Ardour* (an account of a juvenile, incestuous love affair, which Burton would certainly have relished). Burton's *Nights* figures here as a source of erotic fantasies, together with his translation of *The Perfumed Garden*, Shaykh Nafzawi's explicit literary guide to Arabic erotic practices from the fifteenth century. Other references to the *Nights* and to the Orient more generally add to the sensual overtones of Nabokov's story, and these are, in turn, reinforced by the use of eccentric words and wordplay reminiscent of Burton's linguistic hybridity.

If we look at "the other side", among Arabic literati we find an ardent admirer of Burton in the Lebanese author Ameen Rihani, who lived for most of his life in the US and was one of the prominent figures of Arabic literature in the diaspora. In the 1930s Rihani wrote a number of essays about the *Thousand and One Nights* in which he compared the different translations. He was enchanted by Burton to such an extent that, while reading his *Nights*, he "felt and often enjoyed the companionship of a mountain stream. [Burton] tumbles, rushes, coruscates, but seldom smoothly flows. In the printed page, as even in his life, the crags jut out, the cascades gleam in the sun, and here and there, in hollow end cove, are beautiful exotic flowers whose pungent perfume is borne upon the spray". For Rihani, Burton was the "scholar in spurs" who indefatigably strove to penetrate into the Oriental soul, even by putting his life at risk. At the end, however, and perhaps somewhat disappointingly and ironically, he prefers the less "pompous", but also "less faithful" translation by John Payne.

Burton has been the subject of numerous biographies and studies, and it seems that he has succeeded in transforming himself into a legend, as he intended, according to Borges. His person and work are still admired and despised, and a publication of his translation of the *Nights* now would probably be as controversial as it was in the 1880s. Even if the legend of him as an explorer and a social critic does fade away, by wriggling himself into the works of such distinguished authors as Joyce, Borges and Nabokov he has certainly secured an iconic place in literary history. Allusions to his person, his literary merits and his legacy are not confined to these influential authors, of course. John Barth dreamed of rewriting Burton's translation in the same way as Pierre Menard produced an exact copy of *Don Quixote* in the famous story by Borges. Unfortunately, Barth's work is only a faint echo of Scheherazade's tales.

Still, all these references to Burton show that his reputation is enduring and multifaceted. If a writer like Salman Rushdie has his protagonist Omar Khayyam in *Shame* state that he read Burton's *Nights* in his youth, immediately a Pandora's box of connotations is unlocked, relating to India's colonial past, British colonial discourses, cultural hybridity, sexual mores, cultural heritage and the intentional manipulation of narratives. If Burton is now no more than a legend, he is a legend epitomizing an age full of conflicts and contradictions, and it is to his credit that he succeeded in revealing these contradictions in their full intensity. ■

Sword play, sorcery and sexism

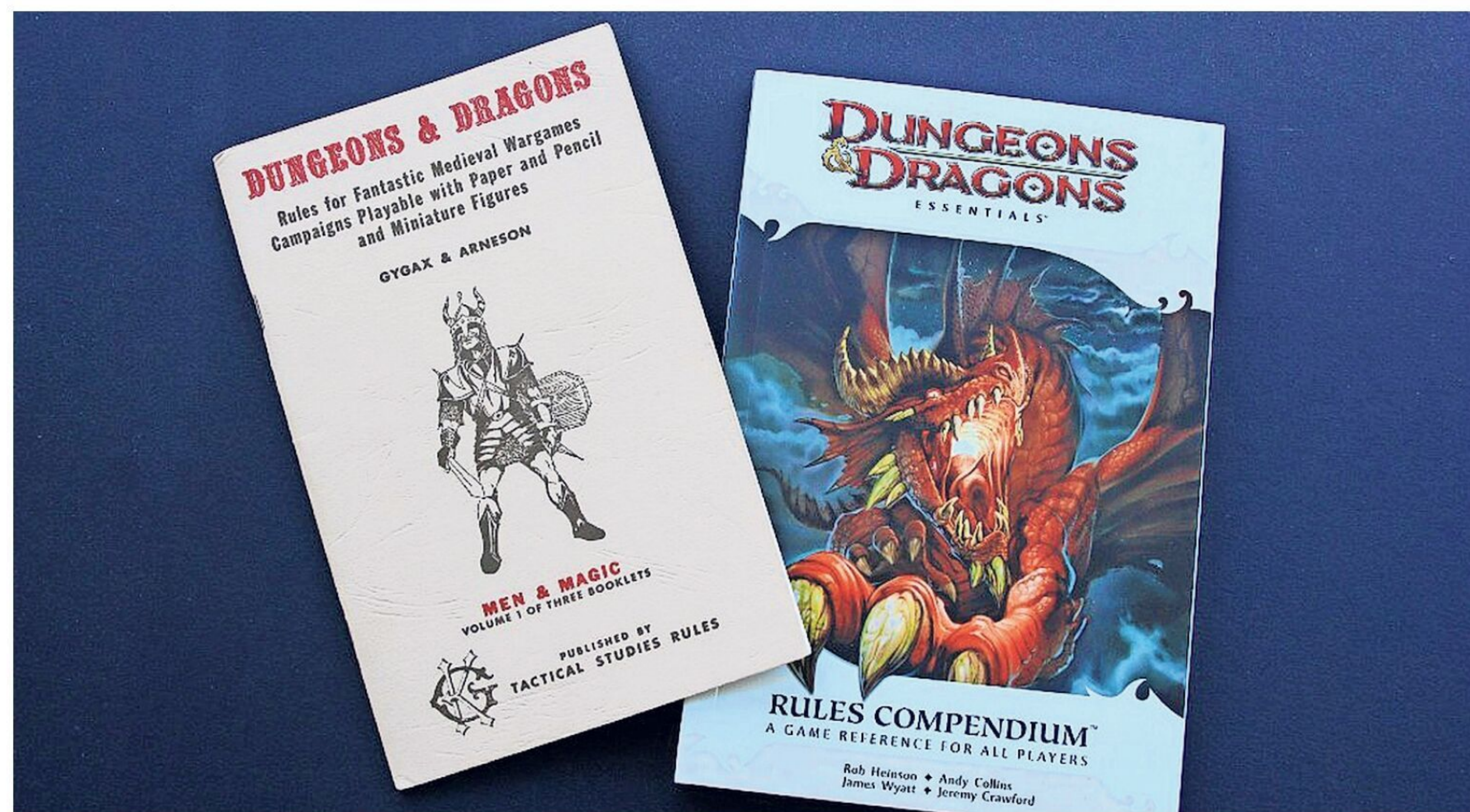
The literary origins of a widely popular game

CAMILLE RALPHS

APPENDIX N.

The eldritch roots of Dungeons & Dragons
PETER BEBERGAL, EDITOR

340pp. Strange Attractor Press. £15.99.



THERE WAS ME, that is Eggs (a gnome with priestly pretensions), and my three fellow player-adventurers, that is Big Baps (a peg-legged and concupiscent bard), But-Ur Gere (a thick-skulled, “dragonborn” monk) and Seamus the Corker (a bibulous wizard), and we were in the middle of a session of the tabletop game Dungeons & Dragons, trying to stay in our invented roles while working through a tricky situation. Our group’s “Dungeon Master” (the one neutral player who creates each scene and ancillary character) responded to our prayer for portents with embattled patience: “Your attempt to seduce the avatar of Death is unlikely to have a positive outcome”. In such moments, his omniscience seems more on-the-go than that of your typical supreme being. Might he, in fact, be using a set of wobbly pre-ordained blocks to lay the road of happening as he goes along?

The Dungeon Master is certainly more demiurge than deity. He fashions the playable world after an established gallimaufry of Ideas, embellishing it with his own concerns. As for what he draws on, Gary G. Gygax gave players, in the first edition of the *Dungeon Masters Guide* (1979), “Appendix N”: a list of science fiction and fantasy reading that inspired the game. The resource sadly vanished from later reissues. Recently, however, Peter Bebergal has recollected those materials, and a few extra world-recipes from David Moldvay’s “Inspirational Source Material”, in *Appendix N.: The eldritch roots of Dungeons & Dragons*.

In an informative but not overstuffed introduction, Bebergal illuminates how each anthologized work influenced the game’s conception. Lin Carter’s “How Sargoth Lay Siege to Zaremm” is “a minor masterpiece of set and setting for entering a state of role-playing consciousness”. H. P. Lovecraft’s unheimlich oeuvre spawned a number of D&D-like games (see also *Call of Cthulhu*); his “The Doom that Came to Sarnath” is included here as a nod to “the bizarre: liches and invisible stalkers, Goetic-like demons and intellect devourers, Cerebral Parasites and Thought Eaters”. Poul Anderson’s “The Tale of Hawk”, set in a Viking hamlet tormented by a divisive and undead king, demonstrates D&D’s confluence of “history and fantasy”. Clark Ashton Smith gives us the requisite “countless tombs and burial sites ... decadent nobles, foul sorcerers, desert nomads, and of course, necromancers”. “From out of the imagination of C. L. Moore, Gygax might not only have found the uncanny blend of sword and spiritual madness, but a heroine named Jirel” – to his credit, Gygax did state in the handbooks that player characters could be men or women.

Whether these works can be seen as influential in a purely literary sense is another matter. Lovecraft’s oleginous tentacles are undeniably still felt in contemporary horror and science fiction, and his writing’s uniqueness comes in part from its hammi-

ness – how it unpretentiously, unstylishly hauls ghouls from the human subconscious and marches them across a page. Ramsey Campbell’s “Pit of Wings” has something of this: Ryre, an itinerant swordsman, becomes involved in an altercation with a gang of slavers and is thrown into a charnel-smelling cave of monsters described as “wings ... the blotchy white of decay; between their bony fingers, skin fluttered lethargically as drowned sails ... but there was no body to speak of ... only a whitish rope of flesh thin as a child’s arm”. Each non-body turns out to be a thin mouth; one embeds itself in Ryle’s back and lifts him away, making him fly as it drains the life from him. There is a lot of dissonant “dry eager flapping” and “leathery fluttering sluggish and restless”, and for its imagery too this is the best story in the book: the “slow pallid emergence” of the men who drag Ryle to his fate reminds him of “worms dropping from a gap”.

Other pieces are more pedestrian. Lockdown insomniacs may be drawn to Michael Moorcock’s “Dreaming City”, which is so soporific that I fell asleep reading it three nights in a row. Margaret St. Clair offers another reality-fantasy blend with “The Man Who Sold Rope to the Gnoles”, which sees a salesman visit the senior gnole (“a little like a Jerusalem artichoke made of India rubber ... [with] small red eyes which are faceted in the same way that gemstones are”). The salesman realizes too late that “the gnole could not safely be assigned to any of the four physico-characterological types mentioned in the Manual”, and he is shortly “carried ... down to the cellar to the fattening pens”. This story is one of a couple exemplifying the main appeal of modern D&D: even the worst situations are darkly comical. In David Madison’s “Tower of Darkness”, the two adventurers, Marcus and Diana, debate whether they should return to Shazir:

“And my cousin Beatrice’s whorehouse, and we could have made it if you hadn’t spent half the morning nursing your hangover!”

“You picked out that foul wine, as I recall, and you can tell your fat cousin that if I ever wake up and find her in bed with me again, I’ll split her skull!” (NB: the second speaker is Diana.) Since slashing, bashing and bagging swag can now be actioned more realistically in digital games, D&D’s kriegsspiel slant has lessened, and an average session is now more akin to an improv skit or exercise in novelistic world-building – like a murder mystery party at the foot of Mt Doom. But *mêlées* and loot are still to be had, often acting as in-game McGuffins. As Fred Saberhagen’s “Song of Swords” suggests, a powerful possession often has power over its possessor (“The sword of wisdom lightens loads / But adds unto their risk”), although good luck can win out (“Who holds coinspinner knows good odds”). Unfortunately, “The Song of Swords” is so syntactically and metrically mangled it is hard to read (“Vengeance

Dungeons & Dragons, Vol. 1: Men & magic by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson; and *Rules Compendium: An essential Dungeons & Dragons compendium (4th Edition)* by James Wyatt

“
An average session is now like a murder mystery party at the foot of Mt Doom

Camille Ralphs is Poetry and Religion editor of the TLS

is his who casts the blade / Yet he will in the end no triumph see”).

Frank Brunner’s “Sword of Dragonus”, meanwhile, is difficult for another reason. Many of these stories subscribe to the well-worn virgin-whore dichotomy – either a woman is “intense eyes and careless hair ... the same slim pale bodies” or she is “the bitch-sorceress whose head you have lopped” – but this one, a comic strip packed with feathery beards and whooshing ectoplasm, plumed by fumetti of plonking dialogue, contains a mute and mostly naked woman in chains. At the end, having meted out the captor warlock’s “own brand of justice”, Dragonus “claimed his reward” (“his fee”, in the final pane). No prizes for guessing what that might be.

Bebergal is aware of this sexist legacy. Rather than bowdlerizing Gygax’s miscellany, he invites the *Weird Tales* editor Ann Vandermeer to contribute an afterword commenting on this and other exclusionary *bêtes noires* of the early D&D universe. Much of what takes place there is stereotypical western masculine fantasy – all buskins, gauntlets and pathologically rippling sword-arms. The damsels who claim they don’t want a man are always wrong, and anything exotic is approached with a consumerist-orientalist bent or with outright terror. Vandermeer describes all this as “an unfortunate reflection of the limited social horizons of Gygax’s target audience” in 1979, and points out that Wizards of the Coast, who currently publish all D&D paraphernalia, have “addressed how they will resolve the errors and mistakes of representation in past books and stories”. She also argues that these stories were proposed as merely a set of raw stimuli, for use “in settings so far-reaching and eccentric that anything can be imagined”:

What IF the gnoles were non-binary? ... And dare we even imagine if the necromancers from Smith’s story, Mmatmuor and Sodosma, were more than just allies but partners in life as well?

The book’s inside covers map a dungeon in which there are astral portals, ossuaries, secret doors and glaucous bodies of water, and its sections are titled “Key to Upper Level”, “Secret Chamber”, “Key to Lower Level” and “Key to Secret Passage”. These rooms, these stories, predate the *Dungeon Masters* who call them up and the capricious player characters who shuttle through them. But their contents are as changeable as the players’ wills and circumstances. Early last year, Seamus the Corker loosed a round of magic missiles at a haywire alchemist and, when asked by our DM what shape they ought to take, suggested “a hard Irish border”; more recently, the missiles have resembled such chthonic entities as “Jordan Peterson” and “a dry cough”. More than half of the adventurers in our rag-tag posse are women. The horizons we roll over are very much our own. ■

Be kind to the land

The cruelty behind industrial agriculture

BARBARA J. KING

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, JUNK

A history of food, from sustainable to suicidal
MARK BITTMAN

384pp. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. £22.

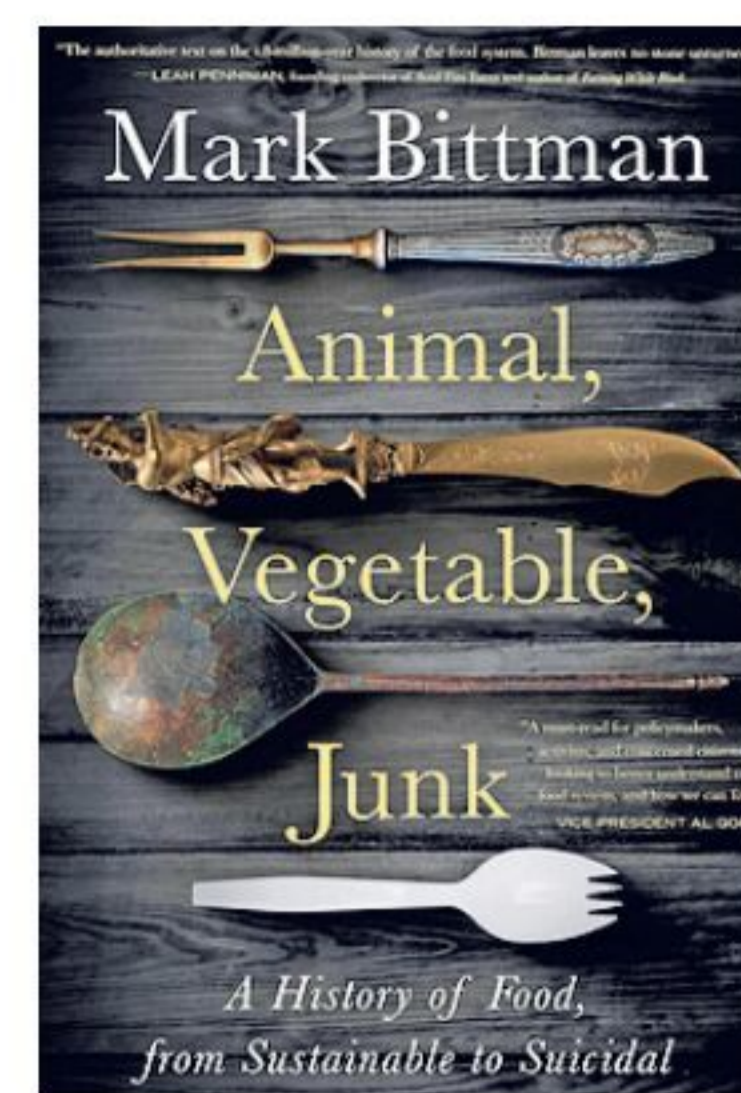
THANKS TO THE LURE of ultra-processed foods, many populations around the world are “three or four generations into a food system that’s killing us”. That system, run by corporations motivated by global profit, is overseen by “mostly immoral and cruel people”. With statements like these, Mark Bittman pulls no punches in making ardent pleas for a shift in how we grow and market food systemically and for loosening Big Food’s grip on how we eat. He takes us from prehistory’s long period of sustainable hunting-and-gathering through to the development of agriculture, when “real food” was grown to feed families. As population sizes grew, farmers increasingly toiled “not for their benefit or that of their communities, but for a global cash economy”. Today, in a mechanized and consolidated farming system, enormous fields planted with monocultures, such as soybeans or corn, underwrite an industrial agriculture that is cruel to animals, including humans.

Bittman, known for thirty cookbooks and a *New York Times* column about food, tells this multi-

millennial tale in a fresh way. He shows sensitivity to the excessive cost of land and food inequality to oppressed populations throughout history. And, in outlining change-making agroecological work he emphasizes the need for diversity in all aspects, from land to labour. “Agroecology,” he writes, “is hands-down our best bet for changing agriculture’s role from a driver of the greatest problems afflicting humankind to a solution.” Agroecology involves kindness to the land through farming without toxic fertilizers and pesticides; multi-cropping and inter-cropping rather than persisting in monoculture; and helping pollinators to thrive. It is more than a set of agricultural techniques, though, because it aims to bring about “the empowerment of women and long-exploited people, such as BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and people of colour], land reform, fair distribution of resources and treatment of labor, affordable food, nutrition and diet, and animal welfare”. As Bittman puts it, dryly, this is “a tall order”; then again, “the alternative is catastrophic”.

Bittman reviews evidence for the sustained exploitation of BIPOC people through the nexus of food, money and power. Examples include the sugar industry in the Americas built on the labour of enslaved Africans, from the sixteenth century; the forced collapse of sustainable farming by the colonizers of Indigenous peoples worldwide; and the “coercion and manipulation of poor mothers all across the world” by corporations including Nestlé, which falsified the benefits of sugar-laced baby formula versus breast milk in the second half of the twentieth century. Even today, poorer people are disproportionately targeted with unhealthy foods.

The author’s decision to focus on successful food resistance by non-white individuals and groups, is welcome. The Zero Budget Natural Farming initiative in the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh replaces chemical fertilizers and pesticides with cow waste and promotes soil health and crop diversity. In Detroit, Michigan, through an alliance of activists and businesspeople, more than a thousand community gardens and farms thrive, thanks to organizations



“
Asking the poor to give up meat and dairy without ensuring nutritious alternatives is hardly aligned with food justice

Barbara J. King is a biological anthropologist whose book Animals’ Best Friends: Putting compassion to work for animals in captivity and in the wild is published this month

such as the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, now fifteen years old. “The world’s strongest combination of taxes, marketing restrictions, and [food] bans to date” exists in Chile, where ultra-processed foods aren’t sold in schools or advertised to children aged thirteen or younger. Chile levies an 18 per cent tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. In fact, public health experts advocate broadly for taxes on unhealthy foods and these are catching on; the Navajo Nation in the US levies a 2 per cent tax on all junk foods while waiving any tax on fruits and vegetables.

Massive change in “industrial agriculture’s marriage to high-yield monoculture” is most urgently needed, but so is change at the individual level “for our own health and sanity, to support others doing good work, and even as an example”. To this end, Bittman offers a chart dividing food into three categories. Desirable foods, those to rely on to whatever extent possible, are vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and water. Optional foods, those to eat in limited quantities, include meat, dairy, seafood and eggs. Undesirable foods, to avoid as much as possible, include ultra-processed foods and “industrially produced animal products”. Given that the overwhelming number of cows, pigs, chickens and other farm animals consumed *are* processed industrially, this is something of a weak call for change from the author of *VB6: Eat vegan before 6:00 to lose weight and restore your health ... for good* (2013).

In *Animal, Vegetable, Junk*, Bittman writes of “tortured cows” and describes the food system as a chief contributor to the climate crisis. Any mantra urging the world to go vegan would be tone-deaf - asking the world’s poor to give up meat and dairy without ensuring nutritious alternatives is hardly aligned with food justice - but, still, Bittman misses an opportunity. His readers, many of whom have ready resources for making dietary choices, could be told that avoiding meat and dairy is not merely a good idea, but also utterly urgent. The last word of the book’s subtitle is exact: a continued commitment to eating those foods is “suicidal”. ■

Short change

Revealing the nature and extent of modern slavery

LUCY POPESCU

THE TRUTH ABOUT MODERN SLAVERY
EMILY KENWAY

240pp. Pluto Press. Paperback, £14.99.

CIAO OUSMANE

The hidden exploitation of Italy’s migrant workers

HSIAO-HUNG PAI

336pp. Hurst. £20.

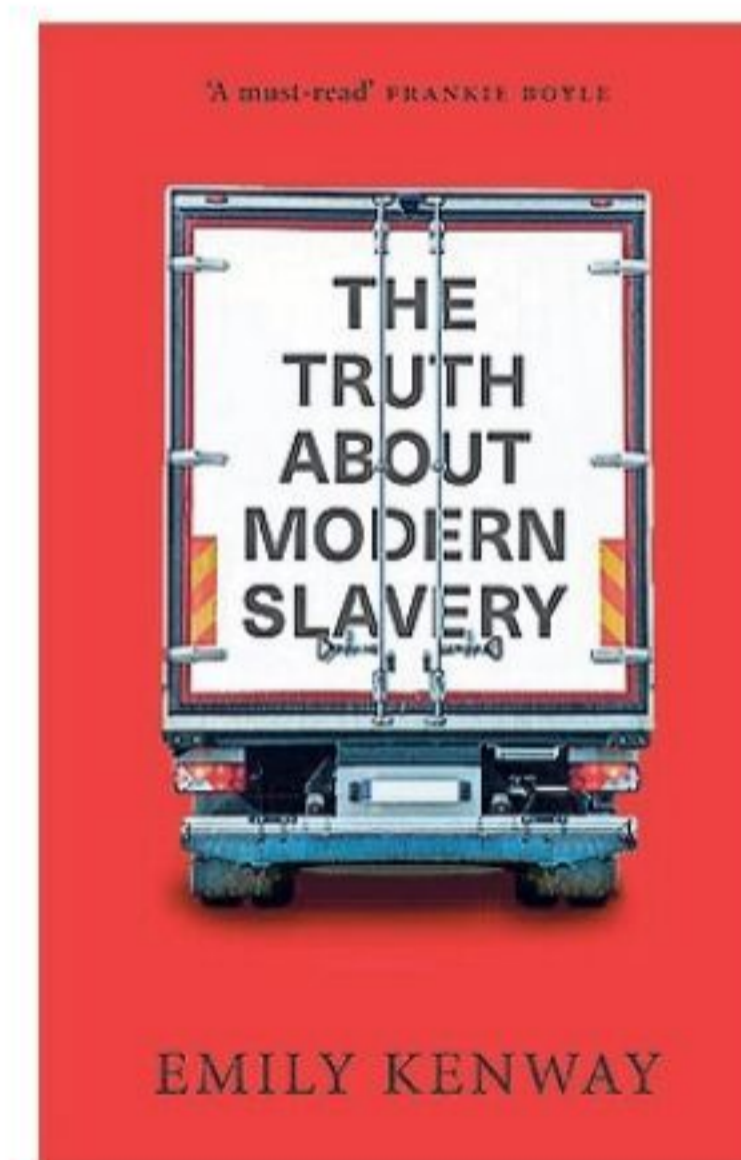
WHEN DISCUSSING those who make the hazardous journey by sea to Europe, a distinction is often made between “refugees” and “economic migrants”, in which the first category is seen as more deserving of help. And yet many “economic migrants” have been forced to seek a better life abroad because of climate change, political instability, corruption or extreme poverty. On arrival, it is often necessary to accept exploitative conditions in order to survive. This happens under our noses every day.

In *The Truth About Modern Slavery*, Emily Kenway suggests that we are being misled about the nature

of the problem in the UK and abroad because of how “slavery” is framed. The new abolitionists’ condemnation of traffickers has become “a cover for anti-migrant policies and harder borders”. By focusing on trafficking as “a problem of crime and migration”, some cast the migrant as a social “aberration” who “we simply need to arrest, deport and eradicate”. The “hostile environment”, created in 2012 by the then home secretary, Theresa May, “not only pushes undocumented people into riskier parts of our economy but also prevents them from seeking help safely when they experience exploitation”. A similar theme is taken up by Hsiao-Hung Pai in *Ciao Ousmane: The hidden exploitation of Italy’s migrant workers*, which explores that country’s mistreatment of Black African workers in the agricultural sector. As both authors demonstrate, vulnerable migrants and “undocumented workers” are being exploited by employers in wealthy European countries precisely because they have no rights. Their fear of deportation is systematically abused. That they are working, Kenway says, displays “an appetite for their labour that matches their wish to be here”.

Criss-crossing between the farming regions of southern Italy, Pai follows the fortunes of several transient workers. Her narrative is occasionally repetitive - endless evictions, dawn starts, long days toiling, the search for accommodation, the racism - but much here needs repeating. Italy’s punishing harvests have been documented before - the book’s title refers to Ousmane Diallo, a Senegalese olive harvester who died in 2013 when a gas canister exploded in a Sicilian field - but, as Pai points out, it takes a worker’s death for “extreme exploitation to come to the surface” and “after a short while in the media spotlight, it [is] submerged again”.

Pai details how migrants are treated by farmers in Sicily who want cheap labour (an average day’s pay is around €25) but don’t want to provide workers



Lucy Popescu is the editor of the anthologies A Country of Refuge, 2016, and A Country to Call Home, 2018, about the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees

with suitable accommodation. Some have the audacity to charge workers to stay in outhouses lacking basic facilities or a roof. Mostly, workers squat in camps without amenities, in ruins or in disused buildings. They are further exploited by the mafia-controlled *caporali*, who “arrange” the work, take a cut and sometimes run off with the earnings. Workers are often forced to buy residence permits, in return for fake employment contracts. The farmers claim they are paying a fixed wage and benefit twice over, short-changing the worker and the tax office. The figures Pai notes are breathtaking: “When Mohammed picked twenty-five crates of olives and earned only €75, his employer would make €937.50”.

The failure of the authorities to deal in a humane way with the plight of these essential workers is scrutinized by Pai, as are corrupt officials who run shelters for their own profit and politicians who peddle racist rhetoric and policies. Matteo Salvini, for example, deputy prime minister and minister of the interior from June 2018 to September 2019, predictably blamed conditions in the camps on those who had the misfortune to live there. Pai emphasizes the racism of many local people, who refuse to rent rooms to Black workers, and documents vicious attacks against African boys on bicycles: “When vehicles hit them, usually in the dark, they would turn off the car lights so that no one could see their number plates”.

Both books illuminate the extent of modern slavery and what might be done to fight it. Challenging political rhetoric, Kenway makes a convincing case for the need to separate immigration law enforcement from labour inspection and policing and advocates the creation of “more safe and legal migration pathways”. Pai hopes that “self-organisation and activism among African workers” will help to bring about change and, ultimately, the disruption of “racial capitalism”. ■



John Stuart Mill by
Thomas Woolner, 1878

Work-life balance

Applying the 'project view' to the life of John Stuart Mill

JONATHAN EGID

**JOHN STUART MILL AND THE
MEANING OF LIFE
ELIJAH MILLGRAM**

256pp. Oxford University Press. £47.99 (US \$78).

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE? The question is rarely posed by analytic philosophers - at least in their professional capacity. Until recently, they have tended to view the question with suspicion, surmising that it is guilty of the twin sins of vagueness and equivocation: after all, what does "meaning" really mean in this context? For many such philosophers, meaning is something words have, not human lives. The problem of the meaning of life is little more than a category mistake, a pseudoquestion arising when language goes on holiday.

And yet, David Wiggins's classic paper in analytic ethics, "Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life" (1976), begins with the claim: "Even now, in an age not given to mysticism, there are still people who ask 'What is the meaning of life?'" Wiggins chastises his philosophical contemporaries for an attitude that not only breeds suspicion of, but also precludes any real engagement with, the question. Rather than rejecting it as senseless, he proposes an answer of his own, arguing that for a life to be meaningful, it must be unified - the things one values in life must ultimately add up to this life itself. Philosophers after Wiggins have developed this notion of unity in the direction of a particular method of unifying a life: that of making one's life a *project*. What came to be known as the "project view" held that what gives our lives meaning are the projects we pursue, "and that if one of these projects is large enough and central enough, identifying it will be as close as we can come to finding the meaning of one's life".

It is this "project view" that Elijah Millgram seeks to contest in his new book *John Stuart Mill and the*

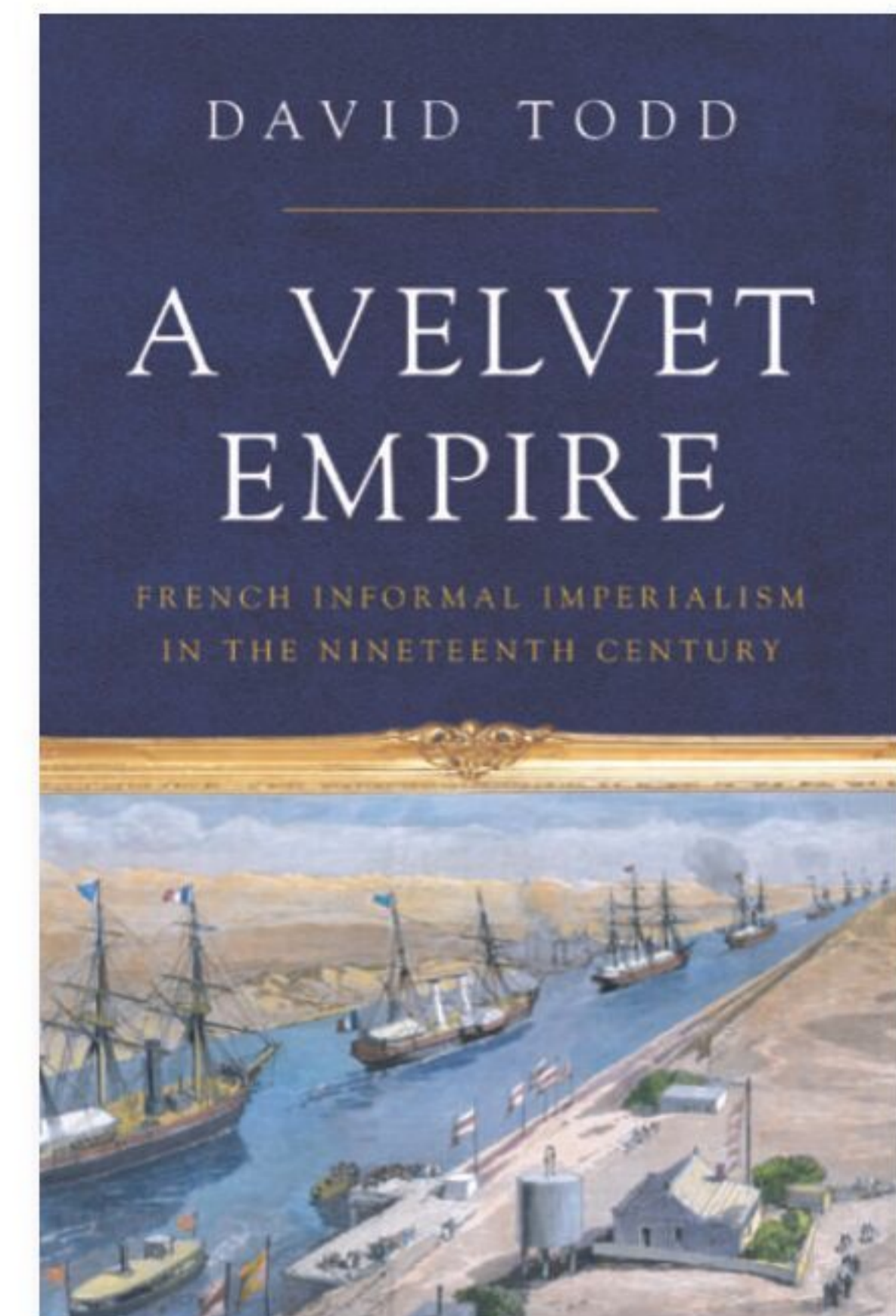
Meaning of Life. Millgram's book is a contribution to the "analytic meaning of life literature", and promises a new method of pursuing this enquiry: using biography to shed light on a philosophical theory. Millgram suggests that we can assess the project view by examining in detail a particular human life that instantiates it. If even a "best case" of a project life is flawed in some serious way then we will have reason to think that the project view is wrong about what it is to live a meaningful life. Millgram's thesis is that the great Victorian philosopher John Stuart Mill lived such a life, and that examining what went wrong with it can show us what is wrong with the project view more generally.

Mill's life was structured around a particularly unified and demanding project from its earliest moments, and his commitment to this project, though it may have wavered at times, remained powerful enough to command almost all his energies until his dying day. Millgram argues that although Mill's project was itself extremely successful (just about everything the Utilitarians campaigned for, from universal franchise to prison reform and freedom of religion, came to be), Mill's life-as-a-project went very badly indeed: his life was "a train wreck", characterized by disappointment, regret and self-sabotage. It was a life so bad, Millgram suggests, that "if this is what it is to have a meaningful life, nobody should want one". The biographical sections are a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, using Mill's life as a refutation of the project view.

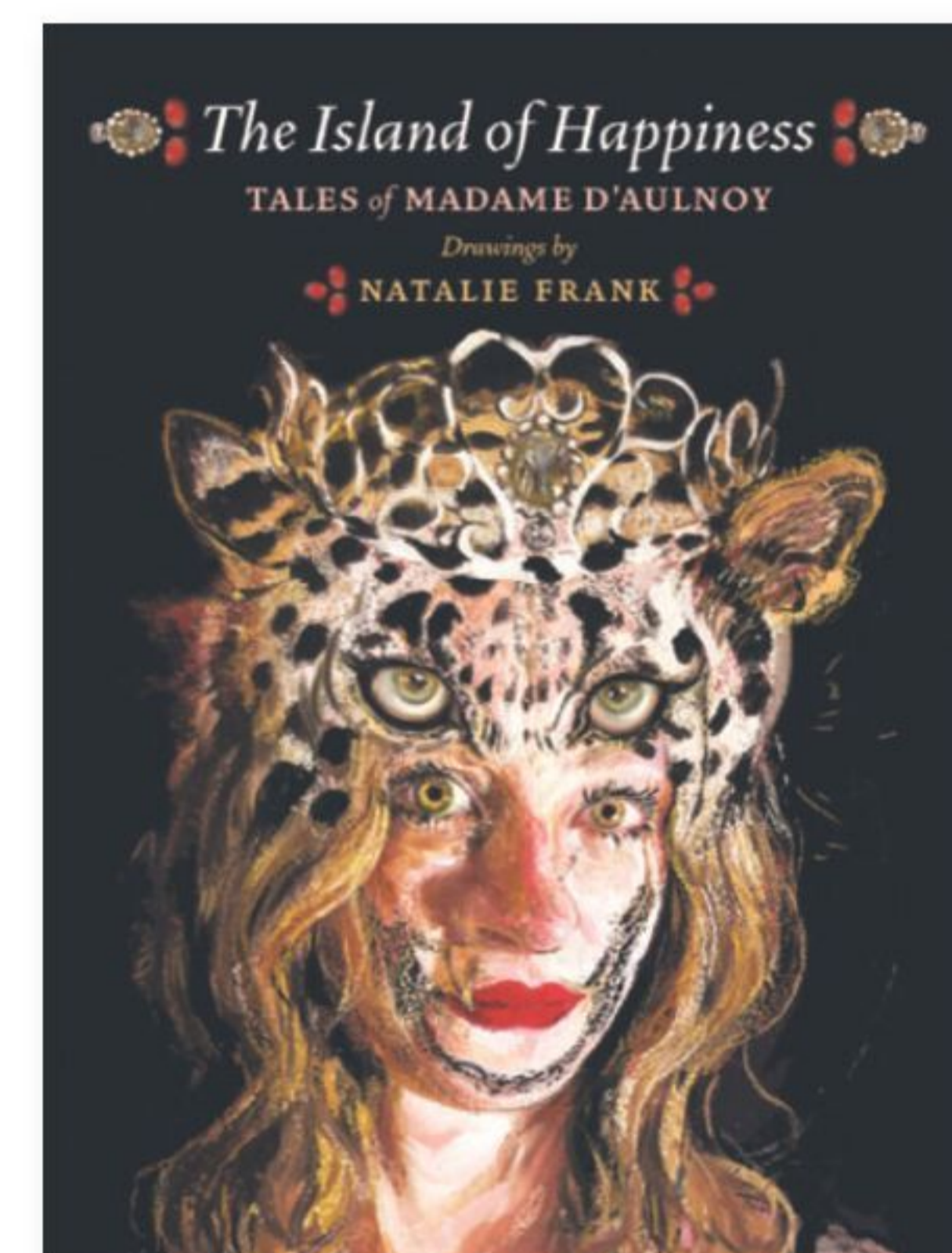
One reason that Mill is such an interesting case for the project view is that he did not choose his project, but had it chosen for him. Mill's father gave his son an unconventional education, training him according to the precepts of associationist psychology, teaching him Greek at three and Latin at seven, and forbidding him social contact with children his own age until his early teens. The sections in which Millgram traces Mill's early life and career in terms of the theory of associationism are some of the most compelling in the book, and much of the subsequent interpretation occurs within this framework.

“
Millgram's book offers us a more humane way of harvesting the intuitions required for ethical theorizing

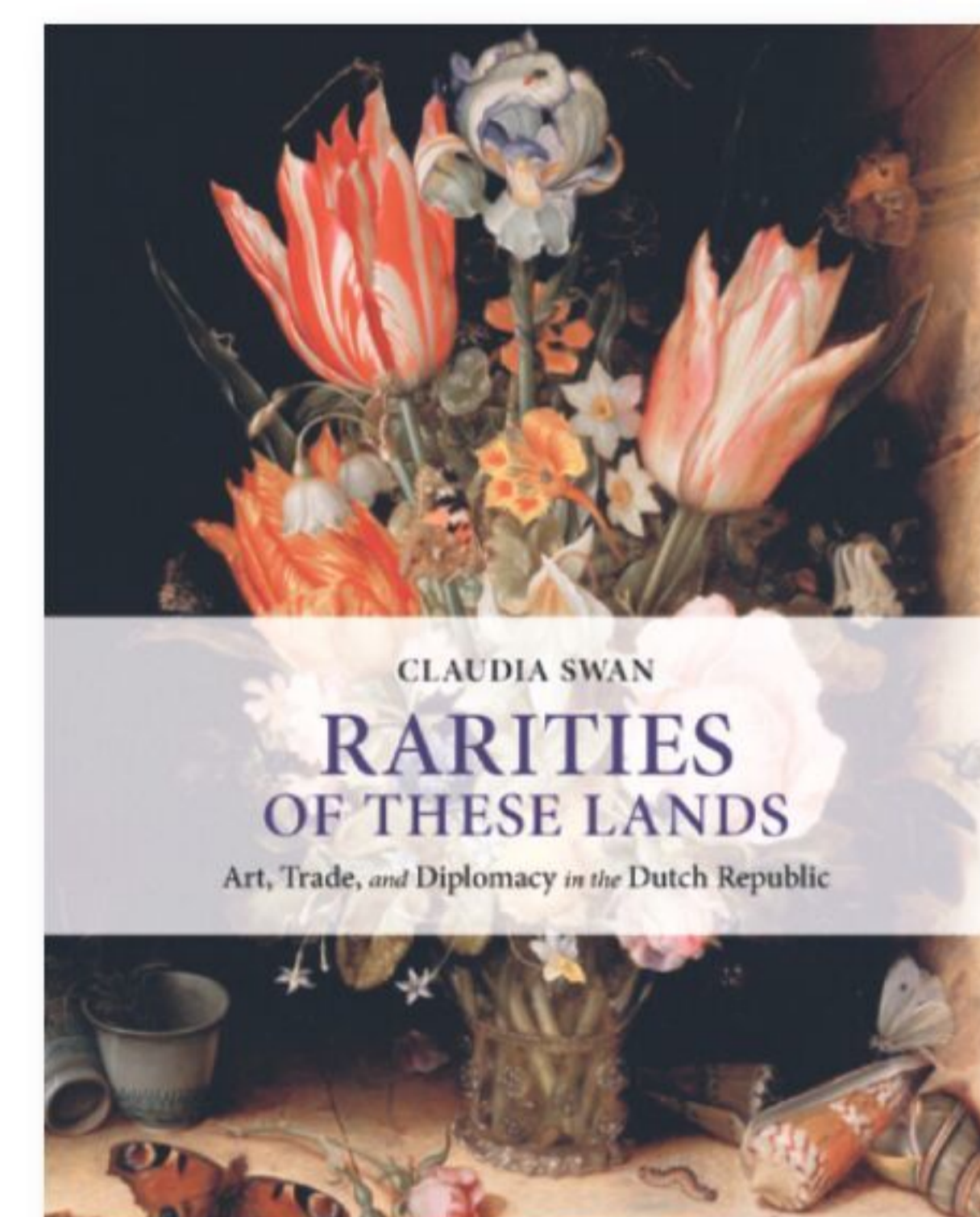
Jonathan Egid is a writer and teacher of philosophy. He is writing a book about the seventeenth-century Ethiopian philosopher Zera Yacob, and the question of whether or not he existed



How France's elites used soft power to pursue their imperial ambitions in the nineteenth century



An enchanting selection of Madame d'Aulnoy's seventeenth-century French fairy tales, interpreted by contemporary visual artist Natalie Frank



A vivid account of the exoticism of the Dutch Republic at a critical moment in its cultural and political history

P PRINCETON
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Mill worried later in life about the public perception of him as a “manufactured man”, indoctrinated and drilled by his father’s radical Utilitarian sect to become the terrifyingly accomplished and indefatigable intellectual mouthpiece of the movement. Millgram seems to trust this self-assessment, arguing that Mill was “literally made for this project”, and could not but devote all of his energies to furthering a cause he had neither chosen nor had the power to escape. He allows that Mill affirmed his project in an “epiphany”, a moment of revelation he experienced on reading Jeremy Bentham as a teenager, but notes that just a few years later, in the episode Mill referred to in his autobiography as his “Mental Crisis”, he lost this hard-won faith and fell into a deep and prolonged melancholy. At twenty years old Mill found himself questioning the very basis of his project, and thus of his life:

It occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, “Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?” And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, “No!” At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.

Given that Mill spent the remainder of his immensely productive life writing such works as *On Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1861), and *On the Subjugation of Women* (1869), as well as successfully running for parliament, it seems he must have regained some of his earlier confidence. Millgram here suggests that Mill sought refuge in a series of authority

figures (first his father, then his wife Harriet Taylor, and finally his stepdaughter, Helen) who helped provide him with the psychological impetus to continue driving forwards with a project from which he was increasingly estranged. To keep such a conflicted life going is difficult, and Millgram suggests that Mill exaggerated wildly the genius of those figures in order to justify taking instruction from them. Ultimately, Mill’s project life entailed a tragic contradiction: his life demanded Herculean feats of genius and originality, while also requiring that he deny and repress any parts of his life that might fall outside the closely circumscribed boundaries of his project. Millgram argues that estrangement, submission and the tragedy of a torn personality are “disturbing and almost inevitable feature of project lives”, particularly vivid in Mill’s case, but by no means unique to it. Any such life aims at coherence and unity, but ends up tearing itself apart.

Millgram intends the book to be read as a philosophical argument against the project view, but its major shortcoming is not treating the question of the meaning of life as sufficiently mysterious. Early analytic philosophers were right to observe that it is far from clear what we are talking about when we talk about the “meaning of life”. Yet Millgram does little to unpack the ambiguities of the question, or to explore the meaning of “meaning” as applied to a human life. Moreover, Millgram’s characterization of the project view is presented in such broad terms as to leave open a number of variations - many of which are not addressed, let alone refuted, by the case of Mill’s life. The problem is not so much a lack of charity regarding Mill’s life, but a lack of clarity regarding the concepts.

Nevertheless, the great value of this thought-provoking book is neither strictly biographical nor ethical, but methodological. Readers of contemporary moral philosophy will be familiar with thought experiments (or “intuition pumps”) - scenarios involving runaway trolleys, comatose violinists and teleportation machines - that are intended to elicit our “intuitions” about right and wrong, used to buttress principles, refute arguments, support or falsify ethical theories. It has seemed to many contemporary philosophers nearly impossible to do philosophy, and in particular ethics, without these tools. But Millgram’s book offers us a more humane way of harvesting the intuitions required for ethical theorizing.

By investigating the life of a real human being whose disappointments, ecstasies and aporias were all his own, we are reminded that the true topic of ethics, a human life and how to live it well, is better served by examining a life in its fullness, in all its complexity and apparent contradiction, than the sparse and faceless thought experiments we usually encounter. The reader is encouraged to think through just how much light an ethical theory sheds on such a life, and how the philosophy stands up to the evidence that the particular life provides. If Millgram’s book encourages ethicists to begin working from this starting point, to “philosophize from life”, it may well offer contemporary philosophy a grip on questions that have seemed messy, too resistant to analysis. Or perhaps not. Either way, Elijah Millgram’s book reminds us that it is legitimate to demand that philosophy tell us something about those questions. ■

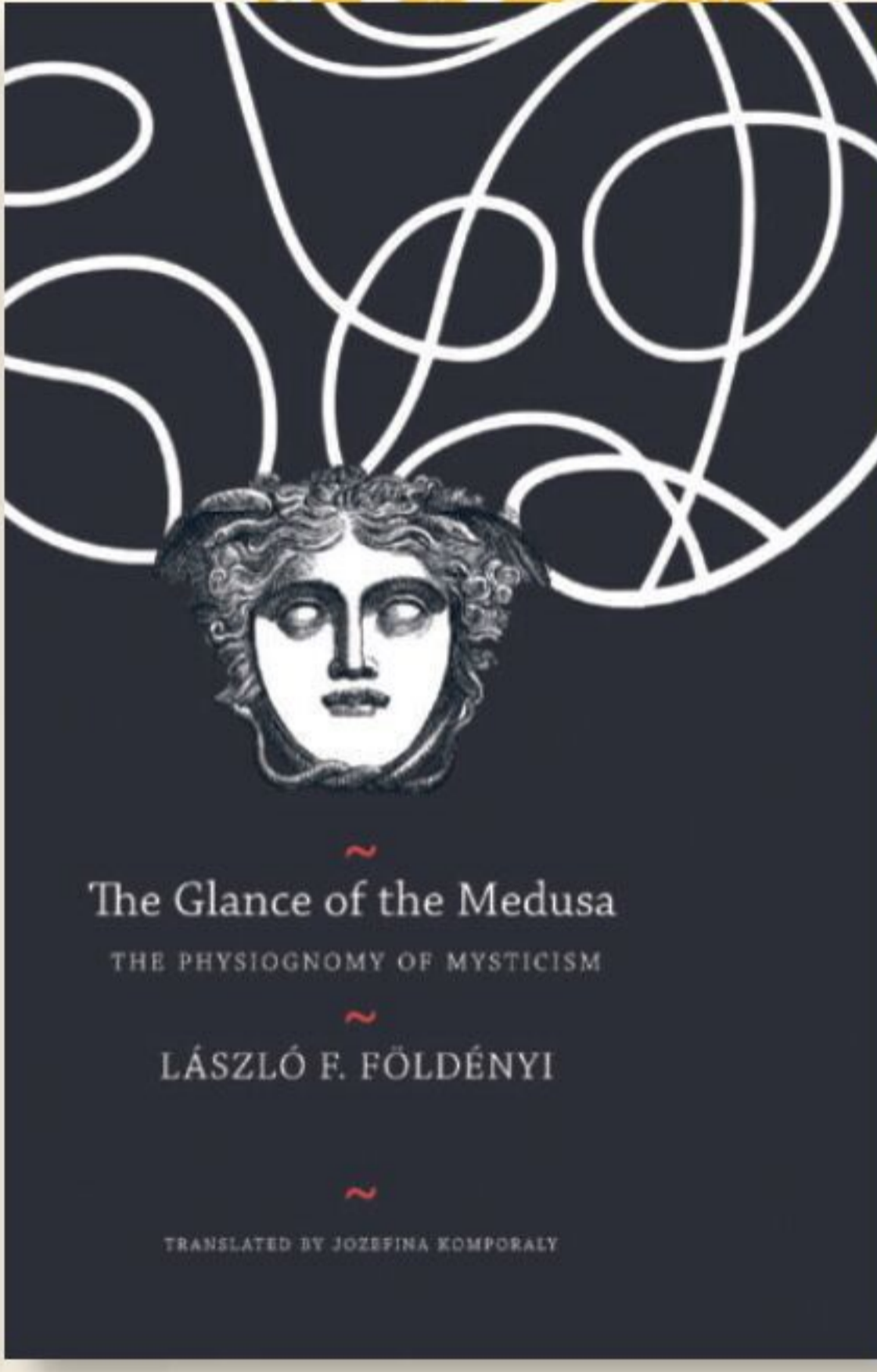


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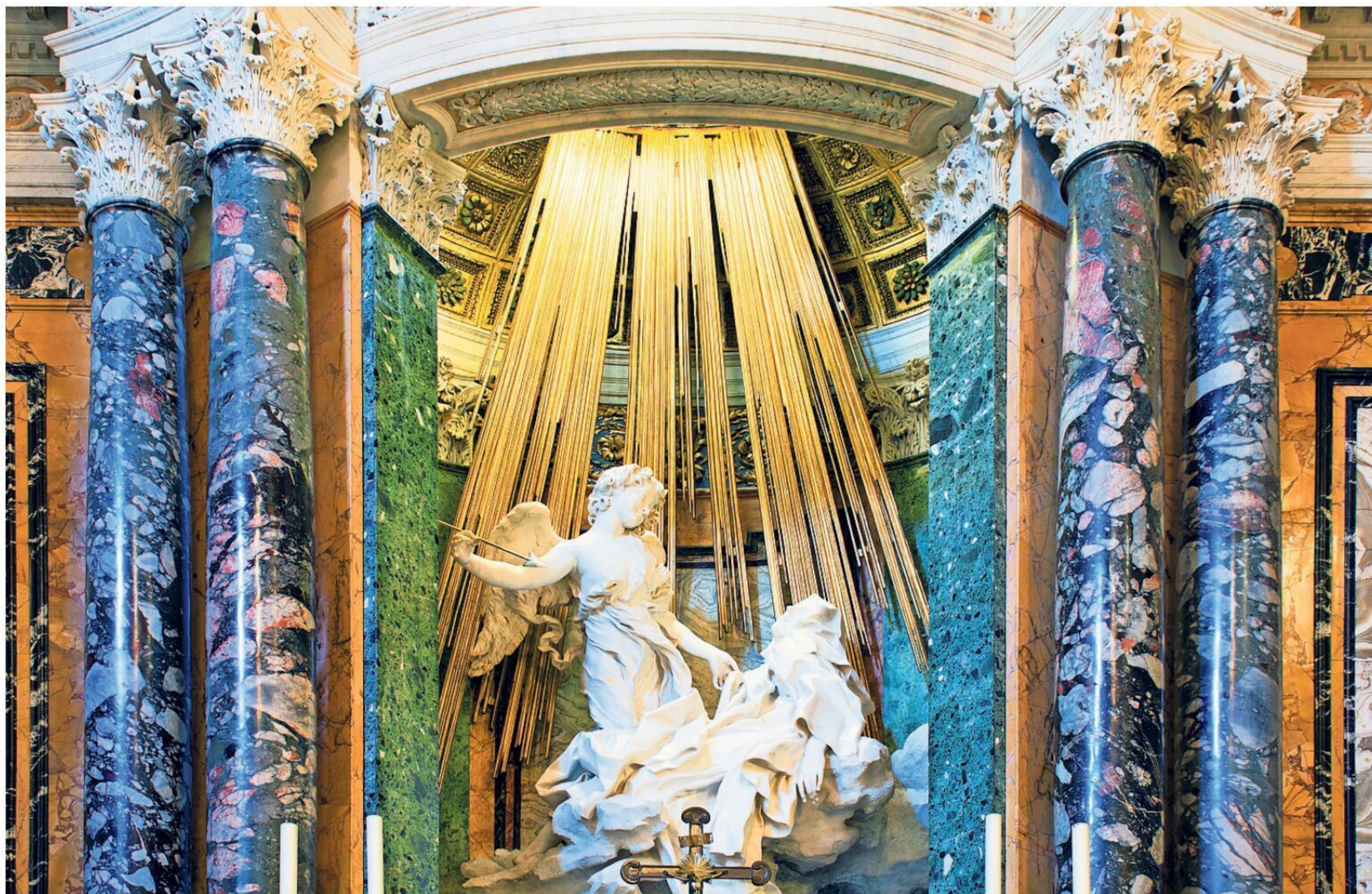


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Soul-searching

A philosophical attempt to make sense of the self

JUDITH WOLFE

IN SEARCH OF THE SOUL

A philosophical essay

JOHN COTTINGHAM

192pp. Princeton University Press. £18.99
(US \$22.95).

THE POET OF “DOVER BEACH”, hearing the long, withdrawing roar of the Sea of Faith, promises to be true to his love amid the confused and ignorant battles sweeping the naked world left behind by the ebbing of religion. To Matthew Arnold and those who followed him, the strength that endures is the sturdiness of human love, along with poetry’s capacity to draw thought from nature, give form to formless anguish, and span epochs. In the universities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this new humanism became the soil of a study of the Arts and Humanities untied from theological frameworks. To the sciences’ rapidly advancing investigations of nature, these subjects provided a counterweighing defence of culture. But in recent decades, the Humanities have experienced a crisis similar to theology’s before them. To many now, the concept of a human soul – of the human virtues, sentiments, insights and traditions on which the humanities traditionally relied – seems as implausible and unnecessary as the concept of God itself. Arnold’s faith in humanity is experiencing its own Dover Beach moment.

In Search of the Soul is a philosophical ode to this ebbing faith, but it refuses to be elegiac: its impetus is a quiet confidence that a receding night tide returns at dawn. Although talk of the soul is complicated, John Cottingham is convinced that it is not only legitimate but ultimately unavoidable. His own contribution is to affirm the trustworthiness of the basic human experience of ensoulment, and to probe the metaphysical horizons within which it thrives.

Cottingham does not treat “soul” as a simple notion, but as a placeholder for that by virtue of which we are each a self: a subject rather than merely an object. The first chapter chronicles facets of this experience of selfhood or ensoulment: the presence of the world and other people as realities we encounter emotionally, rationally and actively; our ineradicable sense of the demands of truth,

goodness and love; our lifelong striving for a “better” or “truer” self. Many scientists and philosophers, seeking to pare away unnecessary entities, analyse these experiences as by-products of processes more basic than consciousness, aimed at survival and self-propagation. Cottingham, like Raymond Tallis, regards this analysis as self-referentially incoherent: it denies the fundamental significance of the difference between illusion (even advantageous illusion) and truth which motivates and enables scientific work in the first place.

In Cottingham’s eyes, casting the soul as a ghostly substance independent of the body is a distracting caricature. His second chapter shows the contrasting richness of the philosophical tradition, at least since Aristotle’s hylomorphism, which defines the soul not in parallel to the body, but as the body’s own “form” or “act”. Descartes in particular, of whom Cottingham writes with masterly understanding and crisp verve, poses a much more interesting challenge than the need to overcome his much-maligned mind-body dualism. The Descartes of diaries and letters, testing the limits of his own *Meditations*, describes the human being less as two separate substances, an immaterial mind and a material body, than as a “substantial union” of the two. Unlike the mind in itself (which is the subject of the *Meditations*), this union eludes introspection: it is not philosophical abstraction, but “the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation ... that teaches us how to conceive the union of soul and body”. The nexus of this union is our emotions and sensations: if an angel were to inhabit a body, Descartes claims in a letter, it would not have sensations like a human, but “simply perceive the motions which are caused by external objects” with its unattached mind. For Descartes, in other words, the soul-body unity is a “primitive notion”: the analogue of a chemical rather than a physical composition, which changes the qualities of each element. This change determines both the kind of thing under investigation and the methods by which it is investigated, which can be neither abstract philosophy nor scientific analysis alone.

Cottingham’s response to this challenge is to take a different approach to the relationship between soul and body which dispenses with talk of the soul as a “substance” altogether, and draws on aesthetic experience and metaphor to explain ensoulment. His third chapter finds particular relevance in the lan-

“The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa” by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1647–52

Judith Wolfe is Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of St Andrews

guage of material and function, or object and attribution. Besides the examples discussed in the chapter, this language recalls Roger Scruton’s description of the emergence of a face from paint strokes on canvas, or C. S. Lewis’s complementary observation that no amount of pointing to the lines of a drawing could convince a two-dimensional creature of a qualitative difference between a triangle and a street vanishing in the distance.

Some might object to such language because it redescribes ensoulment without explaining it, since it implicitly relies on categories like intention, which are aspects of what we understand as free human agency, not reasons for it. To that objection, Cottingham might respond that such circularity is only to be expected if Descartes’ observation about method is right. But neither the objection nor the response would engage with what makes Cottingham’s language (and Scruton’s and Lewis’s) striking: its *revelatory* quality. This quality is the result not of explanatory power but of metaphysical suggestion. It arises from the implicit analogy of material nature as a whole, including the material nature of our brains, to a two-dimensional painting or a functional object. Just as we can understand flat figurative paintings only because we inhabit a world of three-dimensional space, the analogy goes, so we can see the body as the picture of the soul only because we inhabit a world that has meta-physical depth.

This depth, Cottingham argues in chapters four and five, is best understood through theism. Scruton, at his most religiously daring in the 2010 Gifford Lectures, suggested that to acknowledge the human face as expressive of a soul might be possible, ultimately, only by acknowledging it as a reflection of the face of God. Cottingham is too modest to make such a transcendental argument, but he offers an inference to the best explanation – in other words, he offers theism as the best available answer to the question, “given subjecthood, what states of affairs can make sense of it?” That the description of the problem may be seen partly to predetermine its explanation does not invalidate this style of argument. It merely poses the challenge: if you reject the description, try to give a better one. For Cottingham’s part, “God is the primordial subject who enfolds all that exists, without whom there would be no enduring conscious subjects, and no genuine authoritative value to guide their lives”.

Cottingham’s warm and sinuous text opens these horizons without undue force, seeking consensus and posing questions he is not afraid to let stand. It is animated by an optimism which is infectious, but also conceals difficulties with his account even for those who accept his basic picture. Leaving aside some theological questions raised by the final chapter, human selfhood as Cottingham describes it strives towards an ideal of authenticity which is not only unrealistic but possibly incoherent, insofar as its goal is both one’s “best self” and one’s “truest self”. But to be good in Cottingham’s sense (which is to respond adequately to the normative claims of values and others) is always to give up being unique in Cottingham’s sense (which is to be true to one’s inmost desires). Neither is it clear that the latter is a coherent aim. Desires have the structural appearance of object-directedness, but nevertheless sometimes arise from causes unrelated to their apparent objects. That there is a difference between orientations of the soul and neural stimulus responses means not that every desire is a revelation of meta-physical depth and connectedness, but that the challenge we face is one of discernment rather than mere illusion. Discernment is never guaranteed: our deceivability is as indelible a mark of our humanity as our perspicuity.

Ultimately, this would come as no surprise to Cottingham. His book (in the words of its subtitle) is a “philosophical essay”, not in the analytic sense of a demonstration but in Wittgenstein’s of a therapeutic release into life. Only for Cottingham, the question of God is not a distraction, but part of a therapy capable of releasing us from the peculiarly human itch to flay our skin with Occam’s razor. ■

Cult clubs and heritage sites

FOOTBALL

ST PAULI

Another football is possible
**CARLES VIÑAS AND NATXO
PARRA**

288pp. Pluto. Paperback,
£14.99.

Despite spending most of its history bouncing between the German second and regional third tiers, the German football club St Pauli has transcended its lack of on-field success to become the embodiment of resistance to the commercialization of modern football.

Carles Viñas and Natxo Parra's excellent book draws out the club's story, contextualizing it with a brief, but insightful overview of German football. This is coupled with a more detailed social history of both Hamburg and the city's St Pauli district which, thanks to industrial development in the mid-1800s, evolved into a working-class community and a left-wing stronghold.

For most of its existence, St Pauli was overshadowed by its more illustrious neighbour, SV Hamburg. They were even denied a place in the inaugural Bundesliga as it was determined that cities should only have one team each, and that was taken by Hamburg.

St Pauli's most successful spell on the pitch came in the late 1970s with promotion to the Bundesliga. For a club with such a maverick image it is perhaps fitting that one of the most beloved players from that era is Walter Frosch, a compulsive smoker and alcoholic who accrued eighteen yellow cards in one season. The highlight was a 2-0 win against Hamburg - the European Cup Winners' Cup holders.

But Viñas and Parra's story is not one of on-field action. It's about the convergence of social and political factors in the mid-1980s - squatters, punks and an anti-militarist and anti-nuclear movement at odds with the local establishment - that transformed a relatively unsuccessful neighbourhood club into one with a cult status. As the authors argue, it is difficult to see such a confluence of factors coming together today to create a club with a similar ethos.

Yet Viñas and Parra acknowledge the complexities of this cult status. To the distaste of some older fans, St Pauli has become a hugely popular brand, with a successful marketing operation and some 11 million fans worldwide. A steady stream of football tourists who treat the Millerntor Stadion as just another landmark to check off their itinerary only compounds that distaste.

Yet this is still a club with an overtly anti-racist ethos, a higher percentage of female fans than any other European club and a management model that allows fans to

veto new sponsors. These are the characteristics which set the club apart and, as the authors argue, prove that "another football is possible".

Roger Domeneghetti

WAAC

**ART, PROPAGANDA AND
AERIAL WARFARE IN
BRITAIN DURING THE
SECOND WORLD WAR**
REBECCA SEARLE

168pp. Bloomsbury. £85.

Rebecca Searle has written a fascinating account of the part that Kenneth Clark's War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC) played in reflecting and recording the British experience of the Second World War. Clark set up the committee as soon as war was declared, haring down from his National Gallery office to the Treasury to make requests for funding while also making arrangements for the nation's art collection to travel to a Welsh mine. He was often pressed to justify the funding of paintings of war in an age of film and photography, which he did with verve: "What did it look like?" they will ask in 1981, and no amount of description or documentation will answer them ... Only the artist with his heightened powers of perception can recognise which elements in a scene can be pickled for posterity in the magical essence of style". The funding came with strings attached: the WAAC would answer to the Ministry of Information (MOI), whose directives as to the feelings that the artworks should produce in the population were sometimes resented.

A tight focus on the air war allows Searle to bring in an impressive breadth of reference encompassing Mass Observation accounts, propaganda and commentary on the economic, industrial and technological context, alongside her examination of the art that was commissioned, bought or rejected. Tensions between the MOI and the WAAC are explored productively. For example, Searle tracks the Ministry's communications policy on aircraft production through the war alongside the Committee's commissions and acquisitions. This work runs from more clinical modernist paintings of aircraft parts, through portraits of female workers as women were conscripted, and finally to depictions of factory scenes in order to boost workers' morale as the war dragged on. She also discusses depictions outside the reach of the WAAC at the time, such as the sketches by a factory worker, Margaret Abbess, that suggest greater reluctance to finish a tea break than was generally recognized by official war artists.

Chapters on aircraft production,

and on Britain's bombing campaign against German cities, are valuable contributions to areas that have been given little attention in our national narrative. Our understanding of the more familiar Battle of Britain and the Blitz, the subjects of Searle's other chapters, is enriched by her close attention to the visual storytelling that operated in conjunction with other mediations - whether via radio, newspapers or films - to shape the population's experience of war.

Lily Ford

FRENCH CAMPS

UN PAYS DE BARBELÉS

Dans les camps de réfugiés
espagnols en France, 1939

VLADIMIR POZNER

Edited by Alexis Buffet
285pp. Claire Paulhan. €33.

When Catalonia fell to Franco's nationalists in January 1939, half a million Spaniards fled north across the Pyrenees to seek refuge in France. Known as *La Retirada*, this move would be eclipsed just over a year later by the "exode", as millions of French flocked south to escape the invading Germans; but it began one of the more shameful and frequently overlooked periods in modern French history. With its determined anti-immigration policy (immigrants were known as "undesirables"), the government was faced with an unprecedented dilemma but had little option other than to find an immediate solution. The result was the hurried creation of a series of camps - known as concentration camps - around Perpignan and along the coast. On the beaches, they were marked off by fences of barbed-wire.

There were more welcoming responses. Already, from the beginning of the Spanish Civil War three years earlier, anti-fascist and predominantly communist groups in France had formed the pro-republican Comité franco-espagnol, from which emerged the Comité d'accueil aux intellectuels espagnols. Spearheaded by Renaud de Jouvenel and especially by Louis Aragon and benefiting from public exposure in the latter's paper, *Ce Soir*, the committee aimed to identify and support all intellectuals (writers, artists, scientists, teachers), of whom it was estimated there were nearly 5,000 in the camps, and organize their release.

Vladimir Pozner, a friend of Jouvenel, was delegated to investigate and went to Perpignan in March. From the substantial archive he left, Alexis Buffet has made a judicious and carefully researched selection of photographs, letters, notes, two articles and an unpublished piece closely resembling a private diary. Pozner's activities ranged from

negotiating with government representatives to ordering clothes or providing cigarettes for the inmates. He was instrumental in organizing visas for those who sought to settle in Mexico and Argentina, as well as in finding accommodation for those who would stay in France.

No longer a member of the Communist Party (he had been inexplicably excluded in 1936), Pozner still had to be careful in his official duties; privately or in correspondence with Jouvenel, he could be scathingly critical. That he ridiculed the attitudes of government representatives was inevitable, but his real targets were the poorly constructed huts, the insanitary conditions, inadequate food, widespread disease and even the brutality and viciousness of guards. His findings resulted in a number of articles, some translated into Spanish and English, and he would eventually use much of this material for his novel *Espagne premier amour* (1965). At a time when refugees and camps are for ever in the news, *Un pays de barbelés* makes for salutary reading.

John Flower

AWAKENINGS

**THE WOMEN I THINK
ABOUT AT NIGHT**

Traveling the paths of my
heroes

MIA KANKIMÄKI

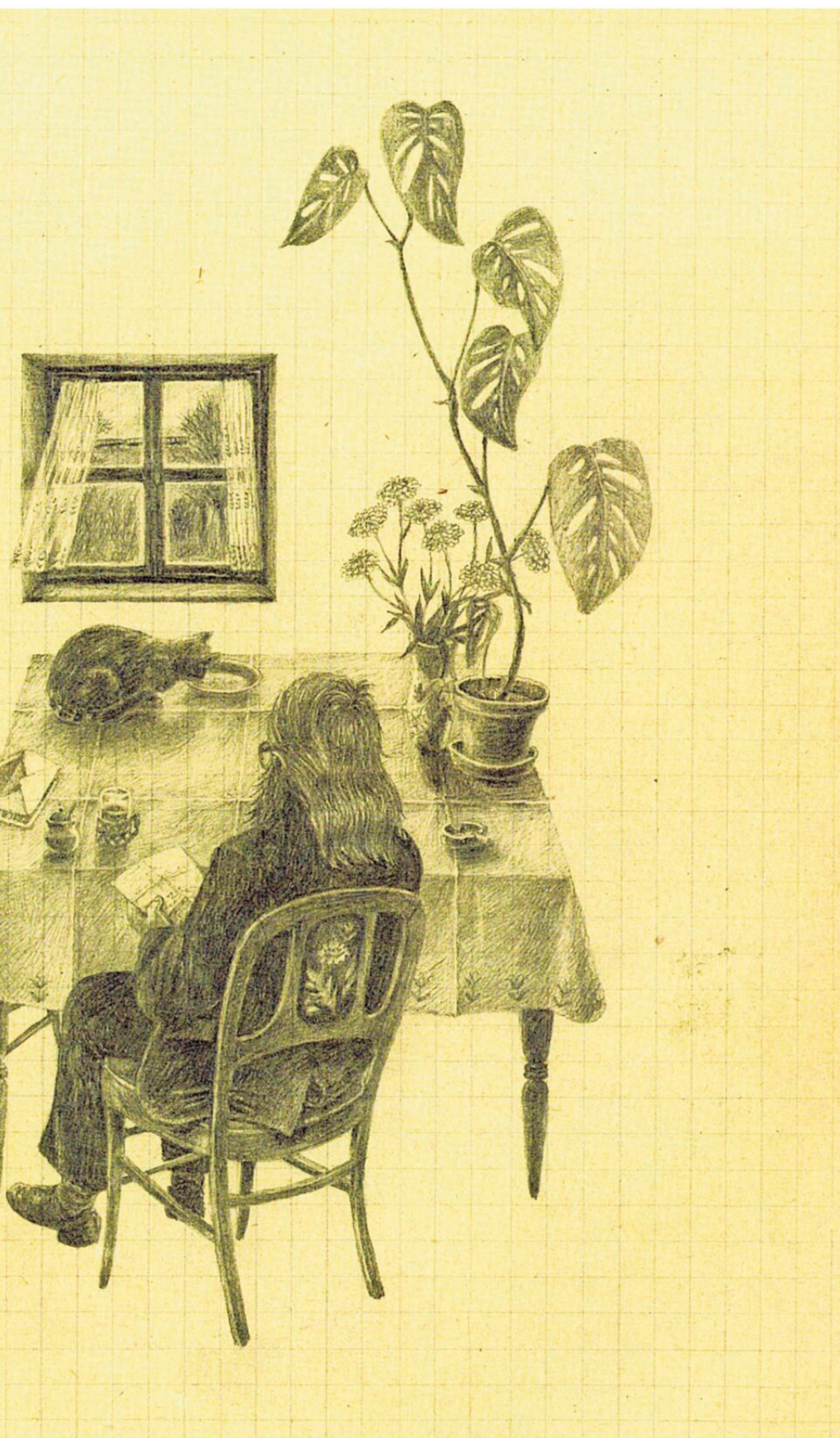
Translated by Douglas Robinson
416pp. Simon and Schuster.
£20.

The Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b.1929), the explorer Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) and the Buddhist nun Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969) have something in common: each set off on a solo journey seeking solace and adventure. It was these women and others - ten in total - who inspired the Finnish writer Mia Kankimäki in her own intellectual and spiritual awakening. The title of her memoir reflects the sleepless nights she experienced before she conceived of the book, ruminating on the lives and travels of her heroes. Kankimäki had reached a crossroads in her life: at forty she was childless, partnerless and searching for meaning. At this point, she sold her flat and left her job as an editor and copywriter, choosing to venture to Japan, Kenya, Tanzania and Italy.

Smoothly translated by Douglas Robinson, *The Women I Think About at Night* combines travelogue, historical analysis and memoir. (The book resists categorization even in the way it is organized: sections include "Africa", "Explorers" and "Artists".) We are given access to the innermost thoughts of the women who motivate Kankimäki via letters, diary entries and biographical

**"No. 71" by Joanna Concejo;
from *The Lost Soul* by Olga
Tokarczuk, translated by Antonia
Lloyd-Jones (48pp. Seven Stories
Press. £16.99)**

accounts. In one striking passage about the Italian artist Lavinia Fontana, Kankimäki writes, "[Lavinia] was a powerful woman. She had to have been strong as a horse, enormously determined, with nerves of steel, not to mention prodigiously talented, industrious, proud, brave. There's no way she could have produced two hundred paintings if she hadn't been those things". At times, Kankimäki provides day-by-day accounts of her travels. In Africa, for example, she describes a safari through landscape she likens to the garden of Eden. "On the lake", she writes, "we see pelicans and marabou storks; on the horizon surges a vast flock of pink flamingos, like a dream, or a mirage. Beaks in the water, they step rhythmically ... like ballerinas in a long line."



conflict is hijacked by national party leaders. What follows is an often satirical tale of intrigue, deception and human folly.

Since he was discovered by Italo Calvino, Andrea de Carlo has written more than twenty novels. This latest work is a searing social commentary that emphasizes deep-rooted problems with which Italy has struggled for decades, including illegal construction and a perceived failure to protect its heritage. The author's contempt for politicians, the popular media and, at times, the ordinary citizen is unbridled: in the case of Massimo Bozzolato, mayor of the fictional municipality of Cosmarate, no amount of "rebranding" can disguise the foul-mouthed salesman of agricultural machinery who struggles with Roman numerals. Annalisa Sarmani, the vice-mayor and cultural attaché of the rival town Suverso, struggles to enlist the backing of a community whose cultural interests are limited to *smoccarone*, the local cheese.

De Carlo places his most withering indictment of contemporary Italy in the mouth of an incredulous British archaeologist: "you suffer from a double curse: that of your complex bureaucracy and corruption. Then there is your politics, interested solely in self-preservation, and your disconcertingly superficial television ... you are a wonderful country that is bent on harming itself!" Certainly, under the influence of Silvio Berlusconi and his Mediaset channels, Italy was an early example of a country seized and shaped by a media mogul, but these days British readers may not find the situation all that foreign.

Il teatro dei sogni, however, is far more than a thinly veiled criticism; it is an exploration of human weakness, of the effects of populist rhetoric and alternative versions of the "truth". Through the brazen methods of the television journalist Del Muciaro, we are warned of the dangers of the "unscrupulous extrapolation of conclusions" that has plagued the "post-truth" era. After a slow start, the novel gathers pace, culminating in a powerful denouement.

Esmé O'Keefe

POETRY

A COMMONPLACE

Apples, bricks and other people's poems

JONATHAN DAVIDSON

100pp. Smith/Doorstop. £9.95.

Is poetry commonplace, like apples and bricks? It is hard to agree that poems "are as common as food and drink", but, for Jonathan Davidson, poetry is quite ordinary, the sort of thing a working-class boy from Didcot who wasn't very good at exams might become interested in because his mother read him Walter de la Mare.

A Commonplace borrows its form from the commonplace books once used by writers and scholars to compile ideas, quotations or extracts. Davidson presents his own poems alongside sixteen written by his contemporaries. They are arranged in small thematic clusters, and interspersed with a lively commentary: "I care. I care about equal temperament because, as I understand it, the maths doesn't work but the music does. It is the perfection of imperfection. It isn't right but then again it is". There are also footnotes, a gazetteer and a bibliography.

Poems are functional, Davidson suggests - able to cool the hot water of grief like the now-demolished towers of Didcot Power Station depicted on the cover, symbolic of the passage of time, the loss of familiar landscapes and receding selfhood. These themes are explored in his poem "Father": "But they are gone now: / new roads, new names, new people. // Dad, stay here for a while, I said, / and I'll go and find out what / has happened to our lives".

The other poems Davidson quotes are similarly direct - the elegiac "Sonnet for Dick" by Kit Wright, for example, or "Night flight to Belfast" by Catherine Byron - and he introduces selections as simply being about "people I am not", "listening to music" or "distracting myself from grief". There is a pleasing Englishness to the book, which is liberal and humane in its treatment of heritage, industry and community, but it also includes poetry from elsewhere. It closes with a translation, by Michael Hofmann, of Gottfried Benn's poem "Listen":

That's all you were, but Zeus and
all the immortals,
the great souls, the cosmos and
all the suns
were there for you too, spun and
fed through you,
that's all you were, finished as
begun -
your last evening - good night.

Before this, Davidson offers a critique of his own final poem, "Quiet the afternoon after rain", which he describes as "arch and affected ... pretentious and bombastic". It is not. His poems are deftly made and moving. And although his voice is one among many here, its plain-speaking style and dry humour set it apart.

Naush Sabah

DEEPAKES

DEEP FAKES AND THE INFOCALYPSE

What you urgently need to know

NINA SCHICK

224pp. Monoray. Paperback, £8.99.

The idea that we might not be able to trust what we see with our own eyes, or hear with our own ears, is disturbing. Yet, as

Nina Schick shows us in *Deep Fakes and the Infocalypse*, it is increasingly becoming our reality. Through the advanced capabilities of artificial intelligence, it is now relatively straightforward to make people say and do things they haven't said or done. "A deepfake", Schick explains, "is a type of 'synthetic media' ... that is either manipulated or wholly generated by AI."

As is so common with the internet, deepfakes began in the world of pornography. Now they are helping to upend democracy and put people's lives at risk. Although the difference between deepfakes and the broader issue of the "infocalypse" - the confusion largely caused by state-run disinformation campaigns, of which Russia is the master - could have been explored with more acuity, Schick expertly lays out the history of the latter and the increasing danger posed by the former.

The author describes Russia's Operation Infektion, which was launched in 1983 when an article in a New Delhi outlet called the *Patriot* "made a bombshell accusation: the deadly AIDS virus had been invented by the US military as a biological weapon to kill black and gay men". The article played on existing social divisions in the US and built on a Russian trope that its foe was pursuing biological warfare. Operation Infektion persisted over the years as the epidemic worsened and the conspiracy gained traction.

These Cold War disinformation tactics have enjoyed a revival in recent years. Russian operatives helped to spread the idea that Ukraine was responsible for the downing of Flight MH17 in 2014, and Russian meddling in the build-up to the US election of 2016 has been widely discussed. Over the past year, we have seen China suppressing information from Wuhan about the Covid-19 outbreak, the spreading of disinformation about the virus by President Trump, and Russia's promotion of "the narrative that Covid-19 is a Chinese-made bio weapon and that it is linked to the construction of Chinese 5G networks". This is the "infocalypse". Then there was the speech by Belgium's Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès in which she appeared "to sing off the XR [Extinction Rebellion] hymn sheet" when discussing epidemics. In fact, it was a deepfake, created by the Belgian branch of the activist group. "Arguably", says Schick, the clip "is the single best example of a politically damaging deepfake that exists 'in the wild' to date."

Elsewhere, the author looks at how the infocalypse has allowed extremists to misrepresent the Black Lives Matter movement, and at how deepfakes have created a new "porn ecosystem". With deepfakes still in their infancy, Nina Schick's book feels not just timely but essential. ■

Charlotte Henry

Readers may fear at first that the elements of memoir - both Kankimäki's and that of the other female explorers - will entail little more than a recounting of their lives. But we soon come to appreciate their insights on subjects such as femininity, mental health and motherhood. At the end, Kankimäki provides "night women's advice", in a manner both commanding and humorous: "Paint yourself the way you'd like to be. Be industrious as hell. Work out of passion. If you suffer horrific losses, keep going".

"Write books, collect rocks, sleep under a table, if need be", she writes at one point, "do whatever you must in order to do what you want." Having been "tired and listless", she comes to embody the evolution of the women she follows: "I collect anecdotes and stories, weave them together into a kind of web, a rhizome of night women". In this book, Kankimäki achieves a feminist feat, bringing together women from different backgrounds and eras, each of whom "trans-

gressed boundaries and expectations" in her own way.

Meera Navlakha

ITALIAN FICTION

IL TEATRO DEI SOGNI ANDREA DE CARLO

432pp. La Nave di Teseo. €20.

On New Year's Day 2020, the sensationalist television journalist Veronica Del Muciaro almost chokes on a pastry. After being saved by the mysterious archaeologist and local nobleman Guiscardo Guidarini, she makes a remarkable discovery: on his undulating estate in Lombardy, Guidarini is hiding an ancient amphitheatre. A race to claim the "pre-Roman" site breaks out between competing local municipalities - heritage is cultural, but also political, and perhaps especially so in Italy. As the media fan the flames, sparking the interest of international businessmen, the

In next week's

TLS

MARK MAZOWER

Greece, 1821, and the historians

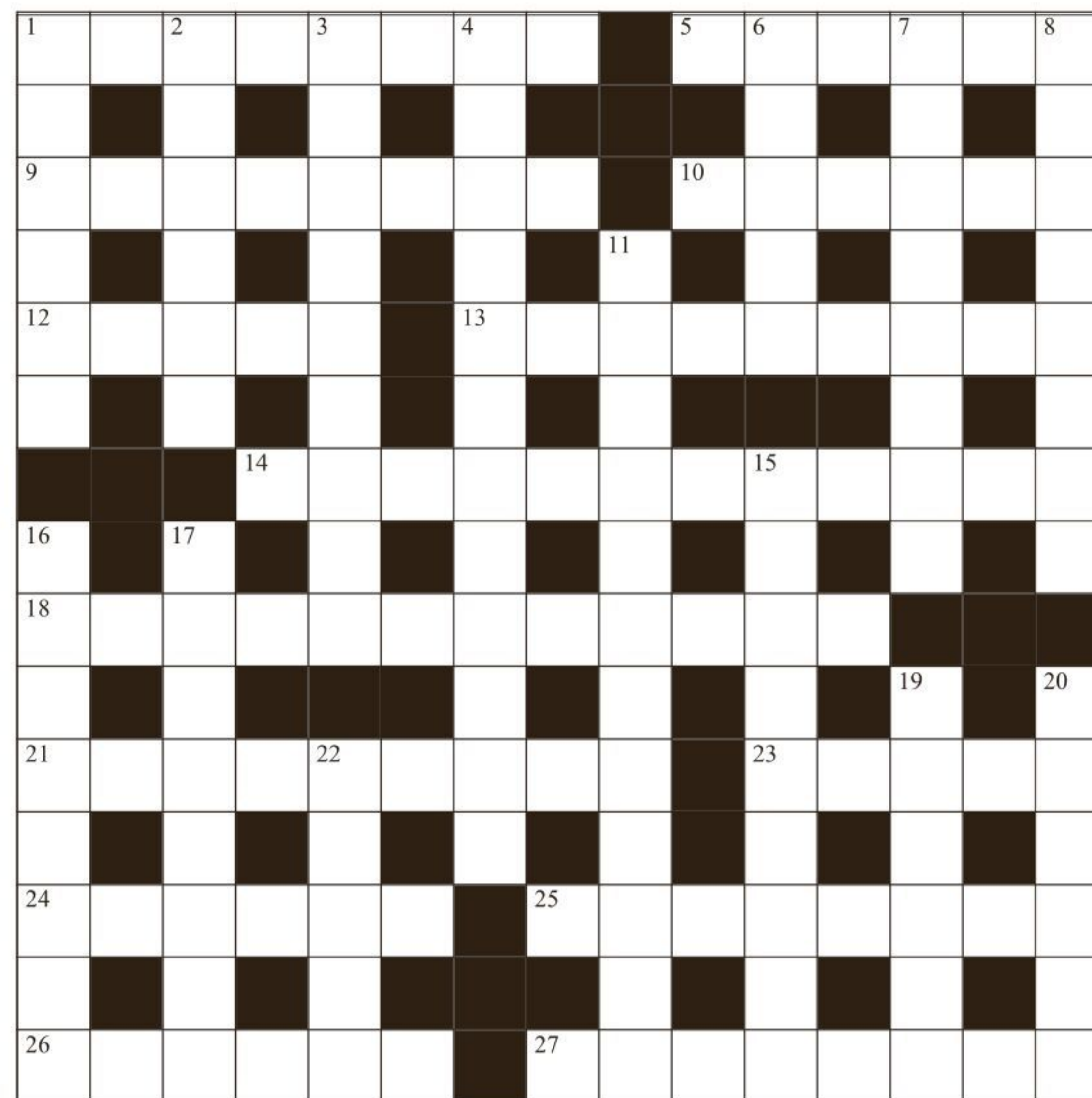


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TLS CROSSWORD 1368 BY TALOS

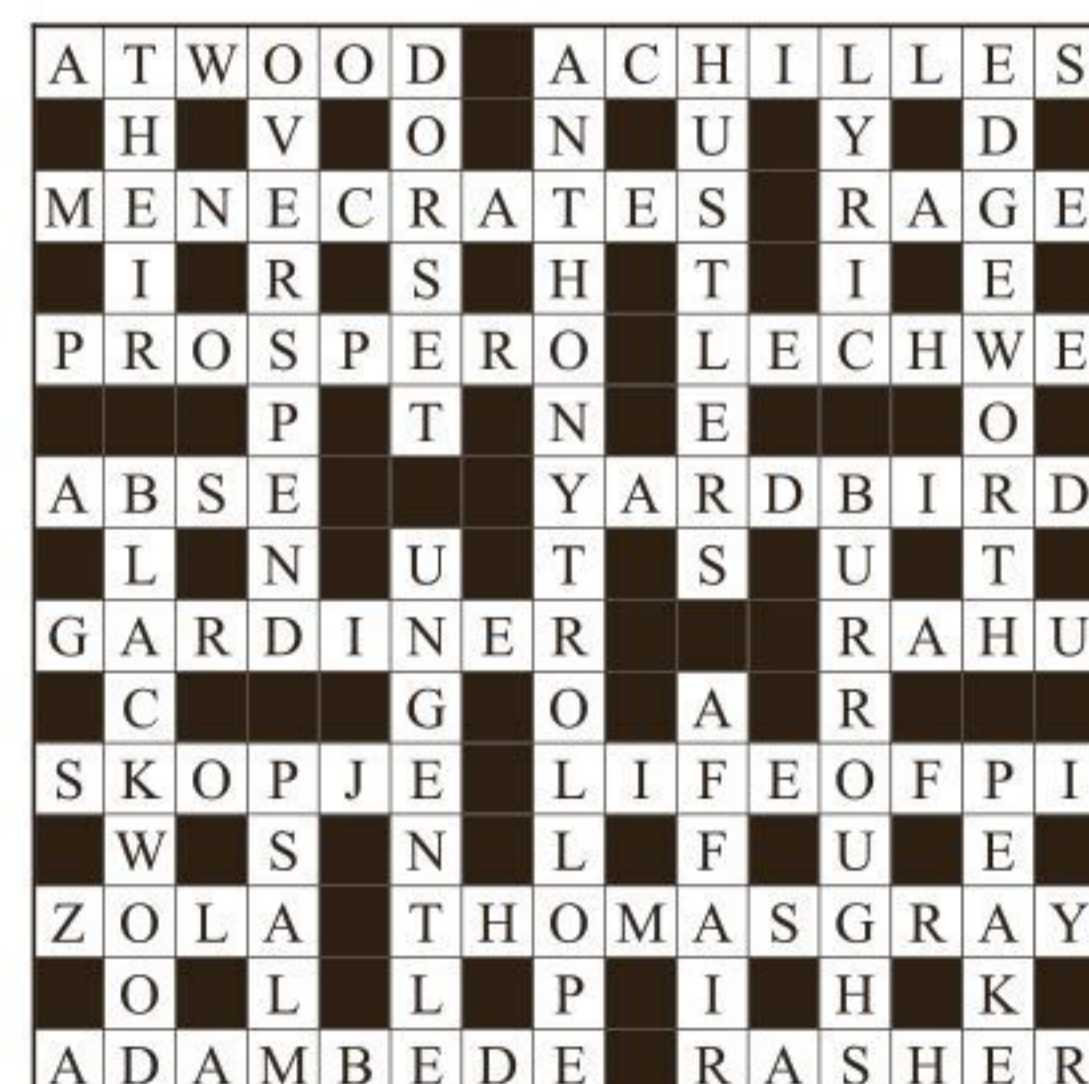


ACROSS

- 1** Good Italian detective who vies with Beatrice (8)
- 5** Male in A&E having trouble about Captain Booth's wife (6)
- 9** Blind seer wearies, having toured most of Thailand in the 20s (8)
- 10** Blanche who has designs on Rochester home with grand drive (6)
- 12** Old female, 51, hugs foremost of illustrators, an artist associated with Pooh (5)
- 13** Ultimately aberrant mistake, first for Tyler Durden? (9)
- 14** Maybe offer a famous feminist work involving quite a lot of sex (4, 2, 6)
- 18** Somehow it is male snob that's descriptive of playboy Dickie (12)
- 21** One of Bianca's suitors is not hero, getting in a flap (9)
- 23** Much Ado About Nothing is my flipping foremost of his "amusers" (3-2)
- 24** A nurse hugged by wild Greek girl at orgiastic revel? (6)
- 25** Knight attracted to Christabel's energy and alluring charm (8)
- 26** Old relative loves getting close to elk and bear in Canada (6)
- 27** Demand of one Fielding hampers right overworked and underpaid clerk (8)

DOWN

- 1** Race to tuck into mushroom, one a drugged-up queen loves? (6)
- 2** Naturalist writer and teacher Weasley possibly upset (6)
- 3** "Be —, seek husband, wife, whether / To pour into one person our aspiration's cues" (*Flight into Reality*, Rosemarie Rowley) (9)
- 4** Hire out hotel overlooking river and Stendhal's Parma residence? (12)
- 6** I wrote satires and died in 1916, but I won the Nobel prize for literature in 2013 (5)
- 7** Aussie hooligan in train regularly punches famous librarian (8)
- 8** Member goes to Congress to meet mature poet laureate (8)
- 11** Criminal dealt drug for a nicker (6, 6)
- 15** Horse tale needing a rewrite could make one do this (4, 5)
- 16** Impulsive old maiden performing in story featuring a thieving wigmaker (8)
- 17** Rising poverty concerning graduate in Logan McRae's city (8)
- 19** "First —, horrid King besmeared with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears" (Milton) (6)
- 20** Climbing hill with charge is what stimulated Flaubert (6)
- 22** Inspiring type of books reviewed by Time (5)



SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD 1364

The winner of Crossword 1364 is Jonathan Shaw, of Trowbridge

The sender of the first correct solution opened on April 9, 2021, will receive a cash prize of £40. Entries should be addressed to TLS Crossword 1368, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

Anti-classics

Another library in trouble - who could have predicted that? While the National Library of Wales recently received a much-needed boost in its funding (see NB, February 5 and 12), it is the National Art Library, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, that is now under threat. For “the world’s leading museum of art, design and performance” is undergoing a dreaded restructuring - and that means, among other things, redundancies.

Facing an annual deficit of £10 million, the V&A has declared that its staff are its “main priority” - but that twenty of the NAL’s thirty staff are to be made redundant. Don’t worry, though: the museum’s director, Tristram Hunt, promises that the “visitor experience” is to be “progressively transformed”; the NAL will be opened up to more “users” and “digital access” will enable it to reach “audiences worldwide”. “A special collections Reading Room will be maintained” - by fewer librarians, somehow - “to provide a space for scholarly and specialist research.” After the NAL has been closed to the public for a year, that is, running an online service only. The “recovery strategy” will be complemented by a “root-and-branch review”.

We love a dose of corporate blandishment as much as the next Grub Street Diogenes. All the same, forgive us for wondering if - aside from a laudable yearning to save £10 million per year - a good old-fashioned strain of British philistinism is at work here, too. Not on Dr Hunt’s part, surely. But as part of the background music to these troubling scenes. The V&A has form in this area, after all. Many readers will recall the Saatchi & Saatchi campaign of the late 1980s that portrayed the V&A as “an ace caff with quite a nice museum attached”. A clever line, that could be justified as a joke at the same time as it played on a perceived public preference for a slice of cake over a piece of art. It was only in 1985, meanwhile, that it finally occurred to someone to put a qualified librarian in charge of the NAL (which was founded in 1837, fifteen years before the V&A itself). At least that’s what was reported in the *TLS* at the time. Can it be?

The non-philistines have set up an online petition calling for the NAL cuts to be cut; to date, 10,000 people have signed it. They understand the case, it may be assumed,

for maintaining its services at full strength (the reading rooms have usually operated at capacity) and ensuring that proper care is taken of its treasures (nothing much to speak of - only the Book of Verse that William Morris made for Georgiana Burne-Jones, the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, three copies of Shakespeare’s First Folio, the fifteenth-century Book of Hours of Marguerite de Foix, etc). A parallel petition calls for the Theatre and Performance department to be saved from closure - and reminds us that the V&A closed the department’s excellent predecessor, the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden, in 2007. The department, we were promised then, would “flourish in its new home”. “The V&A is in danger of breaking that promise.”

Management, even at the best of times, cannot necessarily grasp how to deal fairly with the expertise in its employ. As for museums, so for the media, which cannot claim to be without its own comparable quirks. Old-fashioned British philistinism may also be at work, for example, when it comes to the annual Press Awards.

The shortlists for the Press Awards for 2020 were announced on March 1, in forty-nine categories. As the critic Alex Clark pointed out, on Twitter, not one of them mentioned the arts. As usual. An award for Critic of the Year doesn’t really count: it’s for reviewers, including reviewers of restaurants. Despite the foetid spirit of self-congratulation that odorizes such industry affairs, arts journalists might feel justifiably aggrieved to see themselves left out yet again, while their counterparts in hackery vie for the laurel in such coveted categories as Data Journalist of the Year (“sponsored by Facebook Journalism Project”) and Lifestyle Podcast of the Year.

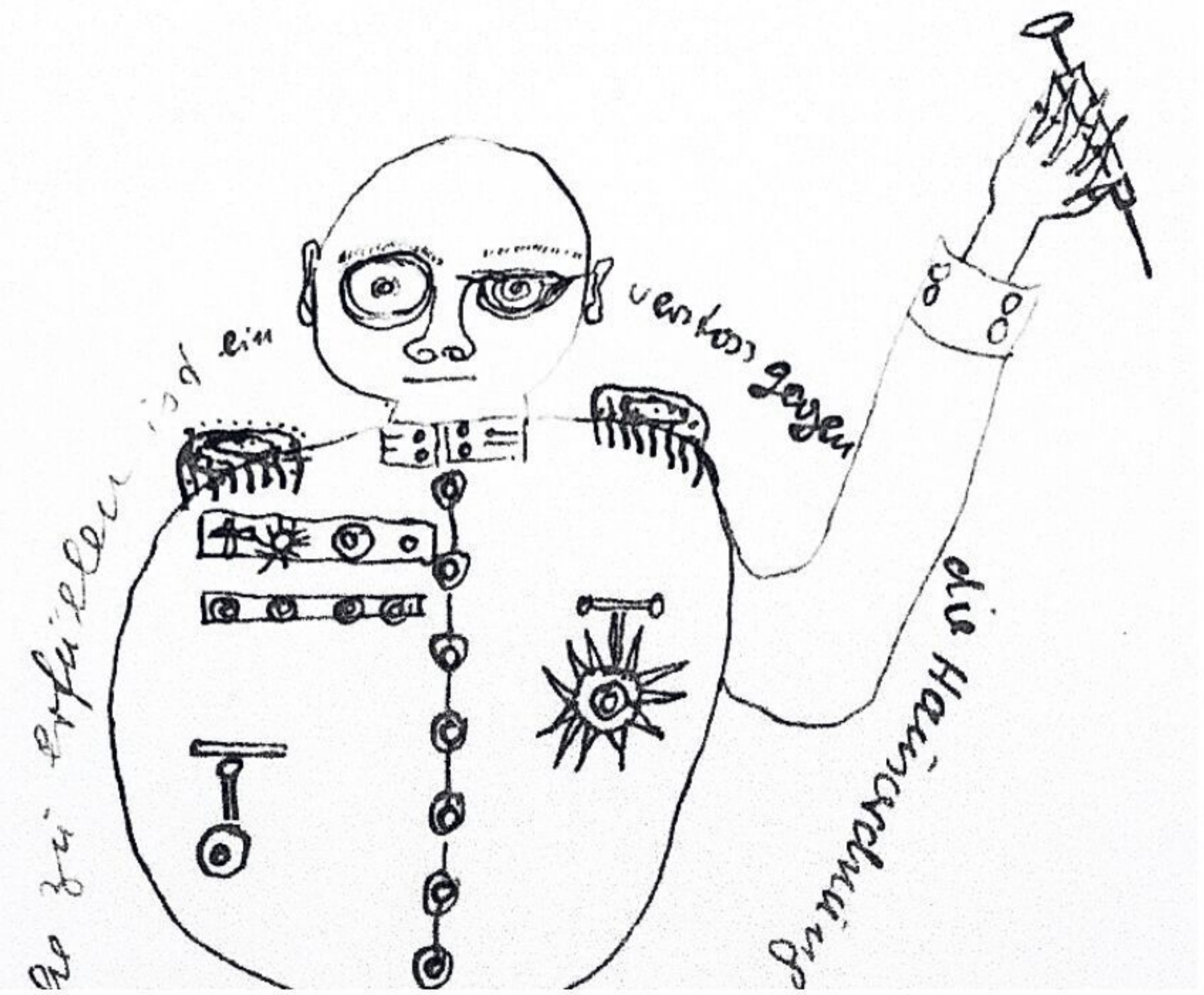
Since the Press Awards were due to have been announced at the end of this month in a “virtual ceremony”, we were going to rant about their anti-artistic omission, and make a petulant little paragraph of it, involving curmudgeonly terms such as “hackery” and “foetid spirit of self-congratulation”; but then the small matter of the Society of Editors being in denial about racism’s role in the media cropped up, resulting in the awards’ postponement and the resignation of the SoE’s executive director, Ian Murray. Ah well. You can’t win them all.

Over the past few decades, Atlas Press has been building up a mighty series of “Anti-Classics”: works in the Dadaist, surrealist, or Oulipian vein. Following a parade of zany blokes - George Melly, Harry Mathews, Michel Leiris and Louis Aragon among them - it is

now the turn of the German artist and writer Unica Zürn (1916-70) for the anti-classic treatment.

Translated by Malcolm Green, *The Man of Jasmine & Other Texts* (£16) and *The House of Illnesses* (£13.50) both contain writings from the time of Zürn’s relationship with the artist Hans Bellmer. Having turned out “over one hundred short stories for the newspapers”, “filled”, as Green notes, “with a longing for encounters with the strange and marvellous”, she started getting serious and dedicating her work to Herman Melville. *The Man of Jasmine* himself was a “childhood vision”, the ideal man, whom Zürn saw reborn in the person of her friend Henri Michaux; a short piece called “In Ambush”, meanwhile, brings together the worlds of Captain Ahab and Akira Kurosawa’s film *Rashōmon* (or the story by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa on which the film is based? Green’s notes are saying nothing). Following several hospitalizations, however, Zürn committed suicide - and these especially strange and marvellous stories of hers were published posthumously, in 1971.

Pictured here is a figure from the Atlas facsimile of one of those stories, *The House of Illnesses* (*Das Haus der Krankheiten*): a doctor metamorphosed, as he stands over his patient, into a portly “militarist” (in Green’s revised translation), in “creaking boots” and “monocle”. “He stamped his left foot on the



floor ... craned his neck and emitted a high-pitched cock-a-doodle-do.” The patient eventually exits the House of Illnesses via the Room of Eyes. Zürn wrote this “gently satirical fantasy” during a fever in 1958, anticipating her first hospitalization by two years. Enquiries about acquiring an anti-classic or two are best directed, for the time being, to editor@atlaspress.co.uk.

The Golden Bowl, *À la Recherche du temps perdu* and *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*: in Brigid Brophy’s view, which she put forth in 1962, these were the three greatest novels of the twentieth century. (See NB, March 5, for the more critically respectable business of what, also in Brophy’s

view, connects these novels’ authors.) All right, we thought. We’ll play your parlour game. Yes, it is absurdly early to be asking such absurd questions; but what are the three greatest novels of the twenty-first century?

Smiling indulgently, a well-placed literary critic said they would play, too. The three greatest novels of the twenty-first century (so far), we have just learnt, are *All for Nothing* by Walter Kempowski, *The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimear McBride and *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst. These authors do not have “mauve roots” in common, as did Brophy’s critical trinity; let us know if you think you can do better.

M. C.

How identity politics failed one particular identity

‘Fast, witty and occasionally furious ... David Baddiel has pulled one of today’s most contentious blind-spots into focus and laid out an inarguable and shameful truth’

Caitlin Moran

‘This is a brave and necessary book’

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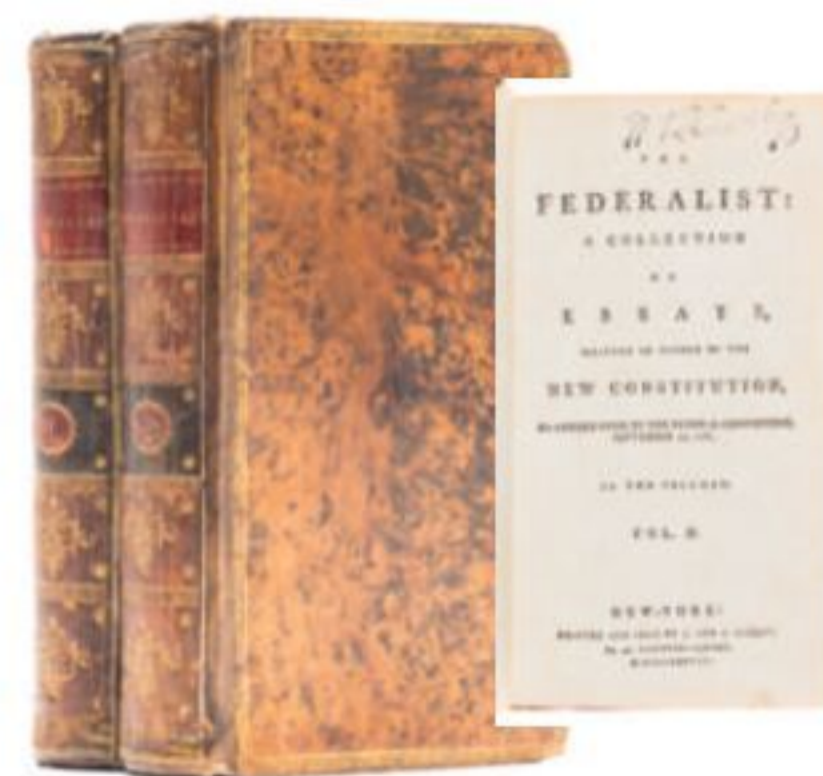
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Plato.
Opera [with commentary by Proclus],
edited by Oporinus and Simon
Grynaeus, Basel, Johann Walder, 1534..
Est. £6,000-8,000*



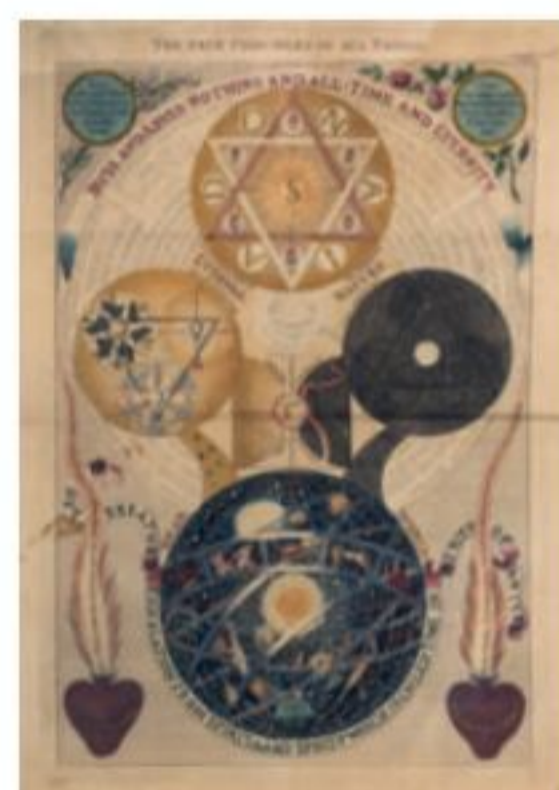
Single leaf from a monumental lectern Bible,
manuscript in Latin, on vellum, [Germany],
[12th century].
Est. £8,000-12,000*



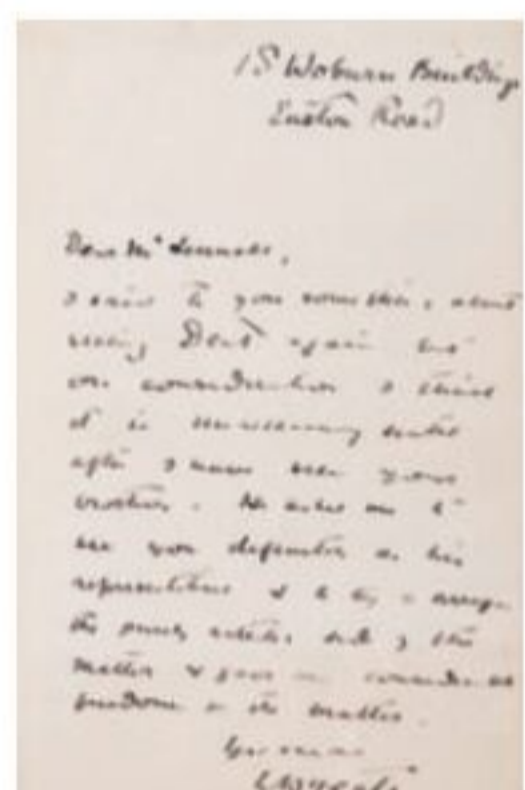
Hamilton (Alexander) Madison (James) and John Jay.
*The Federalist; a Collection of Essays written in favour of
the new Constitution*,
2 vol., first edition, New York, 1788.
Est. £60,000-80,000*



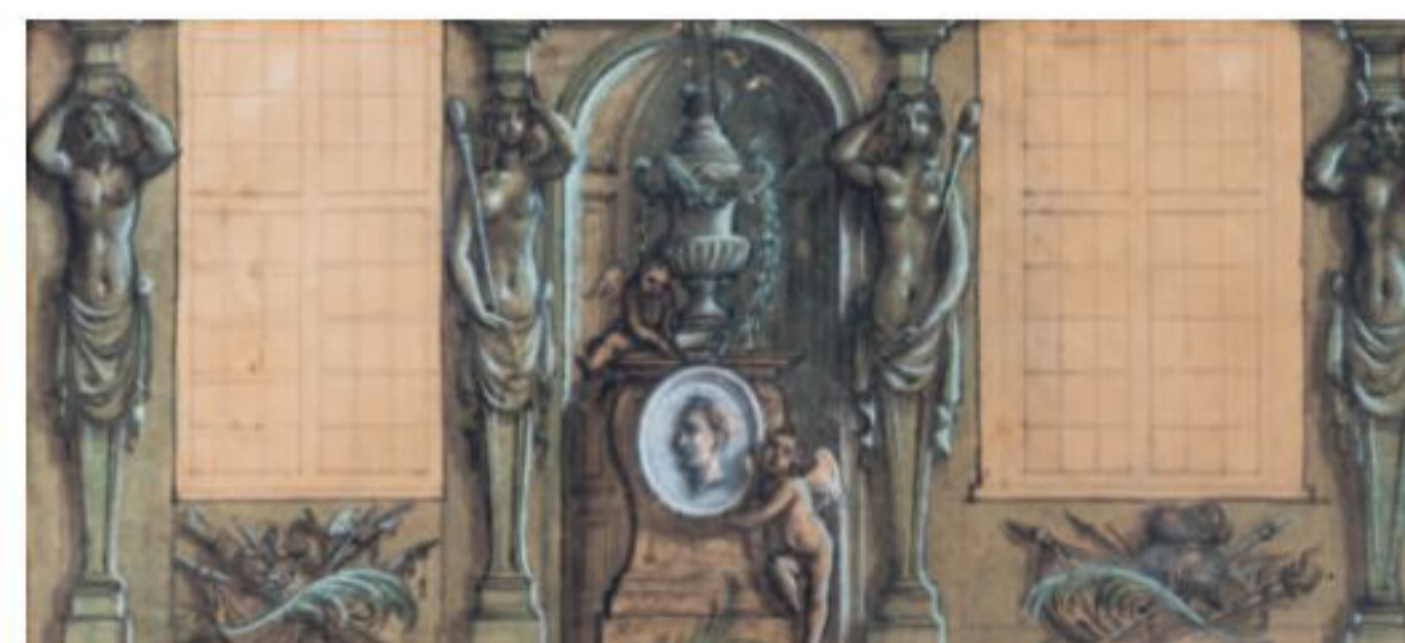
Shakespeare (William)
*The Merry Wives of Windsor [&] A
Midsommer Nights Dreame*,
extracted from the second folio,
1632.
Est. £5,000-7,000*



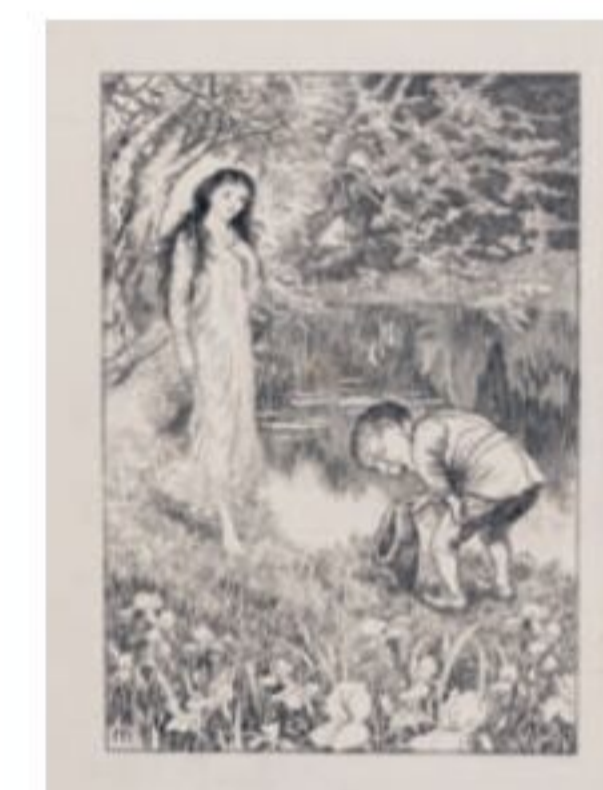
Böhme (Jakob)
The Works..., Edited by G.
Ward and T. Langcake,
4 vol., first collected edition,
1764-81.
Est. £8,000-12,000*



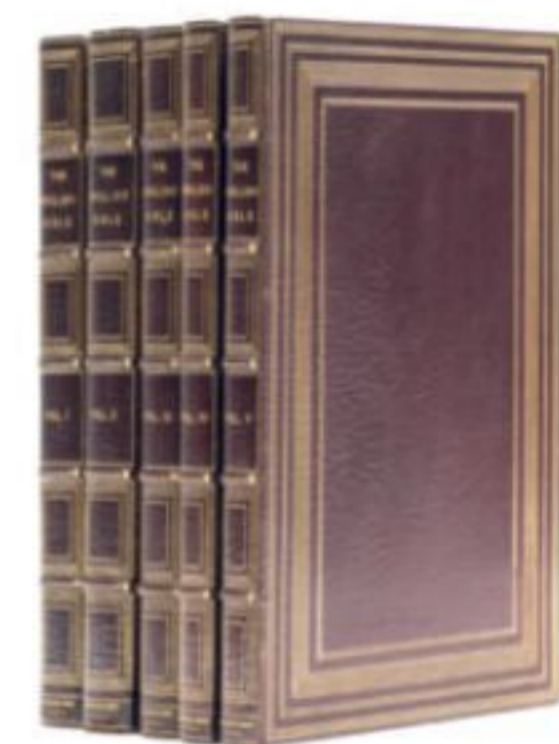
Yeats (William Butler)
3 Autograph Letters signed to [William] Linnell, 1
Autograph Letter signed to John Linnell & 1 Typed
Letter signed to Katherine Riches,
Dublin, [1896] & 1927.
Est. £5,000-7,000*



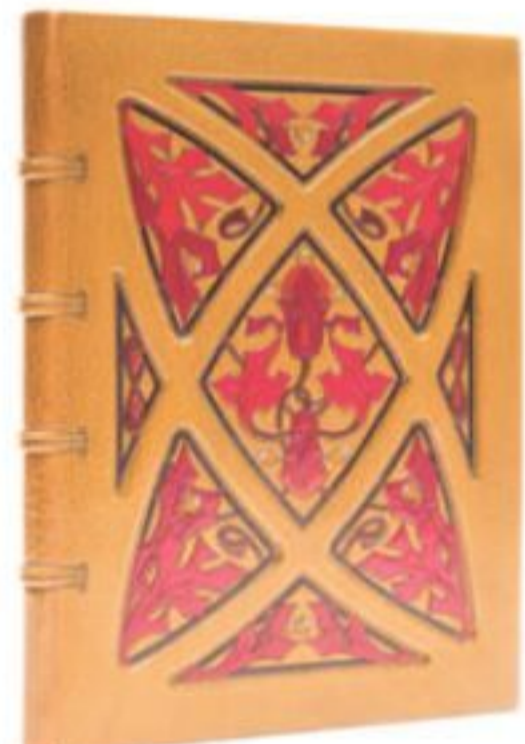
Whistler (Rex)
Two original designs for a mural in Port
Lympne,
Kent, [c. 1929-1930].



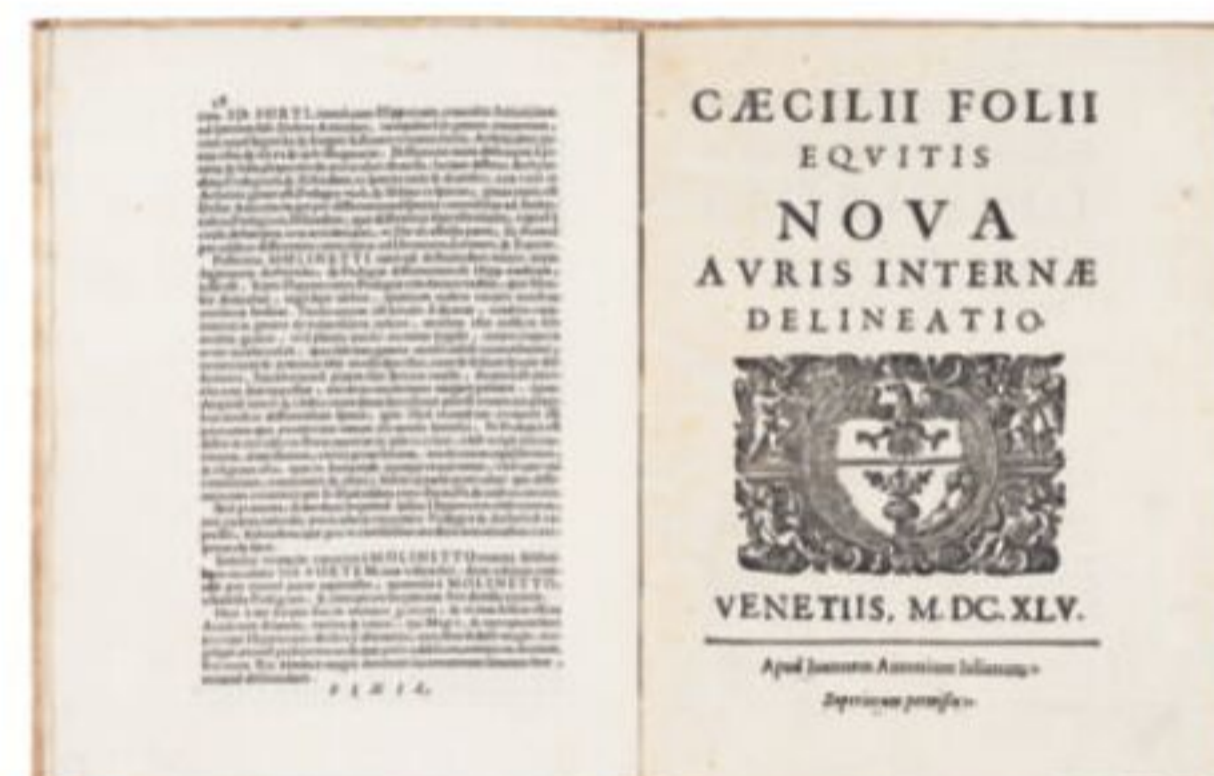
Hughes (Arthur)
Collection of 27 original designs to
illustrate Greville MacDonald's *Trystie's
Quest, or, Kit, King of the Pigwidgeons: a
Fairy Story*, [c. 1911].
Est. £4,000-6,000*



Doves Press -
English Bible (The),
5 vol., William Randolph Hearst's copy
bound in burgundy morocco, 1903-05.
Est. £6,000-8,000*



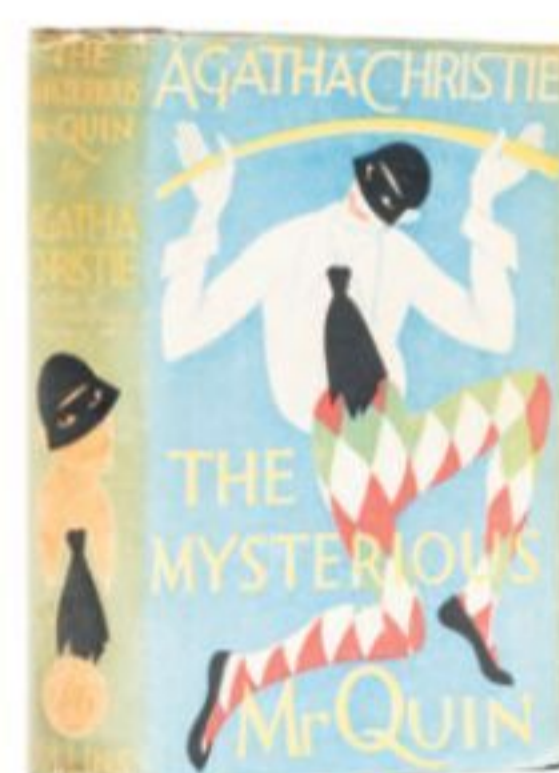
Heredia (José-Maria de)
Romancero,
calligraphic manuscript on vellum, illuminated
by Malatesta, goatskin with inset inlaid mosaic
panels, by H. M. Michel, Paris, 1906.
Est. £4,000-6,000*



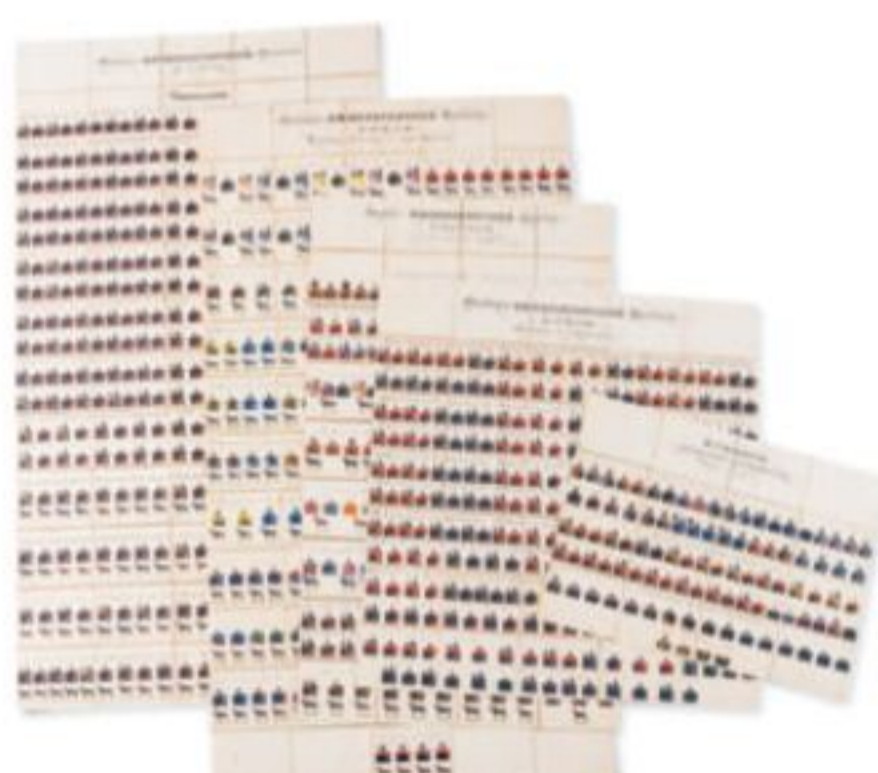
Folli (Cecilio)
Nova auris internae delineatio,
first edition, first issue, Venice, 1645; bound with 3
other works.
Est. £10,000-15,000*



Whistler (James Abbott McNeill)
The Duet,
lithograph, [1894].
Est. £4,000-6,000*



Christie (Agatha)
The Mysterious Mr Quin,
first edition, 1930.
Est. £10,000-15,000*



Military Uniforms -
*Mundry Imperatorskoi Rossiiskoi Armii. [Uniforms of
the Imperial Russian Army: Guards; Regular Cavalry
and Cossack Hosts; Infantry; Artillery; Various military
Establishments.]*,
[circa 1840].
Est. £8,000-12,000*



Curtis (William)
The Botanical Magazine...,
vol.1-30 in 15, 1236 hand-coloured
engraved plates, 1793-1809.
Est. £3,000-5,000*



Whitehead (Alfred North)
and Bertrand Russell.
Principia Mathematica,
vol. 2 and 3 only (of 3), first editions,
1912-13.
Est. £4,000-6,000*

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