HISTORY TODAY

Madam Butterfly
effect: a musical
marriage of
East and West

1771: the year
Britain lost
America?

Riot and Rebellion
in Restoration
London

FROM THE EDITOR
MY BACK PAGES

Those who kept a diary in 2020 have provided a service to posterity.
Paul Lay

Diarist in distracted times: John Evelyn, by Robert Walker, 1648.

'People who keep journals have life twice', claimed the writer Jessamyn West – though it's hard to imagine that anyone who has kept a diary over the last 12 months will be keen to relive it anytime soon.

Diarists of 2020 will, however, be providing a service to historians; there is the possibility that, once the vaccines kick in and the pandemic contracts, people will quickly forget the misery of the last year or so and embrace a 'Roaring Twenties' effect. It's good to preserve the moment.

Whatever the reaction, pandemic diaries will deal not only with the isolation, the boredom, the confusion and anxiety that permeates everyday life at the moment. Their background is one of profound political drama: the rise and fall of Trump and continuing unrest and division in the US; Brexit; a China resurgent; these and other ruptures will colour the pages – though they won't just be pages. An increase in personal record-keeping also includes social media posts and video entries. Historians will not have too little information, but too much. And then

there is the question of veracity.

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* is one classic whose sales have increased of late, though he was just five in 1665. Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn were certainly adults at that time and their entries offer wonderful contrasts. Evelyn's evocative account of the Great Fire of 1666 remains unequalled, though it is the intimacy of Pepys that compels: the wenching, the drinking, his love of music, mirrored a century later in the diaries of James Boswell. It might be argued that Pepys and Boswell offer a picture of their age we want to believe in: Ralph Josselin is arguably a greater diarist of the 17th century, but his world of piety, puritanism and magic is a more challenging, less recognisable one for the modern reader.

One must not talk of diaries, of isolation, boredom and fear, without mentioning those of Anne Frank, the greatest of the 20th century, with their concluding invocation, a shocking sentence of hope: 'I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.' We all wish that observation to be true.

FOUNDATIONS
PROMETHEUS

The immortal Titan abandoned to his eternal fate.

Peter Paul Rubens opened his studio in Antwerp in 1610 and *Prometheus Bound* was one of his first works to be produced there – though the eagle was painted by Frans Snyders, a colleague renowned for his depictions of the natural world.

The scene is that of the Titan Prometheus bound to a rock, an eagle devouring his liver in perpetuity; an immortal, Prometheus cannot die.

The Titan had helped Zeus, the leader of the gods, in his attempt to rule over Cronus and other Titans. Zeus, however, had turned on his former ally, angered that Prometheus had given the gifts of fire – stolen from Mount Olympus – and art to mortal humankind. Zeus, therefore, ordered Power (Kratos) and Force (Bia) to chain Prometheus to a rock in the isolated Caucasus mountains, where he would be abandoned to endure his eternal fate.

Rubens' painting was inspired by the play of the same name by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus: or so it was thought. The fifth-century BC drama is now believed to be by a different hand, its language, metre, style and outlook too different from the plays known to be by the Athenian.

'Aeschylus' owed the story to Hesiod, who was writing around 700 BC, but its appeal proved strongest among the European Romantics of the 18th and 19th centuries, who adored the idea of a tragic hero defying a god. It inspired Percy Bysshe Shelley's four-act drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), while *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley's epochal novel of 1818, is subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*.

Prometheus Bound, by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611-12, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
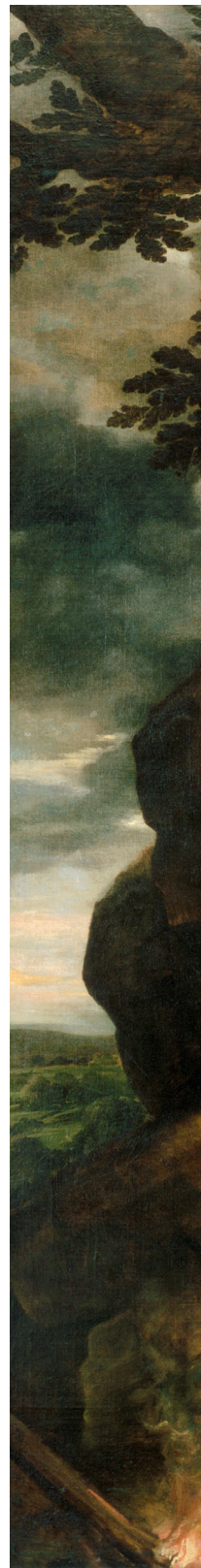
LETTERS

**'Trust in Change', artwork by
Ben Jones.**

Blaming the Victims

Avi Shlaim laments that Israel has done nothing in return for peace with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco (Head to Head, February 2021). This is victim blaming on a national level. For countries not to recognise, and remain formally at war with, a UN member state is an irregular situation not requiring concessions by the state in question for its reversal. Nor is occupation of land relevant – Israel has not occupied Emirati, Bahraini, Sudanese or Moroccan land; linking recognition with the situation of a third party (the Palestinians) was a discretionary political decision by those countries, now wisely reversed.
Andrew Lewis
London

Where's the Evidence?

My first reaction to Ray Weaver's letter (Letters, February) with its threat to cancel his subscription was that it must have escaped from Sir Herbert Gussett's correspondence with *Private Eye*. It doesn't contain a shred of evidence or argument in support of his intemperate condemnation of Peter Mandler's article about the National Trust (Behind the Times, December 2020). It's not even clear what exactly he is objecting to, since Mandler's article consisted mainly of background information about the origins of the National Trust together with a measured assessment of the issues surrounding the preservation and interpretation of historic properties. Given Mr Weaver's gratuitous sideswipe at the

Guardian, I can only assume that he was so incensed at Mandler taking issue with a *Daily Telegraph* editorial that he felt obliged to mount an immediate counterattack. If it wasn't for the current lockdown I would advise him to get out more.
Duncan Toms
Machynlleth, Powys

Closer Reading Required

I cannot see what Ray Weaver is complaining about. He surely cannot dispute that many grand houses now in the National Trust's care were built with the profits from slavery; is he therefore upset that these facts are being given more prominence than hitherto? If so, he would appear to be aligning himself with those criticised in Mandler's article in the December 2020 issue: the politicians and commentators now working themselves into a lather over this alleged historical revisionism. But revisionism – the reinterrogation and reinterpretation of the past – is the essence of historical study.

Mr Weaver may have been a subscriber to *History Today* for many years, but he can't have been reading it very closely!
Joseph Nicholas
London

Not Just a Roman

Lucian of Samosata is described as a 'Roman poet' (Foundations, February). 'Roman' is OK in the sense that he was writing in the high Roman imperial era, but he was also a Hellenised Syrian, while 'satirist' best captures his very wide-ranging oeuvre.
Paul Cartledge
Cambridge

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE CREATION OF BANGLADESH?

Beginning in March 1971, the Bangladesh War of Independence led to East Pakistan becoming a new nation state. On the 50th anniversary of its outbreak, four experts assess the war's legacy.

Sarmila Bose

'The "nation state" is the poisonous gift of European colonisation'

Author of Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War *(Hurst, 2011)*

The creation of Bangladesh was a missed opportunity for India to reverse the British partition of Bengal. It was an error of judgement due to India's tendency to think in terms of how to damage Pakistan, rather than what might benefit India.

At the end of the 1971 war, Pakistan was in disarray and the Indian army was in control of the territory of East Pakistan. Had Indira Gandhi annexed it as the new state of East Bengal within the Union of India and offered Sheikh Mujib the chief ministership, evidence suggests he would have accepted. He had few options. India has responded with an iron fist to any secessionist tendencies within the boundaries it was bequeathed by the British, holding large swathes of territory under military occupation, without Constitutional protections. By 1975 Indira Gandhi had annexed Sikkim and broken the 'Lion of Kashmir', Sheikh Abdullah, who agreed to be chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

The creation of Bangladesh also reinforced the concept of the 'nation state', the poisonous gift of European colonisation, rather than stimulating thinking about alternative forms of political organisation. Worse, it reinforced the fallacious notion that nationhood and state formation could be based on a singular identity – 'Bengali' in this case, rather than 'Muslim', which was the basis for Pakistan. Pakistan ceased to exist in 1971, as the creation of Bangladesh destroyed its raison d'etre. But Bangladesh was no more a land for Bengalis than Pakistan was a homeland for South Asia's Muslims. Nearly half of the world's Bengalis did not live in East Pakistan and had no desire to become Bangladeshis, nor did Bangladesh want them. The continuing precarious position of Hindus in Bangladesh showed that being Bengali was not enough.

In 1947 many Bengali Hindus backed Partition to avoid Muslim majority rule in a democratic India. The continuation of Partition in the form of Bangladesh by a professedly secular Indian government has ultimately contributed to the political space for the rise of Hindu nationalism in India.

Bangladesh was no more a land for Bengalis than Pakistan was a homeland for South Asia's Muslims

Nahid Afrose Kabir

‘The Pakistani government has never apologised for the genocide it committed’

Professor of History at BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

As we celebrate 50 years since Bangladesh's independence, I feel proud of my Bangladeshi identity. Yet, when I (with my parents) lived in Karachi in what was then West Pakistan from 1964 to 1970, I observed first-hand how the West Pakistani government deprived the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) of their economic, cultural and political rights. Then from 25 March to 16 December 1971, the Pakistani military government resorted to genocide against Bangladeshis, while many Bangladeshis joined the Liberation War. India offered help to the Bangladeshis by giving them refuge and training their freedom fighters. India finally defeated Pakistan's forces in early December 1971.

The Bangladeshis have been resilient in nation building and have made advances in many areas. Bangladesh now has a female prime minister, Sheikh Hasina. It has made progress in the field of education and excelled in cricket and the garment industry. The late Sir Fazle Abed founded the world's largest non-government organisation, BRAC, in Bangladesh. Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus' Grameen Bank's microcredit system assists the poor, mostly women, to get out of poverty. Bangladesh has also accommodated about 1.3 million Rohingya refugees.

Amid the positive developments, however, there are issues to be addressed. In 1997 a peace accord was signed between the government of Bangladesh and the Chittagong Hill Tracts people. Yet there is still a heavy presence of Bangladeshi military in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and land disputes continue. The 2016 terrorist attacks on the Holey Artisan Café in Dhaka revealed that Bangladesh is vulnerable to the rise of Islamic radicalisation.

Through Bangladesh's foreign policy of 'friendship to all, malice to none', Bangladesh and Pakistan are trying to improve their bilateral relations. But we should never forget the genocide committed by the Pakistani military government against the people of Bangladesh in 1971. As of February 2021, the Pakistani government has not apologised for the genocide. On the war's 50th anniversary, it is time for it to do so.

The West Pakistani government deprived the people of East Pakistan of their rights

Samira Shackle

‘Refugees from the war have struggled to find a foothold in Pakistan’

Author of Karachi Vice: Life and Death in a Contested City *(Granta, 2021)*

The Bangladesh War of Independence has cast a long shadow across all the countries borne out of Partition and each has its own way of viewing that war and its aftermath. In Bangladesh, of course, the 1971 war is a story of liberation from an oppressor. In India, it is seen as a moment of victory. In Pakistan, it is felt as a deep loss; even today, 50 years later, it is not unusual to hear people refer to Bangladesh by its old name, 'East Pakistan'. Yet despite that sense of loss, refugees from the 1971 war have struggled to find a foothold in Pakistan; instead they are rejected by both sides.

At the time of Partition, many Muslims from the Indian state of Bihar moved to East Pakistan. They were working class but educated and many found work on the railways or in other government jobs. The Biharis spoke Urdu and, over time, tension escalated with the local Bangla-speaking population. When war broke out, the Bihari community sided with West Pakistan. Their side lost the war,

meaning that thousands were displaced for a second time. Having already left their homes in India in 1947, many migrated once again. Despite these sacrifices in the name of nation-building, in Pakistan they found a country less than willing to welcome them. Even today, many Biharis do not have full Pakistani citizenship. Thousands more have been left stranded in camps in Bangladesh; until the Supreme Court ruled in 2008 that they had the right to Bangladeshi citizenship, they were rendered stateless. Many of those who did make it to Pakistan still are.

This is echoed on the other side of the border. Millions of ethnic Bengalis sought refuge in the Indian state of Assam, but, 50 years later, they are still considered 'foreigners'. In recent years, under a Hindu majority government, efforts in Assam to deport or detain some ethnic Bengalis have stepped up.

In both India and Pakistan, these marginalised communities are the ultimate living evidence of the communal tensions that have simmered since 1947 – tensions which have erupted into war several times and which continue to shape people's lives profoundly.

Millions of ethnic Bengalis sought refuge in Assam, but 50 years later they are still considered 'foreigners'

Mubashar Hasan
'Independence has not necessarily brought freedom or democracy'

Adjunct Fellow at Western Sydney University and author of Islam and Politics in Bangladesh: The Followers of Ummah *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)*

Though it is 50 years since the country's creation, the momentum behind the quest for freedom and democracy for Bangladeshis had been building throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Systematic exclusionary policies imposed by West Pakistan had resulted in arrested development in the country's East, leading to poverty, lower literacy and limited access to civil and military positions for the citizens of East Pakistan.

Added to this, restricted press freedom and the imprisonment and extra-judicial killings of activists and critics funnelled mass resentment. When the Awami League (AL), which was founded by Bengali nationalists in Dhaka in 1949, won 167 of the 169 East Pakistan seats in the 1970 national election, Pakistan's military ruler Yahya Khan repeatedly postponed the meeting of the national assembly. On 7 March 1971,

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the charismatic leader of the AL, said 'the people of Bangla want to have their rights'. It seemed the issue could not be resolved peacefully and what followed was a nine-month-long war.

In the early years of independence, the Bangladeshi economy was ruined by the war and remained underdeveloped. Yet today, 50 years after the war's conclusion, progress has been remarkable. The government, with support from NGOs, has lifted millions out of severe poverty, increased mass literacy and reduced child mortality. Its multi-billion-dollar textile industry employs hundreds of thousands of women. Huge infrastructure projects have been completed.

Yet severe economic inequality is on the rise and Bangladeshi democracy is grossly undermined by regular state attacks on freedom of speech, academic freedom and allegations of grave human rights violations against the opposition and critics. Since 2014, the country has, in practice, been under the one-party rule of AL. Citizens, including AL supporters, are denied voting rights. It is a state of affairs, in terms of civil liberties and democracy, that might remind onlookers of the situation which first prompted unrest in East Pakistan. Independence has not necessarily brought real freedom or real democracy.

Progress has been remarkable, yet severe inequality is on the rise

HISTORY MATTERS
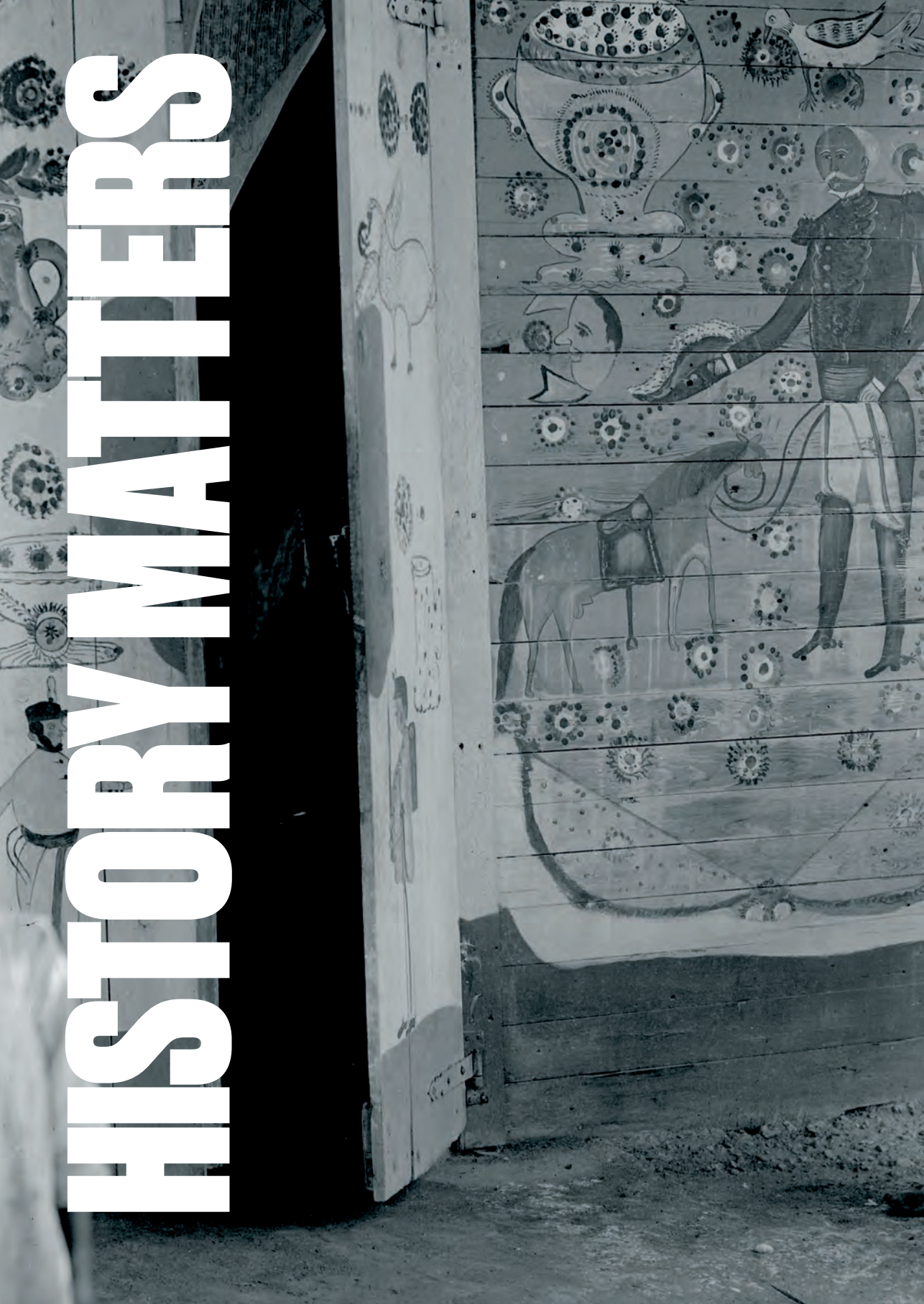
Zombies, Cannibals and Werewolves

The complexities of Haiti's religious culture were misunderstood and exploited by imperial powers.
Alex Goodall

Disenchanted isle: entrance to a Vodou shrine, Haiti, 1908.

Over the centuries, claims of cannibalism have been used repeatedly to justify slavery and imperialism. Indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans, it was said, were uncivilised and un-Christian people, whose savagery could be curbed only by European control.

After the Atlantic slave trade came to an end, these ideas gained in strength. In the late 19th century, as a new generation of imperialists began to push for colonial renovation, they revived older arguments about savagery and civilisation to make their case.

A key point of reference was Haiti, whose revolutionary struggle against the French had led in 1804 to the creation of the world's first black republic. Haiti's very existence was a challenge to those who believed that non-white people were incapable of self-government. However, a combination of political crises, foreign exploitation and debt had plunged the nation into trouble. European imperialists argued that Haiti's problems were the fault of its people alone. They were particularly contemptuous of Haitian Vodou (or 'voodoo'), a local religion that blended Caribbean and African folk traditions with Christianity, which they believed had corrupted the people and led them back into barbarism.

Spencer St John was a British diplomat who had been posted to Haiti. His book, *Hayti; or The Black Republic* (1884), was probably the most globally influential text written about that island in the 19th century. It left a pernicious legacy. Using little more than rumours spread by white planters and European expatriates, he offered up a host of negative stereotypes about Haiti's people, government, culture and religion, and claimed that Vodou ceremonies commonly involved child sacrifices and cannibalism. He offered his readers salacious stories of cannibalism, of people being buried alive, children murdered by the dozen and even tales of packages of salted human flesh wrapped in leaves for storage. 'Every foreigner', St John wrote, 'knows that cannibalism exists.'

St John's allegations spread widely. From the perspective of British imperialists, the problems Haiti faced would be repeated in the British West Indies if local people were given full rights and local cultures allowed to flourish. In 1890, for instance, the attorney general of Barbados told a visiting journalist that 'in spite of centuries of Christian rule devil worship was a fact in most of the islands'. Only European control would keep it suppressed. The choice in the West Indies, wrote the Oxford historian James Anthony Froude, was 'either an English administration pure and simple like the East Indian, or a falling eventually into a state like that of Hayti, where they eat the babies, and no white man can own a yard of land'.

These arguments also helped to justify the US invasion of Haiti, which began in 1915. One potted newspaper history published a few months later described the country as the 'grave of 50,000 whites', a fertile land that had become 'the burying ground of a once

'The occupiers correctly understood that local religious leaders could lead resistance against the occupation'

prosperous white race, destroyed by a Frankenstein ['s monster]' of its own creation.

During the 20-year occupation that followed, the US sought to clamp down on Vodou using laws against poisoning and *les sortileges* (spells), as well as more brutal methods. Marines raided Vodou ceremonies, arresting and assaulting participants and destroying ritual objects.

In part this was because the occupiers correctly understood that local religious leaders could lead resistance against the occupation, just as they had against France. However, discussions about human sacrifice and cannibalism were also a useful diversion when allegations of torture and violence by marines on the island began to be raised by critics at home. In response to claims of the 'indiscriminate killing' of Haitian rebels, officials told journalists that captured marines had been subjected to 'the most barbarous indignities' including being 'offered as sacrifices to the Voodoo gods', their bodies 'disembowelled and the viscera hung on trees'. General Lejeune of the US Marine Corps alleged that Haitian rebel forces had killed and eaten the 'vital organs' of American marines in order to absorb their courage. Shooting captured rebels, it was implied, was an entirely proportionate response.

Many Americans believed that 'Christianising' the island was a key reason for the occupation in the first place. As a result, it was argued that US control had seen Vodou rituals fall into decline in the 1920s – that, in the words of

Scare story: poster for Victor Halperin's 1932 film *White Zombie*.

one journalist, the 'marines have silenced many of the voodoo drums'. In practice, however, the long occupation only amplified the ghoulish image of Vodou.

This led to an explosion of interest in Haitian religion in the US, but often a distorted version that blended fragments of inherited French folklore – such as the *loup-garou,* or werewolf – and Haitian creole elements such as the *zombi* with the lurid stories of cannibalism. The small number of anthropologists and journalists who sought to

understand Haiti's complex religious landscape more soberly could do little to counter this tidal wave of misinformation.

Since 1932, when Victor Halperin directed the first ever zombie film, *White Zombie*, zombies, cannibals and werewolves have become staples of the dark underbelly of cinematic imagination, often retaining their racialised associations not very far beneath the surface. Probably the most famous example is *Live and Let Die* (1973), in which James Bond travelled from Harlem to New Orleans then Haiti to hunt down a drug-dealing Caribbean dictator who used a Vodou priest to terrorise the local population and force them to work on his opium fields. Ironically, the use of religion to control the local population and make them obedient plantation workers is a better description of the historical role of established Christianity in the Caribbean than of Vodou.

Nor did these ideas stay in films. Similar claims about the savagery of Haitian culture emerged during the second US invasion of the island in 1994. And, following the Haitian earthquake of 2010, the US Baptist minister Pat Robertson claimed the disaster was punishment from God because Haitians had made a 'pact with the devil' during their struggle for independence. Even though figures such as Spencer St John are long forgotten, their myths and mistakes still survive.

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Stakhanovite Shopping

Even the retail sector became part of the second Five Year Plan imposed on the Soviet Union by Stalin. *Dolly Church*

On 3 August 1935 Aleksei Stakhanov mined a record-breaking 102 tonnes of coal in six hours. He became an overnight celebrity. Towns were renamed in his honour, his face graced the covers of international magazines, including *Time*, and a movement was created in his name: Stakhanovism. At the dawn of Stalin's second Five Year Plan, new levels of productivity and efficiency were deemed imperative in order to catch up with the West. Stakhanovism, the proverbial carrot, rewarded workers who broke new ground in skill and technical ability. The Communist Party Central Committee, which met in March 1937, branded sceptics of the movement 'Trotskyist saboteurs', many of whom were sent to labour camps at the height of Stalin's terror. Inculcated with images of Stakhanov – exuding strength, dexterity and all the expected impressions of manual labour – workers were to be led by example. While prevalent, however, these hypermasculine images do not capture the breadth of the Stakhanovite ideology and its participants.

Far from the grit of Stakhanov's coal mine, Serafima Borisova was fastidiously practising the craft of selling women's clothing. She was meticulous and had a keen aesthetic eye, crucial attributes in her line of work. Like Stakhanov, her unique skills in dressing windows, advising customers and procuring desirable fabrics earned her national acclaim, as well as rewards in the form of a gramophone and a

Shopping with Stalin: a queue in a Moscow street, 1930s.

1,000-rouble bonus. Elevated to the Presidium of the General Moscow Meeting of Exemplary Workers, she was a paragon of retail excellence, renowned not only for her productivity but her courteous service.

Seeking to replicate her efforts and standardise the metric of good customer service, the Soviet state developed an infrastructure of Stakhanovite training in retail. The historian Amy E. Randall argues that these changes were intended to be both cultural and practical. They were enacted through trade unions who employed Stakhanovite specialists to oversee work, hosted conferences and facilitated the establishment of Stakhanovite stores. Retail culture was to be modernised, both in the behaviour of staff and in the products stocked.

Emphasis was placed on offering customers a cultured (*Kul'turnost*) experience, which meant refining shoppers' taste towards new, and often more luxurious, items. For Stakhanovite workers to succeed, they had to pre-empt consumer trends, organise the store into easily navigated displays and educate shoppers in the use of their products. This included teaching consumers how to prepare foods or maintain garments, but also meant instructing them in the use of new electrical equipment, such as radios. Adhering to its roots, Stakhanovism in retail also focused on mechanisation, which was manifested via the products sold – intended to automate the domestic sphere – but also in working practices, such as the development of

conveyor belts for packaging. This was part of a broader Stakhanovite emphasis on productivity in retail: sales, the mastery of new technologies and working techniques.

Bringing Stakhanovism to retail was intended to solve a host of practical issues. On a basic level, it aimed to expand the parameters of socialism and to assimilate a new demographic of workers as model Soviet citizens. At the same time, Randall argues that expanding the retail sector was integral to Stalin's agenda of rapid modernisation, which demanded a successful retail industry that could service new workers in cities and cultivate a shared sense of Soviet culture. It was an attempt to cast off, at least superficially, communism's frugal, anachronistic associations, showing the world that it too could be metropolitan and cutting-edge. In Stalin's own words: 'It would be stupid to think that socialism could be built on the basis of destitution and deprivation ... this would not be socialism, but a caricature of socialism.'

Yet retail and communism make an unlikely pairing: even more so when that retail caters to people's desires rather than their needs. Without branding, advertising and a plethora of options, the idea of window-shopping in a state-controlled economy was a sterile one, and moves to re-energise the industry were met with scepticism from many Soviet citizens. In the 1930s, retail workers were hindered by their association with bourgeois *Nepmen*, who exploited early Soviet policy in their own

'It was an attempt to cast off, at least superficially, communism's frugal associations'

interests. Attempts were made at revolutionising their reputation through educational and social programmes – workers' clubs and literacy circles – but the same question haunted the trade: was Stakhanovism in retail a genuine manifestation of worker pride or merely a concession to capitalism?

For the critic, Stakhanovism could be likened to an 'employee of the month'-type system of favouritism. Evoking the familiarity of tipping or employee bonuses, Stakhanovites were motivated by the prospect of better working conditions, material gains and the potential of fame. At the same time, lauding certain employees over others splintered the workforce, fuelling, at best, a culture of culpability and, at worst, blame. This stacked the decks against individual workers when they were held accountable for shortfalls in sales and distributions, even when the fault lay in the production process.

Yet one should not overlook the culture that Stakhanovism fostered, Randall argues: 'Admittedly, members of the Soviet elite benefited more from the new trade system than the average citizen because of their greater purchasing power ... However ... the narrative of "retreat" and

embourgeoisement has obscured aspects of the campaign for Soviet trade that helped to extend the Soviet revolutionary project.' It would certainly be wrong to overlook the sheer numbers of retail workers participating in the Stakhanovite cause. When officially surveyed in 1936, it was found that at least seven per cent of the 1.5 million trade workers identified as Stakhanovites. The proportion was far greater in the retail sector, which boasted figures over 30 per cent in several cities. This movement offered workers not only a collective purpose but also an identity: no longer suspect shop clerks, they could now be considered 'retail heroes', at the forefront of a national agenda.

While some argued that Stakhanovism marked a concession to the right, an equivalent compromise might be seen on the other side of the aisle. Indeed, the idea of motivating employees through pride instead of monetary incentives is far from alien to capitalist workplaces. Bureaucratised into team building exercises, employee socials and leadership training, it is part of the ethos of 'company culture'. Both Amazon and Walmart have touted their 'retail heroes' in response to the pandemic. Such workers have been elevated, praised for their diligence and put to the fore of a national plight. In this sense, a more benign Stakhanovism might be said to live on, at least rhetorically, beyond the Soviet Union's defunct borders.

Dolly Church is an editor and freelance writer.

Roosevelt's Southern Connection

Was the US president 'dealing with the devil' in his relationships with segregationist politicians or was his 'the art of the possible'?
Ashley Steenson

After a 1937 trip to Mississippi, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent the state's senator Pat Harrison a letter of praise along with the debts he had incurred after losing to him in a game of poker: 'I bow to your prowess and apologize for the delay, and trust that you have not been pecuniarily inconvenienced.' Traditional histories portray Roosevelt's personal relationships with southern segregationists as a utilitarian necessity that Roosevelt made with some regret. Sources like the 1937 letter, however, suggest that Roosevelt's concessions were also part of a shared leisure culture which many politicians took part in across sectional lines.

In his 2013 study *Fear Itself*, Ira Katznelson argued that Roosevelt upheld liberal democracy in the face of fascism, militarism and southern racial conflict through his relationships with foreign dictators and domestic segregationists. Katznelson explained: 'To promote the common good, Machiavelli claimed, it is necessary to perform ethically dubious acts.' Katznelson holds that Roosevelt's connections with southern politicians were, somewhat inevitably, more enduring than those with dictators, but Roosevelt nonetheless saw his negotiations with segregationists as a tragic Faustian arrangement. In response, the historian Robert Westbrook has argued that it is ahistorical to consider Roosevelt's deals with politicians such as Harrison as tragic: 'A tragic decision is an occasion for anguish ... But did New Dealers suffer such anguish? Katznelson offers no evidence that they did.'

Of Pat Harrison, the socialist firebrand Huey Long, Senator of Louisiana explained: 'The Senator from Mississippi has another way of standing by his friends ... catch your friend in trouble, stab him in the back and drink his blood.' In 1924, the labour organiser A. Philip Randolph called Harrison 'one of the most rabid Negro opponents'. Harrison, who after the Democrat Woodrow Wilson's presidency (1913-21) became known as the 'gadfly of the senate' for speaking out against subsequent Republican administrations, was to serve the Democratic party for 30 years from 1911 to his death in 1941.

Later in his career Harrison maintained his segregationist political philosophy while presenting himself publicly as a moderate. After state constitutions disenfranchised most black southerners in the late 19th and early 20th century, southern Democrats were able to maintain substantial percentages in the US Congress and receive important committee appointments based on their seniority. As a result, Harrison became Chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee.

Socially, Harrison's world was little different from the smoke-filled rooms of the Knickerbocker Club, which Roosevelt frequented in New York. Roosevelt regarded himself as a patrician, a beneficent guide to those below him. As he advanced politically, Harrison came to represent

planter culture in the South. Although not born into wealth, he supported monied interests and acquired the company and endorsement of elites. To Northern Democrats like Roosevelt, Harrison was both more useful and more relatable than Mississippi demagogues, such as Theodore Bilbo and the 'Great Commoner' James K. Vardaman, although the three politicians shared similar segregationist views.

After the initial devastation of the Great Depression and the historic 1932 presidential election, Harrison adapted his political beliefs to work with Roosevelt on the most progressive legislation in the history of American politics, the limited but unprecedented Social Security Act – limited, because it conveniently barred domestic workers and sharecroppers, the majority of whom were black southerners.

Southern Democrats such as Long and the Alabama senator Hugo Black questioned the barring of farmers in the legislation, though no legislators opposed the discrimination against domestic workers, as most were southern black women with no publicly recognised union.

Even as many southern Democrats broke with their party and the president in the late 1930s, Harrison wrote that, although he disagreed with Roosevelt at times: 'I am sure that there are few, if any, in the Legislative branch of the Government who have been more consistently helpful to the President than I.' Initially, Harrison used the popularity of the president's liberal reforms to advance politically, but the alliance between Roosevelt and the senator was ultimately strained by disagreements over

President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Bill in the White House, 1935. Harrison is in the white suit.

taxation. Though he eventually refused to sign a 1938 revenue bill that contained numerous corporate tax cuts, Roosevelt had previously sent minor suggestions for revision to Harrison, assuring him that: 'Business will be helped, not hurt.'

Harrison also disapproved of Roosevelt's support of the abolition of the poll tax and many Democrats' support of anti-lynching measures. Despite this, Roosevelt remained on friendly terms with him, even in the midst of controversy over the anti-lynching laws, which Harrison claimed would 'destroy the white civilization of the South'. Roosevelt responded:

Pat – old dear! What is this I hear about your going home ahead of time? Do please don't! I need you here on lots of things.

Despite their disagreements, Roosevelt and Harrison continued to work together in the face of war in Europe. In their final collaboration, Harrison and Roosevelt successfully pressured Congress to allocate aid to Britain just two months before the senator's death in 1941.

For Westbrook, to imbue Roosevelt's concessions to racial inequality with tragedy is to 'ennoble' these compromises without sufficient historical evidence. He argues that, rather than making a 'deal with the devil', the president's letters show him and Harrison on a beach trip, sharing a poker game.

Ashley Steenson is a history PhD student at the University of Alabama.

All By Myself

Solitude was treated with suspicion in the Middle Ages. For most people it has only been a possibility in recent times.
Martha Bailey

In modern western society, time for oneself, alone and in private, is taken for granted. Since the late 19th century, access to solitude has been central to understandings of privacy, which was defined in an influential article from the 1890 *Harvard Law Review* as 'the right to be let alone'. But this was not always the case.

In medieval Europe, when life was a far more communal experience than it is today, solitude was considered 'the worst form of poverty'. The Latin word *solitudo,* from which the modern English word *solitude* derives, implied a negative, uncivilised condition. The word *lonely*, which appeared in English in the early 17th century, was barely distinguishable from *solitary* for a further two centuries. Solitude was certainly familiar to monks, nuns, hermits and anchorites, but this was a particularly pious sort of isolation, designed to facilitate communion with God. It was not something that ordinary people should have access to.

The asceticism that some of these religious lifestyles embraced also reflected something fundamental about medieval views of solitude – it was a punishment. In the first century AD, Seneca argued that 'solitude persuades us to every kind of evil ... everyone is better off in the company of somebody or other no matter who, than in his own company'. His views were cited throughout the Middle Ages and are emblematic of the suspicion with which medieval authorities regarded even temporary isolation.

Despite this overarching

O, solitude: *Interior with Woman Reading*, by Carl Holsøe, Danish, early 20th century.

'Finding space to be alone was a challenge for rich and poor alike'

suspicion of being alone, it does seem that medieval people experienced the desire to be by themselves, at least some of the time. This is best reflected in the trope of the lovesick protagonist who flees to a chamber in order to indulge (often very dramatically), in their emotions. Troilus in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* speeds 'un-to his chambre ... faste allone ... every dore he shette' from whence he proceeds to '[smyte] his brest ay with his festes'. But even Troilus, a Trojan prince, cannot take this privacy for granted and has to dismiss 'a man of his or two' from his chamber to obtain his solitude.

This reminds us of a problem which has faced people for much of history. Finding space to be alone was a challenge for rich and poor alike. Larger households would be filled with staff, while in the houses of those lower down the social scale, there was simply not enough room. The lack of privacy caused by all these bodies jostling for space was compounded by the nature of premodern architecture. Until corridors came into fashion during the 18th century (which in itself affected only the wealthiest households), houses were designed *en enfilade,* with rooms running onto each other. Household traffic was not contained within corridors, but rather moved *through* rooms, meaning that doors could (and did) swing open at compromising moments.

As the early modern period progressed, medieval suspicions around the concept of solitude diminished. Historians associate this transition with rising literacy and an expanding print culture, which facilitated silent reading. The Protestant imperative to private reflection also normalised temporary solitude (albeit for the purposes of communion with God and nothing else). There were, still, many in the 16th and 17th centuries who were nervous about it; 16th-century protestants, for example, fretted about which lustful sins the devil might tempt the solitary individual with. Yet overall, there is evidence that a transition from idealising rather than fearing solitude had been made by the end of the 17th century.

In William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) a husband and wife negotiate her right to solitude. The wife argues that she should have the right to:

dine in my Dressing room when I'm out of Humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table ... and lastly ... you shall always knock at the door before you come in.

But private rooms were, again, a luxury reserved for the wealthy and, even though architecture started to favour specialised rooms for sleeping, eating and entertaining, in the 17th and 18th centuries most people still found securing true solitude a difficult task.

It was in the 19th century that the celebration of solitude reached its apogee, encapsulated by the work of the Romantic poets, such as Byron and Wordsworth. The Romantics rejected the Enlightenment commitment to sociability, arguing that prolonged solitude fostered rather than shackled creativity. When Wordsworth 'wandered lonely as a cloud' he was celebrating solitude as a means of connecting with the self, finding inspiration in nature. Yet the Romantic focus on the great outdoors reminds us that, for many, going outside was often the only way of securing personal privacy. Even in 19th-century middle-class residences, to have one's own bedroom was unusual. In 1911 three quarters of the English population still lived in one- or two-roomed dwellings. It was only as the family shrunk throughout the 20th century that fewer bodies in the house made the separating of boys from girls and children from parents more achievable.

The history of solitude reminds us that even the things we take for granted as universals have a past and a context. In the case of solitude, this context is both physical and ideological. For centuries people struggled to carve out space for themselves in crowded dwellings, just as they wrestled with how solitude affected the human condition. Medieval philosophers, accepting Aristotle's philosophy that 'whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god', could never have understood Virginia Woolf as she extolled the virtues of being alone: 'How much better is silence ... How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird ... Let me sit here for ever ... myself being myself.'

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Alternative Histories by Rob Murray

THE OLD WEST, 1870

13 MARCH 1591
FALL OF AFRICA'S GREATEST EMPIRE

The Songhay Empire would not be the first military power to set too much store by its cavalry. Founded in 1464 out of the ruins of the Malian Empire, Songhay was the largest of the indigenous empires in Africa. At its zenith, it covered around 540,000 square miles, stretching east-west for 1,200 miles along the River Niger with the Sahara to the north and the Sudan savannah to the south. Although it incorporated the great centre of Islamic learning and culture at Timbuktu, its capital was sited further east at Gao.

Internally, its biggest problem was succession. While some emperors, such as Askia Toure (1493-1528) and Askia Dawud (1549-82), were able to secure their thrones and rule successfully, the succeeding periods were characterised by fratricidal rivalries and rifts.

But it also had a powerful enemy. In January 1590 the Moroccan sultan Al-Mansur sent Emperor Askia Ishaq II an ultimatum. Ishaq sent back spears and horseshoes; a sign that his horsemen would prevail. Besides, if Moscow had its winter to defend it from Napoleon, Songhay had the Sahara. Al-Mansur was undeterred. He had arquebuses and cannon on his side. The Songhay were so disdainful of the new technologies of war it is said that they threw captured Moroccan firearms into the Niger.

The 4,000-strong Moroccan army entered the Sahara in late December, provisioned by 10,000 camels and 1,000 pack horses. Meanwhile, Ishaq's army – at least 40,000 strong, although possibly more than twice that – was assembled too slowly to attack the invading army as it emerged exhausted from the desert.

These then were the circumstances of the Battle of Tondibi, not far from Gao, which was fought on 13 March 1591 (though some reports suggest it may have been the day before.) One report says that Ishaq's plan was to break the Moroccan line by driving hundreds of stampeding cattle into it. But, terrified by the noise of the cannon, the cattle turned and crashed into the Songhay army instead. Their ranks scattered; Ishaq himself fled. In the end only a small group of Songhay warriors, who had roped themselves together, were left standing. They fought to the last.

Desert dwelling: the tomb of Emperor Askia Toure at Gao, Mali.

By Mathew Lyons
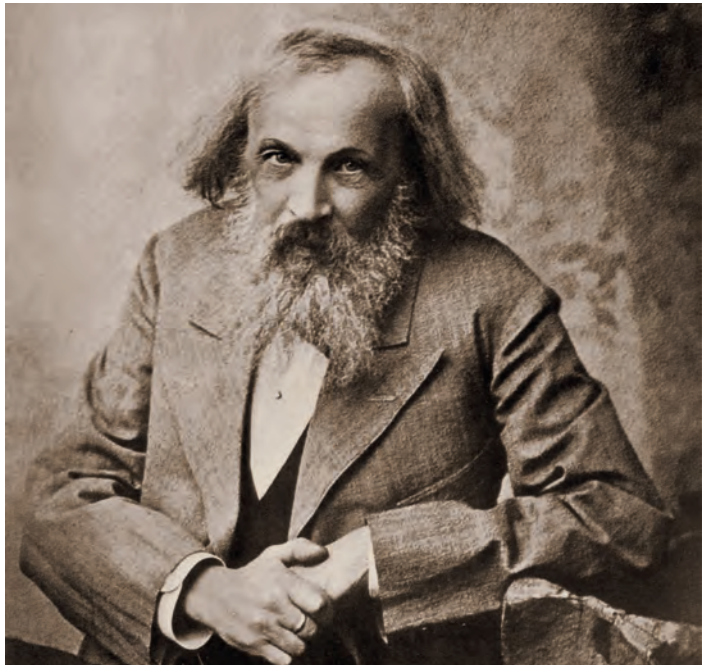
A dream come true: Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev (1834-1907).

1 MARCH 1869
DISCOVERY OF THE PERIODIC TABLE

It came to him in a dream, Dmitri Mendeleev told a friend. He hadn't slept for three days worrying how to classify the elements. Exhausted, he fell asleep and the answer came.

Sadly, this may not be true. To begin with, Mendeleev – born in Siberia in 1834 – had been thinking about the question since at least 1860, when the atomic weights of the elements had been established.

By 1869 he was professor of chemistry at St Petersburg and writing a textbook for his students. Having finished the first section, he paused to consider which group of elements to cover next.

The answer may not have arrived in a dream, but it did come quickly, on 1 March 1869. Mendeleev had accepted an invitation to visit a cheese dairy that day. But instead, he turned over the dairy's letter and scribbled on the back the atomic weights of dissimilar elements. Previously, chemists had sought a taxonomy through familial groups of elements; by comparing the unlike, Mendeleev could identify a general theory underlying all of them.

He made cards of the 63 known elements and played with them in a form of 'chemical solitaire' until he had worked out what we know as the Periodic Table. He saw that its structure implied the existence of then-unknown elements, eight of which he successfully predicted.

'A THING THAT NEVER WAS HEARD OF...'
THE VENNER REBELLION

An armed uprising by a handful of religious extremists in Restoration London led to serious consequences for British and, ultimately, world history. *Steven Prizeman*

The sixth of January 1661, Epiphany, marked the end of the first Christmastide since Charles II's return to England as king after the decade of austere republican rule that followed the Civil Wars. For many Londoners this also meant a welcome return of seasonal merrymaking but, it being Sunday, others found pious quiet more appropriate. Shortly after 9pm that night, in Coleman Street in the Moorgate district at the north of the City, a Mr Martin, annoyed by the incessant activity of visitors to a neighbouring Baptist meeting house, 'went up to know the reason of their unseasonable stay'. Within half an hour those congregants would embark on a murderous rampage, shooting City officials and chasing off soldiers from the Trained Bands militia before escaping into the night, having delivered the first serious armed challenge to the Restoration.

So began the three-day revolt known, after its leader, as Venner's Rising. Thomas Venner, a 52-year-old Devonian wine cooper, had once been prosperous and respectable. A married man with three children, he was a member of London's Coopers Company and, during a dozen years in America, organised a similar trading body in Boston. While in New England, Venner received a 'testimony': a religious awakening. After returning to England in 1651, Venner found work in the Tower of London as a 'master cooper'. In June 1655 he was arrested and dismissed for voicing a desire to blow up the fortress and kill Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the English Republic.

Venner spent six months in prison, but the following summer he was preaching his revolutionary views to a congregation in Coleman Street. His wish to bring down Cromwell moved from thought to action. As 1657 began, Venner was coordinating a 125-strong group committed to his overthrow. On the night of their attempt, troops pounced, arresting Venner and his 'cell' – they had been under surveillance by Cromwell's 'spymaster', John Thurloe. Venner returned to the Tower, this time as a prisoner. He remained there until early 1659, when, following Cromwell's death, he was released. Unmonitored, Venner fell under the official 'radar' as the Protectorate collapsed and the political nation reconstituted itself as a monarchy, inviting Charles to return from exile.

Why would such a visceral opponent of Cromwell also oppose Charles? Because Venner was a 'fanatick'. This word had come into use as a royalist term of abuse for the Protestant nonconformist opponents of Charles I – much like 'Roundhead'. But it also had a very specific meaning, set out in *The Character of a Phanatique*, an anonymous broadside published in March 1660:

Those may be truly called Phanatiques, who depend more upon the dictates of their own corrupt imaginations, and phantasies of their distempered brain than reason, custom, experience, or the general consent of all ages and nations; but especially those who … will not be content unless Christ will submit to their dirty humours, and come live upon earth with them … and will by no means be perswaded to submit to any authority but His.

Contemporaries would have had no difficulty in recognising the Fifth Monarchy Men. Invariably referred to as a 'sect', Fifth Monarchists were an interdenominational group with adherents from various persuasions, mostly Baptists, Independents and Quakers. According to their interpretation of the biblical Book of Daniel, Charles II was but 'the succession of the same cursed Seed, and Serpentine Off-spring, which by a continued *Series* runs through the Veins of the *Assyrian*, *Persian*, *Grecian*, and *Roman* Monarchies'. Those four 'monarchies' were past and all subsequent ones illegitimate – until such time as the Second Coming of Christ would see King Jesus ruling over a fifth, biblically sanctioned, monarchy. The consequence was a radical republican agenda that rejected all governments in which authority was centred in a particular individual, whether king or Lord Protector.

Portrait engraving with inscriptions:

Conventicula Curiosa

Pietas et Paupertas Simulata

Anabaptistarum et Quackerorum

BIBLIA ET DIABOLUS IN MANU IN CORDE

THOMAS VENNER,
ORATOR CONVENTICULORUM REGNI
MILLENARII ET LIBERTINORUM, SEDUCTOR
et CAPITANEUS SEDITIOSOR. ANABAPTISTARUM
ET QUACKERORUM IN CIVITAT. LONDINENS.
Decollatus in quatuor partes dissectus d. 19. Jan. Anno 1661.

Abbildung der zu Londen vorgangenen Execution wieder die rebellirende Quackers/ und deß Cromwels/ Iretons und Brandschauens außgegrabene Cörper; sampt beygefügter Relation/ aus einem Sendschreiben von Londen.

Em Herren sey hiemit unvorenthalten/ welcher Gestalt verwichenen 19. Januarij der vernemsten Redlemsführer der Auffrur- und verräterischen Quackers/ nach gerichtlicher Uberführung aller ihrer theils begangenen/ theils nach vorgehabten Mißhandlungen/ wieder ihre Königliche Majestät und allgemeine Ruhe/ zu wolverdienter Execution und Straffe gezogen: In dem zwen unter ihnen/ nemlich Roger Hodskin/ und Thomas Venner für dem Hauß/ da sie ihre heimliche Versamlung gehabt/ nemlich in der Colmanns-Straße geviertheilt/ Ormann und Prickard aber am Ende von Woodstreit enthauptet worden. Die andern/ welche man mehrentheils in der Lufft arrestiret/ oder mit dem Beil hinrichten wird/ sollen dem verlaut nach/ auch mit ersten in unterschiedlichen Gassen der Stad/ jeder männiglich zum Exempel justificiret werden. Dieser Mord- und Irr-Geister Reden vor Gericht seynd so unbeständig und verwirret gewesen/ daß sie sich mehr damit verdächtig und schuldig gemacht/ weder entschuldiget. Anfangs haben sie alles geläugnet/ nachmahlen/ da sie überzeuget worden/ entweder es einer auff den andern/ oder auff den Geist/ Entzuckungen/ und dergleichen Schwärmereyen gegeben. Das nichtige Fundament/ warauff diese liederliche Leute ihr vorhaben gebauet/ ist die eingebildte fünffte Monarchia/ deren Stiffter und Anfänger zu werden/ sie sich selbsten beredet. Massen aus deß fürnembsten Führers unter ihnen/ Thomas Venners/ Verantwortung und Entschuldigung abzunehmen war/ welcher bald diß bald jenes/ unter andern aber auch einen weitläufftigen Discurs von besagter fünfften Monarchia einwandte. So bestätigte solches auch der Zeugen Aussage/ daß dieser Venner/ Tragger und Tusnay/ als die Häupter der Auffruhr/ in der Colmanns-Straßen in einem Hauß sehr offt heimlich miteinander gerathschlagt/ wie man wieder die Gewalt der Erden/ oder weltliche Obrigkeit zu den Waffen greiffen/ und alles/ was ihnen wiederstrebte ausrotten müste. Zu welchem Ende sie im selbigem Versamlungs-Hause mit Wehr und Waffen/ Mußqueten/ Pistolen/ Spiessen/ Schwertern und Pantzern auffs beste sich versehen/ auch nachmals auff der Gassen/ in dem Tumult offentlich und überlaut geruffen hätten: Sie wolten den Lord Major von Londen haben. Das alles konte Thomas Venner nicht läugnen/ sagte doch/ nicht Er/ sondern Christus wäre der Auffrührer gewest/ Item/ daß er keiner Verräterey wieder den König sich schuldig wüste: Sintemal solcher ja noch nicht gekrönet wäre. Man hat ihm aber seine ungereimte Schlüsse kurtz/ deut- und ernstlich wiederlegt/ biß daß er darüber verstummet. Vors erste wolten diese schändliche Schwärmer keinem/ als dem Göttlichen Recht und Gesetz zum Gerichte über ihre Mißhandlung unterworffen seyn/ endlich aber gaben sie es genauer/ submittirten sich auch den Rechten deß Landes. Etliche/ aber gar wenig/ baten umb ein gnädiges Urtheil/ und fleheten den König umb Barmhertzigkeit an. Welcher denn auch/ wie oben erwehnt/ ihrer vielen die Straffe gemiltert. Ferner so seynd auch allhier den 30. Januarij deß (A) Cromwels/ (B) Iretons und (C) Brandschauen außgegrabene Cörper auff einem Henckers-Karren hinaus nacher Tyburn/ einem unredlichen Ort/ da die ärgsten Schand-Buben abgethan werden geschleppet/ und an den lichten Galgen gehenckt. Gegen Abend hat man sie wiederum herunter genommen/ da wir denn ferner hinweg die Köpffe abgeschlagen/ und auff Westmünster Hall gesteckt/ ihre Leiber aber unterm Galgen begraben. Damit also den Augen deß gantzen Königreichs die verfluchte/ schändliche Mordthat dieser Unmenschen abscheulich gemacht. Und hiebey sonderlich Merckwürdig daß eben an dem Tage/ da die verräterischer Weise hingerichtete Königliche Majestät Carolus der I. vonihnen offentlich umbgebracht/ diese drey Böswichter nach ihrem Tode hinwiederum an den Leibern gestrafft worden/ den Ihrigen zu ewiger Schmach und Schande; der Christlichen Gedult deß verstorbenen Königs aber zu einer hertzlichen Glory: Als dessen Seele ohn Zweiffel in der Himmlischen Freudüber ihre Mörder schon lange triumphirt; die Gedächtnus aber nach seinem Tode hinwiederum glorwürdigst geachtet und erhebt; da hergegen seiner Widerwertigen Gerücht/ sampt dem todten Aaß ihrer Leiber/ für aller Welt stinckend/ und unter die Ertz-verzweiffeltste Schelmen gerechnet worden. Wer hätte ihm dieses beym Leben deß vom gantzen Engelland und vielen andern Landen gefürchteten Cromwels dörffen träumen lassen/ daß diejenige/ welchen so viel vornehme Herren und Cavalier die Hände geküst/ noch unter dem Galgen faulen/ und sein stoltzes Haupt eine Speise der Raben werden müste! Aber GOtt ist gerecht/ und die Bosheit der Menschen nicht so listig zu sündigen/ als seine Gerechtigkeit weiß und ver ständig zu straffen und stürtzen. Welchem den Herren hiemit empfehle/ etc.

Some Fifth Monarchists believed the Second Coming should be awaited patiently, others thought the establishment of godly government was a necessary precondition, which might even precipitate the return of King Jesus. And so back to Mr Martin.

Noisy neighbours

According to *The Kingdomes Intelligencer*, a government-sponsored weekly newspaper (published '*To prevent False Newes*'), when Martin confronted his noisy neighbours, Venner 'smoothly answered that they were seeking the Lord by Prayer and would not long trouble him'. Martin left but, suspecting 'some wicked design', he 'went privately to look through a chink, where he plainly beheld these *Seekers* all arming themselves with Back, Brest, and Headpeece, divers of them having two or three pair of Bandileers a piece, to furnish others that possibly might want, Buffcoats and Blunderbusses good store, with what else these bloody hypocrites thought good for slaughter'. Other reports indicate that the 'what else' included muskets, carbines, pistols, swords and kegs of gunpowder.

Martin might also have spied stacks of the rebels' closely argued manifesto, *A Door of Hope*. This set out the justification for their actions, primarily on biblical grounds but also as self-preservation, claiming that popish influence at court and Catholic powers abroad posed a mortal threat to themselves and their foreign co-religionists. Across Europe there was a 'Grand Conspiracy' of pope and princes, a 'very great and bloody design' to massacre the reformed churches and 'to bring in Popery in *England*'. *A Door of Hope* detailed what Venner and his followers would do once they had seized power, ranging in scope and ambition from banning the export of fuller's earth and 'unwrought' leather to a global war against Catholicism for 'the deliverance of all the Saints'.

Martin 'presently sent intelligence', so the alarm was being raised when they left the meeting house. On their way out they 'set a Musket to Mistress Martin's brest who was great with child', but contented themselves with menacing her. The rebels headed south to St Paul's Cathedral and tried to break in 'to make it a place of situation untill more aid came'. They were deflected from this purpose when an unfortunate passer-by ran into them:

a young man, formerly a Drummer to the Trained Bands; by name Francis Fairbank to whom they said, whom are you for, he answered, for God and King Charles, whereupon one of the Villains discharg'd a Blunderbus and shot this innocent man through the head who died immediately, but with the noise of the Gun it arose an Alaram to the inhabitants thereabouts.

Realising the Trained Bands were responding to the 'alaram', the insurrectionists fled the scene, ranging across the north of the City. In pursuit was the Lord Mayor, Sir Richard Browne, who 'consulting more the Publick then his own safety adventured forth with onely four Halberdiers, and six other persons with swords'. Around midnight, near Aldersgate, a 30- to 40-strong group of rebels had their first encounter with the Trained Bands: 'two files' had been despatched by Browne, possibly no more than a dozen men. The groups exchanged gunfire, with two men being killed on the rebels' side. The Fifth Monarchists withdrew to the gate and threatened to 'pistol' the constable in charge if he did not let them through. He submitted and the rebels headed to the Barbican, killing and wounding further parish officials before fleeing the City. At about the same time, a second group was exchanging fire with other files sent from Bishopsgate and 'divers were wounded'. The troops, 'much over powred by the Rebels', retreated but found 'no Relief from their Commander (the Gate being shut) so diverted their course, and the Rebels in the interim found opportunity to escape'.

As dawn broke above London, 'many rebels were discovered running over the fields [Moorfields], whereby some were taken and put into new Bridewell'. *Londons Glory*, an unreliable hot-off-the-press pamphlet, was

The execution of Fifth Monarchists in the City of London. German broadside, 1661.

soon praising the Lord Mayor and City forces: within two hours of receiving the alarm, 10,000 members of the Trained Bands were 'in Hostility'. Overnight, they scoured the City for their foes, raided houses, seized weapons and detained 40 suspects. 'One woman was taken all in Armour, which if it be true it deserves to be Chronickled': a reminder that the Fifth Monarchy Men included women.

Across London, a 27-year-old administrator with the Navy Office had a rude awakening:

This morning news was brought to me to my bedside that there hath been a great stirr in the City this night by the Fanatiques, who have been up and killed six or seven men, but all are fled. My Lord Mayor and the whole City have been in armes, above 40000.

It is regrettable that Samuel Pepys omitted a comma from this entry in his diary, leaving the suspicion that perhaps he meant '4,000' rather than the more than one-in-ten Londoners that '40,000' would have represented in 1661. The number of insurrectionists is unclear, but *Londons Glory*'s 'neare upon three hundred' is probably several times the true figure.

On Monday, the Lord General, the Duke of Albemarle (formerly General George Monck, ennobled for using his army to ensure the Restoration), despatched troops to Kenwood, then a wooded area north of London, where the main body of rebels had been located. It was nightfall by the time they engaged, but unfavourable terrain – trees, hedges, a gravel pit – prevented more than a desultory exchange of fire before the Fifth Monarchists again slipped away. Meanwhile, Pepys, having spent 'Twelfeday' quietly, was set upon festivity. He dined with his wife and brother before going to the theatre and, later, a family gathering. On their way home, they 'were in many places strictly examined, more then in the worst of times, there being great fears of these fanatiques rising again'. It is notable that after 20 years of political unrest, civil war, the purging of Parliament, the trial and execution of Charles I, the collapse of the Cromwellian

Protectorate and the return of Charles II, this was the time of strictest enquiry into the comings and goings of Londoners.

The following day, Tuesday 8 January, Pepys noted: 'My Lord Mayor, Sir Richd. Browne, hath carried himself very honourably, and hath caused one of their meeting-houses in London to be pulled down.' But all this was a mere prelude to the events of the following day, when, as the title of one pamphlet put it, *Hell Broke Loose*. Pepys was:

waked in the morning about 6 a-clock by people running up and down ... talking that the Fanatiques were up in armes in the City, and so I rise and went forth, where in the street I find everybody in arms at the doors; so I returned (though with no good courage at all, but that I might not seem to be afeared) and got my sword and pistol, which however I have no powder to charge, and went to the door, where I found Sir R. Ford; and with him I walked up and down as far as the Exchange ... the streets full of trainebands, and great stories what mischief these rogues have done.

Less than an hour before, parties of Venner's rebels had appeared in Leadenhall and

Threadneedle Street, where they 'alarmed the Trained-Bands upon duty that day, and drove back a party sent after them'. Fighting, dispersing and reforming elsewhere, the Fifth Monarchists were an elusive, seemingly ubiquitous threat, 'just like Wilde-fire'. Chanting 'Now for Browne', one group moved on the Lord Mayor's house, but he was not at home. At Bishopsgate the mayor 'saluted them with Powder and bullet, and they stood against him with such audacious impudence, that even rebellion itself might stand amazed'.

Venner, wielding a halberd, led an attempt to free the prisoners held in the Wood Street Compter. This became the scene of 'the main and fiercest action' with at least three deaths on each side before Venner was 'knockt down & wounded with shot', then subdued and captured. The remaining rebels soon fled, shooting as they went, with ten retreating to the nearby Blue Anchor alehouse; this had to be taken by storm, most defenders preferring death to surrender. The recalcitrance of the Fifth Monarchists (and the severity of their captors) is illustrated by the candid report that 'some after being taken Prisoners for refusing to tell their Names were presently shot'. Even *The Kingdomes Intelligencer* conceded that the rebels 'disputed as if they had had a greater number and a better cause'. The final death toll was put at 22 on each side. Pepys received an account from Mr Davis:

And in short it is this: Of all these Fanatiques that have done all this, viz., routed all the train-bands that they met with – put the King's lifeguard to the run – killed about 20 men – broke through the City gates twice – and all this in the daytime, when all the City was in armes – are not in all above 31. A thing that never was heard of, that so few men should dare and do so much mischief.

Pepys' estimate of rebel numbers is too low; other reports suggest that on the Wednesday there were up to 50, 'though not above 40 were ever seen together'. Given that some rebels are known to have slipped away in the crowd, that the jails were by then full of suspects and that the ardour of some who set out on Sunday may have diminished, the total number of active participants across all three days must have been well over 50.

Unrepentant

Justice fell swiftly upon the rebels. On 17 January they were tried for treason at the Old Bailey, with the wounded men allowed chairs – Venner having surprised everyone by not dying of his injuries. He tested the patience of the court with 'an extravagant and Bottomless discourse about the fifth Monarchy', before quibbling over his plea, like several of his comrades. Eventually, all pleaded 'Not guilty'. Of the 20 men tried, four were acquitted and 16 sentenced to death. Venner and one other, both unrepentant, were 'drawn, hanged, and quartered' outside their meeting house on 19 January; two rebels were hanged in Wood Street the same day. Of the remaining 12 condemned men, three were reprieved and nine were hanged on 21 January.

Venner's Rising, with its gross disparity between the rebels' aspirations and their actions, has been downplayed as a factor in the political developments that followed. It seems too small an event to have mattered. But such an interpretation ignores the psychological impact. The feelings evident in Pepys' diary were voiced in many newssheets and pamphlets, all conveying shock and outrage. The rising was the 'Hellish Design' of 'more then mad men'. It was 'an Act of Horrid and Malitious treason … far surpassing the Gunpowder-treason, or Oliver, the late usurping Tyrant'. It was even 'the most horrid, treacherous, and barbarous Insurrection that ever was heard of since the Creation'.

The revolt convinced the government of a strength of opposition far beyond the reality. Royalists, rather than being
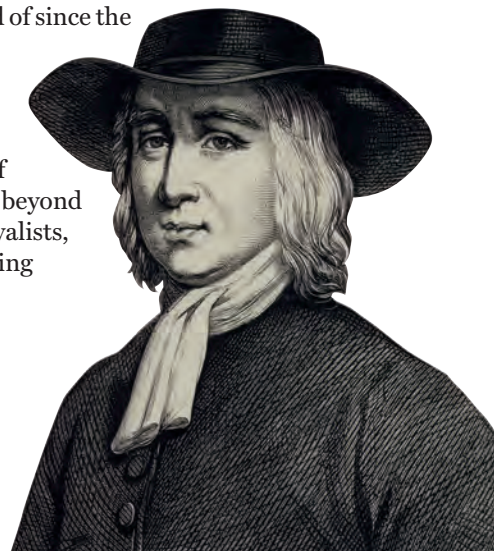
comforted by the tiny number of rebels, the obvious reluctance of Londoners to rise in support and the overwhelming might the government brought to bear, saw confirmation of their worst fears: a precarious monarchy surrounded by irreconcilable enemies whose acquiescence had to be enforced through strict vigilance and repression. The impact of the rising upon nonconformists in England was immediate, catastrophic and enduring.

Crackdown

On Thursday 10 January a proclamation was issued 'for restraining all seditious meetings and conventicles under pretence of religious worship'. A government crackdown and popular anger descended on dissenters as their representatives scrambled to proclaim their innocence and loyalty. Meeting houses were demolished, thousands detained and there was mass interception of mail to find evidence of plots. The Quaker leader George Fox, walking through Whitehall on the morning of 7 January, found that people already 'looked strangely upon me and I went to the Pall Mall and all the city and suburbs was up in arms and exceeding rude: all people were against us and they cried, "There was a Quaker's house, pluck it down!"'

The emergency January proclamation was soon enshrined in – and expanded by – the series of laws known as 'the Clarendon Code'. The Corporation Act (1661), Quakers' Act (1662), Act of Uniformity (1662), Conventicle Acts (1664 and 1670), Five-Mile Act (1665) and the Test Act (1673) had two goals: ensuring the physical removal of nonconformist ministers from the towns in which they preached, and the

exclusion of nonconformists from the mainstream of English life by imposing religious tests they could not fulfil. When the Act of Uniformity ousted 2,000 dissenting ministers from their parishes on 24 August 1662, St Bartholomew's Day, the theologian Richard Baxter found that 'this fatal day called to remembrance the French massacre'. These evictions caused a 'great inundation of calamities', with 'hundreds of able ministers, with their wives and children, [having] neither house nor bread'. Not until the 19th century would the last traces of the Clarendon Code be eliminated from English law.

Venner became a bogeyman, mocked in satirical pamphlets, plays, broadside ballads and almanacs, lingering as a hate figure until well into the reign of George I, after the Stuarts had fallen from power for good. As late as April 1791, a correspondent to the *Public Advertiser* could make a passing reference to Venner in a discussion of the French Revolution without either he or the editor feeling any need to explain the allusion. Venner was synonymous with madness, fury, treachery, hypocrisy and murderous violence. These qualities became embedded in the word 'fanatic' which, as a derogatory term for nonconformists, ingrained their 'otherness' for the Anglican majority.

The official narrative was not, however, the only one. Counter-narratives developed as nonconformists catalogued, lamented and protested their sufferings. In these, the Clarendon Code was understood as a royalist revenge: a long-intended punishment of the religious communities blamed for the Civil Wars. For both Whigs and dissenters, Venner's Rising came to be seen as a pretext, rather than a reason. The repression it triggered ensured a constant stream of dissenters to a place their religion would not count against them: New England. In 1650 nonconformist congregations there outnumbered those of Anglican churches by more than two to one; by 1750 it was nearly four to one. (With Catholic, Lutheran and German Reformed congregations included, Anglican congregations formed just a fifth of the total.)

Joseph Priestley, the Unitarian preacher, scientist and campaigner for dissenters' rights, had no doubt about the relationship between English repression of nonconformity and the trajectory of its transatlantic colonies. In 1774, as tensions between the British Crown and its American subjects rose towards breaking point, he declared:

The measures that are now carrying on against the North American colonies are alone a sufficient indication of the disposition of the court ... The true cause of such violent animosity must have existed much earlier, and deeper. In short, it can be nothing but the Americans (particularly those of New England) being chiefly dissenters and whigs.

In 1791 a 'Church and King' mob destroyed Priestley's Birmingham home while the authorities stood by. Three years later he emigrated to America. This building of a transatlantic population that had reason to fear, distrust and resent the monarchical government that ruled over it was akin to filling a reservoir with water until the dam burst. Seen from this perspective, Venner's Rising – or, more precisely, the government reaction to it – was an essential precondition of the American Revolution and, therefore, the modern world.

In 1801, following the election of Thomas Jefferson as president, Priestley wrote: 'Tho' I am arrived at the usual term of human life, it is now only that I can say I see nothing to fear from the hand of power, the government under which I live being for the first time truly favourable to me.' It was a sentiment that many other English-born American nonconformists would have shared. However, if Thomas Venner had succeeded in establishing his Fifth Monarchist republic, few people could have slept soundly while he readied it for King Jesus.

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Joseph Priestley.
18th-century portrait.

Puccini's opera revealed
misunderstandings and
stereotypes on both sides
of the East-West divide.
Naomi Matsumoto

MADAM BUTTERFLY

AND THE FORGING OF JAPANESE IDENTITY

ROSINA STORCHIO

Rosina Storchio in the
first production of
Madam Butterfly at
La Scala, Milan, 1904.

The broad outlines of Japan's historical encounters with western culture are well known. They began with the arrival of Jesuit priests from Portugal in the 16th century, but after 1639 contact all but ceased under the Tokugawa shogunate's new policy of seclusion (*sakoku*), with limited trade with the Chinese and the Dutch being the only exception. The policy of isolation ended in 1854 and the restoration of imperial rule in 1858 opened Japan to the West. By 1867, artefacts of Japanese culture were on display for the first time at the Exposition Universelle in Paris.

More cultural exchanges followed. Western artists began to incorporate Japanese prints and costumes into their work, as in Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Père Tanguy* (1887), Claude Monet's *La Japonaise* (1876) and Alfred Stevens' *La parisienne japonaise* (1872). *Japonisme* – a term coined by the French critic Philippe Burty in 1872 – was born and it was not limited to painting and the decorative arts. The composer Claude Debussy became fascinated by Japan (the first edition of the score of *La mer* featured a Hokusai print on its cover) and, to move from the sublime to the ridiculous, Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado* was first staged in 1885.

Most of these influences were superficial. They might enrich a painting's surface colours and suggest various exotic allusions, but engaged little with complex Japanese culture and its social character, one that was itself slowly changing under the influence of contact with the West. One work did, however, starkly reveal the underlying dissonances between eastern and western cultures. An opera based on a Japanese subject, Giacomo Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* was first performed at La Scala, Milan in 1904. Eventually, the opera also became known in Japan, where Puccini's vision was seen as forging (in the sense of dishonestly manufacturing) a view of the Japanese, while subsequent Japanese adaptations and productions of such western music played a part in forging (in the sense of fashioning out of raw material) the seeds of a new westernised Japan.

Butterfly arrives

That the tale of Butterfly found its way to the West itself was a result of Japan's new 'openness'. The opera was based on a short story by the American writer John Luther Long, written in 1898 and based on the recollections of Long's sister, who had recently been able to spend time in Japan as the wife of a missionary. Long's story also borrowed from a novel of 1887 by Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, which drew on a liaison Loti had with a geisha in Nagasaki in 1885. Both sources, therefore, contained elements of an 'authentic' Japan. Long's story was turned into a play by the American playwright David Belasco, which Puccini saw in London in 1900.

In many ways the plot is a typical colonial story, with all that implies about oppression, exploitation and the imbalance of power. This should have offered a warning about the likely reception of the opera in Japan itself. The story concerns a US naval officer, Pinkerton, stationed in Nagasaki, who marries Cio-Cio san (Butterfly) but has no intention of a long-term commitment. He sets about re-educating the ex-geisha, who speaks only pidgin English, and she falls in love with him. Eventually Pinkerton leaves Japan and the now impoverished Butterfly gives birth to their son. When Pinkerton returns, he is accompanied by his American wife. Butterfly then 'dies with honour' by committing *harakiri*, a traditional suicide method employed by the honourable Samurai class. This ending, found only in Belasco's play,

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Portrait of Père Tanguy by Vincent van Gogh, 1887.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Reproduction of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Hokusai on the cover of Debussy's *La mer*, 1905.

CLAUDE MONET

La Japonaise (Camille Monet in Japanese costume), by Claude Monet, 1876.

MADAME BUTTERFLY
DE G·PUCCINI

MORCEAUX DÉTACHÉS
POUR
CHANT ET PIANO

(+) 111370 ACTE I.	Solo de Pinkerton: *Amour, folie...* (Ténor)		Fr.	1 25
(+) 111371 —	Le même en *La bémol*			1 25
(⊙)111705 —	Duo de Butterfly et Pinkerton: *Vous êtes mon maître!* (Soprano et Ténor)			2 50
(⊙)111706 —	Le même un ton plus bas			2 50
(+) 111372 ACTE II.	Solo de Butterfly: *Sur la mer calmée...* (Soprano)			2 —
(+) 111373 —	Le même en *Mi bémol*			2 —
(⊙)111707 —	Duo de Butterfly et Souzouki: *Toutes les fleurs?* (Soprano et Mezzo-Sopr.)			2 —
(⊙)111708 —	Le même un ton plus bas			2 —

G. RICORDI & C.

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PARIS — SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME DES ÉDITIONS RICORDI — PARIS
18, Rue de la Pépinière, 18
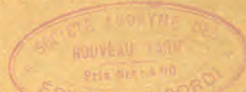
GIACOMO PUCCINI

Front cover of
a French score
of *Madam Butterfly* by
Puccini, 1906.

THE MIKADO

Promotional image from an 1885 production of *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan.

MICHIKO SUNAHARA

Michiko Sunahara with 'Pinkerton', in a 1953 production of *Madam Butterfly* at the Opéra-Comique, Paris.

suited Puccini well, as did the drama's concentration on Butterfly's character and emotions during her final day. Whether such a portrayal was in keeping with the true nature of Japanese womanhood is an issue that has arisen more than once in the critical afterlife of the work.

Butterfly travels east

The reception of *Madam Butterfly* in Japan should be considered alongside the history of the country's assimilation of western music. This in itself is a remarkable story, since indigenous Japanese music, with its own instruments, scales and genres, is so different from its western counterpart. Although music is often dubbed a 'universal language', among the arts it is one of the most stylistically differentiated globally.

The earliest known critical Japanese reactions to *Madam Butterfly* are from 1906, when Henry Savage's Grand Opera Company gave a performance (in English) at the Garden Theatre, New York. In the audience were two Japanese spectators: Seiichirō Mori, a businessman and writer, and Shūichi Takaori, a music critic and theatre director. Takaori was delighted with the music, which incorporated some Japanese tunes, and he thought such a mixture had much to offer the future of his native country's music. Mori was more concerned with authenticity: 'This work may be good for Japanese women as it introduces to the Americans their chastity and virtue, but the staging was just ludicrous: flowers were all in full bloom regardless of their respective seasons; a Shintoist shrine gate led towards a Buddhist temple; and the costumes were just like those worn by prostitutes.'

Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* had premiered just a few days after Japan had declared war on Russia. Japan was aware that it needed to modernise, take on progressive elements from western society and establish itself politically. At the start of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan was still regarded as something of an 'adolescent boy' by the international community; a cartoon in the Dutch magazine the *Amsterdammer* published in 1903 shows John Bull and Uncle Sam coercing a Japanese child into stealing a Cossack's chestnuts. Yet the unexpected victory against Russia altered the West's view of Japan; it was now mature enough to be potentially threatening, a 'yellow peril'. Takaori and Mori's presence at the opera in New York was another sign of change: Japanese men now went to the opera, wore western clothes, learnt about other cultures and were more than willing to defend their own – in this case, the self-effacing and submissive attributes of their women. (Japanese women did not obtain the vote until a new constitution was imposed on the country by the United States after the Second World War – another instance of the forging of Japanese society.)

The 'westernisation' of arts and culture in Japan proceeded rapidly. The Tokyo Music School, the country's first conservatoire of western-style music, opened in 1890. Another major development took place in 1911 with the inauguration of the Imperial Theatre (Teikoku Gekijō). It was built in the western style, equipped with an orchestra pit, and was affiliated to western music training centres taught by German musicians. Unlike other Japanese theatres, which tended to be little more than simple tents with rugs on the ground, it had proscenium seating. Moreover, it was in this theatre that Shūichi Takaori (the critic and director who saw *Madam Butterfly* in New York), presented the Japanese premiere of excerpts from the opera in 1914.

The title role was sung by Takaori's wife, Sumiko, who claimed to have

TAMAKI MIURA

Tamaki Miura in her dressing room, c.1910.

GERALDINE FARRAR

American soprano Geraldine Farrar and child, in *Madam Butterfly*, 1908.

MADAM BUTTERFLY

Poster advertising the
earliest score by Puccini,
Italian, c.1904.

studied with Geraldine Farrar in America. But the performance was not a success. The audience objected to the representation of Japanese women, who, one audience member noted, were presented in a manner 'similar to those of ill-repute found in places like Yokohama. Why did they dare to present something like this in the Imperial Theatre?'

It was not the 'alien' music that disturbed the Japanese audience, but the threat to traditional hierarchies between men and women. Later, in the 1930s, feminist writers such as Ichiko Kamichika and Akiko Yosano criticised the opera for promoting a 'victim' like Butterfly as something of a Japanese 'paragon'. Somewhat ironically, Butterfly thus proved to be an effective catalyst for the emergence of a new model of womanhood in Japan. Moreover, the Japanese themselves gradually began to find *Madam Butterfly* exotic and alien. The opera represented a past Japan, not the modernised version which was already beginning to emulate and even surpass the West.

Authentic Japan

As Japan was becoming disenchanted with aspects of *Madam Butterfly*, the West gained an enthusiasm for what it perceived as its cultural authenticity. The San Carlo Opera Company, based in Boston, routinely contracted Japanese sopranos such as Tamaki Miura, Nobuko Hara and Hisako Koike to sing the role of Butterfly. For many years, this was the only way for Japanese female singers to make their debut on the western stage. Only relatively recently have Far Eastern women begun to become prominent on the world stage as soloists across the whole range of western music.

In 1948, shortly after Japan's surrender in the Second World War, the US authorities occupying Japan requested that the Fujiwara Opera Company perform *Madam Butterfly* in the Imperial Theatre, in what it fondly believed would be 'the most authentic manner'. The same company was also invited to perform a 'bilingual' *Madam Butterfly* (where the Japanese sang in their own language) at the New York City Opera in 1952-53. Puccini, of course, would not have recognised such performances as an authentic production of his opera. His *Madam Butterfly* contained a number of misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Japanese culture, falling foul of what we would now recognise as cultural appropriation.

Unsurprisingly, the total number of *Madam Butterfly* performances in Japan to date is remarkably fewer than those of other canonical works such as Verdi's *La Traviata*, Mozart's *Magic Flute* or Bizet's *Carmen*. Interestingly, the popularity of *Carmen* in Japan owed much to the fascination of the Japanese audience with the titular character, a woman of loose morals who, they assumed, was typical of western society. They failed to understand that Carmen, as a gypsy, is an exotic outsider, far from the western norm. Just as the West had focused on a distorted and simplistic notion of Japanese womanhood embodied in the 'character-cypher' of Butterfly, so the Japanese did the same in reverse with their understanding of Carmen.

Such ironies and misunderstandings of cultural appropriation and stereotyping would eventually be dissolved as Japan became fully integrated into the global community of nations. And Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* played a crucial part in that process, a part out of all proportion to its status as a three-act opera.

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BRITAIN
BETWEEN
CONTINENTS

Having achieved success in the Seven Years War, the following decade would be a chastening experience for Britain, culminating in the loss of its American colonies. *D.H. Robinson*

At the age of 35, John Montresor was already a campaign veteran when John Singleton Copley painted him, arms crossed over the stump of a felled tree, engineer's manual in hand, gazing west as storm clouds gather behind him. Montresor sat for Copley in New York in 1771 and we may well imagine him leaning on some artist's prop in the temporary studio, dressed in a scarlet uniform showing no signs of the field. The painter was on a sojourn from Boston, doing the rounds of colonial high society and the British military establishment, painting plenty of fashionable wives trussed up in *turquerie*. The beginning of the 1770s is often seen as the calm between two storms, equidistant from the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 and the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775, a time shaped in America by obscure and localised tensions with unclear outcomes. Three years earlier, Copley had painted Thomas Gage, the British commander-in-chief in North America, as the essence of undisturbed military grace, poised more like the director of a ballet than a man on a battlefield. Why, then, did he choose to portray Montresor not as the *bon-vivant* and romancer that Montresor's cousin Susanna Rowson would satirise in her 1791 novel *Charlotte Temple*, but as a man of war?

Falklands crisis

On 4 June 1770, five Spanish frigates slipped into the harbour of Port Egmont, the British outpost on the Falkland Islands. The Spanish commander, Juan de Madariaga, brought with him a small army of marines, which quickly overcame the tiny British garrison. News travelled slowly in the 18th century, especially from the South Atlantic, but when it did reach Britain the country went into uproar. In Parliament the opposition leader William Pitt the Elder – the man widely hailed as the victor of the Seven Years War – called on Lord North's government to avenge his 'injured, insulted, undone country'. Pitt's orations came with a hefty slice of political opportunism, but the swelling of public opinion behind him came from a sense of unease that had been building for some years. Many Whigs had been unsatisfied with the end of the Seven Years War, condemning the peace as overly generous

to Britain's vanquished enemies. This had been followed by several years of foreign embarrassments and the revival of French power, culminating in the French invasion of Corsica in 1769. Throughout these events, Britain – hailed in 1763 as the guardian of 'the liberties of the Europe' and even 'the next universal monarchy' – had looked rather less like a superpower than an isolated and impotent nation, with a public life bedevilled by rumours of foreign sedition at the heart of government.

In America, the colonists were enthralled by the crisis. Hugh Gaine, editor of the *New York Mercury*, reported in December that 'Falkland's Island seems at present to engross the attention of the public'. Not only were Americans fascinated by the crisis, but colonial opinion swung fiercely behind William Pitt. The colonial press clamoured with calls for national vengeance. In its verses on the New Year 1771, the *Massachusetts Spy* implored the king:

George, in his extensive reign,
subdue the pride of haughty Spain.

It was not just talk. Colonial assemblies began to put themselves on a war footing. The Massachusetts House of Representatives passed a new Militia Act: after the crisis had abated, Benjamin Franklin would remind its speaker, Thomas Cushing, 'what a glory would it be for us to send, on any trying occasion, ready and effectual aid to our mother country'. Meanwhile, in New York, General Gage drew up plans for the invasion of Louisiana, the Spanish territory to the west of the British colonies that ran northward from New Orleans along the Mississippi. And John Montresor, amid the storm clouds, looked westward.

By the time that much of this had happened, on the far side of the Atlantic the Spanish had climbed down. The French king, Louis XV, dismissed his warlike chief minister, César Gabriel de Choiseul, and informed his Bourbon cousin Charles III that Spain was on its own. Deprived of any hope of French support, the Spanish king recognised that his forces were hopelessly outmatched by the Royal Navy, disavowed the actions of his commanders in the South Atlantic and ordered the restoring of Port Egmont to the British. On the face of it,

Engraved for the Oxford Mag.

A Correct Map of ENGLAND.

Accurate Map of SPAIN.

I say you never made so good a Button in all your Life.

His M_m_'s Directions are very good, well let him breathe a little while she & I undermine the Constitution

A Bribe for the P—D— of W—s

100.000

The Button Makers adjusting their Differences.

this was a significant triumph for Lord North's government, yet Pitt took to the Lords again to denounce the ministry's 'ignominious compromise' and he was not without supporters.

Hostilities suspended

It was much the same in British America. So negative was the response that someone complained to the *New York Mercury* about how the colonial press had been 'crowded by the gentlemen in opposition to the ministry'. At least some of their editors were satisfied with the stream of invective. James Rivington of the *New York Gazetteer*, which sold throughout the northern colonies and Canada, warned that North had fallen into a trap. Spain and France were simply 'amusing' Britain with 'a show of recompense … until the whole Bourbon league can act, united and with their strongest force, against us'. In Maryland, Charles Carroll of Carrollton – who would, five years later, be the sole Catholic signatory of the Declaration of Independence – cautioned a friend that 'if we are to have a peace, it will be a patched up peace or rather a suspension from hostilities till France and Spain can go to war with better hopes of success'. Later he added:

'I know what answer I would make to the haughty Castilian, were I the British minister.' The Massachusetts House of Representatives, which had so recently placed itself on a war footing, greeted the resolution with a barbed address to the ministry. 'Such an act of hostility', the members declared, 'could not but be followed with the most spirited resolution on the part of the British administration, to obtain a satisfaction fully adequate to the insult offered to His Majesty, and the injuries his subjects there have sustained'. No such action had been forthcoming.

Like the discontent William Pitt was able to mobilise at home, these colonial frustrations had been building for some time. Plenty of colonists had condemned the leniency of the Treaty of Paris in 1763. One American wrote:

Britannia, MISTRESS OF THE WORLD
*   NO MORE!*
By foes deluded, by false friends betrayed,
And rifled of the spoils her conquests made.

Benjamin Franklin had ridiculed the doubters back then: those who complained, he quipped,

The American School,
by Matthew Pratt, 1765.

would have done so 'even if instead of Canada and Louisiana they had obtained a cession of the Kingdom of Heaven'. Within a couple of years Franklin had changed his tune, singing lamentations for 'the late and flourishing state of Great Britain', which had so recently 'aided the King of Prussia against the powerful armies of Hungary and Russia, supported Portugal against the Spaniards, and reduced France and Spain to the most advantageous terms of accommodation', but was now 'sliding off the world, no longer courted by the powers of Europe, no longer able to sustain its balance, no longer respected or known among nations'. Britain's inaction in the face of the French invasion of Corsica roused a particularly high tide of dissent. Newspaper correspondents had attacked the government's decision to 'remain a tame spectator of the ruin of that magnanimous little nation', astonished that 'the asylum, the deliverer of the oppressed of all nations … has not yet appeared to assist the noble Corsicans against their cruel ungenerous oppressors'.

And yet the fervour for patriotic British interventionism with which colonists had greeted the Falklands crisis ran on, after yet another display of indolence. In autumn 1771, the American Company – the only troupe of professional actors to tour the colonies – pitched their tents in Annapolis, Maryland for a production of Shakespeare's play about the Roman invasion of Britain, *Cymbeline*. Shakespeare's original work is complex, based on older legends about a (historical) Celtic king called Cunobelinus, with a tangled layering of assertions of political and cultural independence and fealty. But this was not the play that was seen by the citizens of Annapolis; the American Company performed Shakespeare as he had been revised by the greatest English actor-manager of the day, David Garrick. At the height of the Seven Years War, Garrick had simplified *Cymbeline* into a straightforwardly patriotic play about British resistance to foreign insults and invasion. This was what the crowds at Annapolis witnessed in autumn 1771.

Among the audience was Charles Willson Peale, later to immortalise the leaders of the American rebellion and the architects of a different patriotism, but at the time a young artist recently returned from London, where he

had studied at the knee of another colonial expatriate, Benjamin West. Like many of his countrymen, Peale had monitored the international scene closely during the earlier part of the year. 'We have for some time past been confused with the apprehension of a French and Spanish war', he reported to Franklin in April. Perhaps it was this confluence of events that moved him to memorialise the American Company's *Cymbeline*. Peale's first successful painting in America was a full-length portrait of the company's leading lady, Nancy Hallam, in the role of Cymbeline's daughter, Imogen. He portrayed the character in her disguise as Fidele, in which she goes out into the rustic west to find her brothers, the king's sons, who return and repel the Roman invaders. Shakespeare's west was Wales – not coincidentally the patrimony of the Tudor dynasty – but we might reasonably assume that Peale – and, for that matter, the American Company and much of the crowd that witnessed their play – thought of their own western world in the same light. Throughout the imperial crisis, colonists repeatedly asserted that America was the backbone of British power.

Nancy Hallam as 'Fidele' in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, by Charles Willson Peale, 18th century.

Unique role

Nancy Hallam evidently caused something of a stir among the men of Maryland but, whatever other nerves Peale might have touched, his painting picked up on another powerful idea then widespread in American society; it was suggested by the notion that Britain occupied a unique and stewarding role in the European states system, but it did not end there. The idea, which was probably launched in the early 18th century by the philosopher-aristocrat the Earl of Shaftesbury, was of a pan-British culture war to supplant France as the epicentre of European civilisation. Much as American politicians liked to portray the colonies as the makeweight of Britain's diplomatic influence and fiscal-military power, American artists liked to claim that their work would be decisive in wrenching the laurels of cultural supremacy from France to Britain. It was a favoured conceit of West's school in London. In the rooms of the Royal Academy, as Matthew Pratt recorded in his painting *The American School*, young colonists

learned to draw, while their master painted his gargantuan history paintings. Ranging from classical scenes such as *The Departure of Regulus* and *The Oath of Hannibal* to contemporary works about the Seven Years War, like his masterpiece, *The Death of General Wolfe*, West's work seemed calculated to elevate the struggle between Britain and France to a modern equivalent of the Punic War, in a polished neoclassical style that would supplant the excesses of the French Baroque. And colonists were quick to praise Peale's painting of Nancy Hallam for the same achievement. In the *Maryland Gazette*, the clergyman and future loyalist Jonathan Boucher gave his praise in verse, writing that Peale had surpassed the aesthetic achievements of ancient Greece and Renaissance Venice:

*The grand designs in Grecian schools
    was taught,
Venetian colours gave the pictures thought;
In thee O Peale both excellences join,
Venetian colours and the Greeks' design
Thy style has matched what ev'n
    th' ancients knew
Grand the design, and as the colouring true …
Shakespeare's immortal scenes our
    wonder raise,
And next to him thou claim'st our
    highest praise.*

The war scare might have ebbed away, but here was one European conflict that was always raging. In his reworking of *Cymbeline*, Garrick had excised Shakespeare's homage to the great tragedians of classical Greece and Rome, producing instead a simplified ode to British martial glory, billed as the work of a previously obscure Elizabethan dramatist whom Garrick was busy elevating to the status of national bard. Likewise, Boucher eschewed all thoughts of tribute to the classical or Catholic past. As Shakespeare had surpassed Virgil and the medieval romancers, so the American Peale would be Britain's answer to Apelles and Titian.

1771 was fated to be the last hurrah of British-American patriotism, future patriots and future loyalists joining – whether in approval of the North government's handling of the Falklands crisis or not – in displays of common imperial patriotism, centred on Britain's pre-eminence in international affairs.

And yet this was not quite some lost world swept away by the revolutionary events of 1775 and 1776. For the European crisis had always mingled with the brewing crisis inside the British Empire. At the dénouement of the 1771 war scare, John Adams, who was to be the new nation's first ambassador to London, lamented to a friend that Britain's compromise with Spain was 'of a piece with the other measures of the administration, especially those relative to us. A ministry base enough to establish a tyranny in any province or department of His Majesty's dominions, may well be expected to be mean, dastardly, and obsequious to a foreign power'. Years later the Virginian merchant Arthur Lee would reflect in his *Memoir of the American Revolution*: 'Everyone knows by what a shameful submission' the North government had 'appeased the wrath of Spain'.

And yet events like the Annapolis *Cymbeline* went on, to great enthusiasm, even while the edifice of British rule in America was tumbling down. In July 1774, less than a year before the first exchange of fire between the British army and the Massachusetts militia on Lexington Green, Adams found himself at his farm in Braintree, vexed by another 'great event in the political system of Europe'. Although he did not think himself 'enough acquainted with the state of the French, Spanish, and German courts to predict with any confidence what revolutions will succeed the death of Louis XV', he was sure that 'if two young fellows at the head of the German Empire and the French monarchy, both warm and active, don't make mischief in Europe, it will be a wonder'. Another war was surely on the horizon. The man who would become the second President of the United States confessed to his friend James Warren: 'I catch myself … now and then, among the haycocks … bestowing most hearty execrations on a few villains who have dignified themselves by superlative mischief to their native country, the British Empire, and the World.' It can only be conjectured how the course of history might have changed had open war in Europe broken out before open rebellion in British America.

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Not since the Middle Ages have the ancient traditions of fancy dress been so potent. *Benjamin Wild*

PROTEST, POWER, PLAY

An annual fancy dress ball was held at the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden throughout the 19th century. Prizes were awarded for the best costumes and large sums of money were given to owners of the winning outfits. In 1894 George J. Nicholls, author of the apparently authoritative study *Bacons and Hams*, won a first prize of 40 guineas for dressing as a side of bacon. His prize money was equivalent to the annual salary of a semi-skilled worker. The costumes were often satirical as well as inventive. In any year, many of the more notable outfits were those that provided biting social commentary about contemporary events and people. The year after Nicholls' big win, a costume inspired by political scandal proved particularly popular and the wearer received a prize for his efforts; on this occasion a bicycle, rather than money, but he was nonetheless said to be 'happy'. The name of this costume wearer is not recorded, but the outfit the man wore, along with its inspiration, was described in detail by Malcolm J. Frazer in his pamphlet *Some Triumphs of Fancy Dress*:

When at the commencement of last year a certain Earl was raised to the rank of Duke, the ill-favour with which his elevation was regarded was made known by the individual who took upon himself the dress of a 'Court Toady'.

Clothed in a green material made of a woven wool, with two incandescent lights in place of eyes, he resembled an enormous toad ... A blue sash – the insignia of a duke – was passed over his right shoulder and partially covered the Royal Arms, which had been worked upon his back, while in his right hand he held a dispatch box and in his left a bulrush. On entering the ball-room the subtle sarcasm of the whole costume was at once perceived.

Prize-seekers were not the only people in the 19th century to make well-aimed jibes through fancy dress costume; power brokers did, too. Seven decades earlier, in January 1821, eight knights in shining armour, accompanied by squires, brass brands and approximately 1,800 marchers, processed along the Strand in central London to protest against George IV's treatment of his estranged wife, Queen Caroline. The historian Mark Girouard has suggested that this 19th-century chivalric re-imagining, staged just six months before the king's lavish coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey, which contemporary author Walter Scott likened to 'fancy dress', was orchestrated by wealthy Radicals who wanted to remind the monarch of their social and political authority and their intent on securing 'justice for the people, and the rights of individuals'.

Charged messages

The prevalence and popularity of fancy dress entertainments in 19th-century Britain means that descriptions of costumes with socially and politically charged messages are relatively commonplace. They are examples from a long, rich and global history of people using fancy dress costume to articulate censorious opinions. It is a tradition that still flourishes. Protestors who wish to make their views known about Brexit, Donald Trump's presidency, the rights of women, civic violence, the loss of social cohesion, or the parlous state of the earth's environment have taken to streets around the world in creative, colourful and clamorous costumes. It has become routine for newspapers and social media to publish photographs of people marching *en masse* in the world's metropolises as Vikings, vulvas and vilified politicians. The Covid-19 pandemic also seems to have catalysed people's inclination to wear comic costumes to define and defend social values. Why should this be so?

In academic writing, fancy dress costume is neglected because it is conventionally viewed

1910

'Fine Gent Dressed as Red Indian Chief', c.1910.

1898

Dora Langroyd dressed as fireworks, the *Sketch*, 1898.

1894

George J. Nicholls dressed as a side of bacon.

as a short-lived, skill-less spectacle. The trivialisation of this sartorial form has been prevalent since the 1970s and 1980s, when fancy dress costume became widely popular and commercialised. This was the period when the BBC first aired *Mr Benn*, a 14-part cartoon series in which the eponymous hero started each episode by donning a different fancy dress costume. The programme proved popular on its launch in 1971 and was screened twice a year for the next 21 years. In 1988 television personality Jane Asher published a book of paper costume ideas. The estate of Enid Blyton also capitalised on the ubiquity of fancy dress costume. In 1983 *The Famous Five in Fancy Dress* was published under the author's name. The connection between fancy dress costume, popular culture and commercialisation appears to have convinced academics that this sartorial form was unworthy of serious and sustained study.

Corrupting influence

But, if familiarity bred contempt, there had long been qualms about the role and effect of fancy dress costume. Moralists and public guardians had, at least since the 17th century, inveighed against the corrupting influence of people dressing differently from their ordinary self and contrary to their social position. In March 1732 a writer in London's *Gentleman's Magazine* remarked that 'people in disguise do things which their characters would not suffer them to do publickly'. Denunciations against fancy dress costume were typically made without supporting evidence, but they lingered. In 1959 the American author Lawrence Langner went so far as to suggest that infant girls who dressed as boys could 'in extreme cases' become homosexual and *vice versa* for boys. The belief that dressing up transforms its wearer's nature is at the core of its persistent popularity and continued usage as a form of social commentary and protest.

1893

'The Fancy Dress Ball at Covent Garden', illustration by Phil May for the *Graphic*, 4 February 1893.

The mercurial ability of fancy dress costume to transform self and to subvert society derives partly from the fact that it is associated with a transitional or exceptional moment in people's lives. Worn for a limited time and for a specific occasion, fancy dress costume and its associated activities are set apart physically and psychologically from a wearer's everyday routines. For the most part liberated from communal norms – because costumes lack the clarity of socially prescribed clothing to convey status – fancy dress wearers exist between traditional expectations of behaviour. In costume, they gain a precious, albeit temporary freedom to articulate feelings and thoughts that would otherwise be difficult to do for fear of public censure. As the anthropologist Victor Turner has remarked: 'Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behaviour.'

Ludic power

Important in explaining the appeal and power of fancy dress as a form of social commentary and protest is its connection to human play. As the philosopher Roger Caillois has observed, play is aberrant. It is free, separate and uncertain, governed by rules and make-believe and yet still constrained by social structures and mores. Games and fancy dress, he suggests, can educate and enrich the mind. At the same time, they 'contribute usefully to the enrichment and the establishment of various patterns of culture'. Caillois describes the experience of wearing fancy dress costume as a 'total frenzy', which, rather than being a simple game, transforms the wearer's existence and removes them, 'far from the authority, values, and influence of the real world'. The wearing of fancy dress, therefore, creates a separate physical and psychological space that emboldens its wearers to make a stand against the rules and

rulers of their community. And the costumes' incongruity and often comic appearance is an important factor in helping their wearers' message to resonate with peers.

This is illustrated by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and his World*. He explains how the disarming power of laughter was used in pre-Reformation European carnivals to subvert authority and galvanise communal bonds. The apparent harmlessness of playing pretend in makeshift costumes and choreographed performances became a medium through which social and political criticism could be voiced in a public, ostensibly non-threatening way. At a time of widespread illiteracy, gesture and imagery could be harnessed to make complex ideas clear.

One of the best documented examples of ludic behaviour in early modern Europe is the annual celebration of the Feast of Fools. On 1 January social hierarchies were inverted: boys dressed and processed as bishops, and celebrants wore their clothes inside out, sometimes upside down. The raucous antics of this day of festive misrule poked fun at community norms and values, but in doing so they reminded people of the importance of their existence; that without such rules, true chaos would ensue. The ridiculous was being used to substantiate the sublime.

The historian Natalie Zemon Davis has shown how the *charivari* in early modern

'One of the best examples of ludic behaviour in early modern Europe is the Feast of Fools'

14TH CENTURY

Masquerade, French illumination from *Roman de Fauvel* by Gervais du Bus.

France had a similarly galvanising role. The charivari was a comic form of public humiliation imposed on men and women who had transgressed social values by forcing them to ride backwards on a donkey. Davis suggests this ritual conferred a temporary authority on a community's future leaders – its young men – by 'socialising them to the conscience of [that] community by making them the raucous voice of that conscience'.

Swine on the street

The principle of the charivari continues today. It is often invoked to lampoon errant politicians. In April 2016 the Panama Carnival was organised in London following the publication of the Panama Papers. These documents appeared to implicate many public figures in irregular tax dealings, including Britain's former prime minister David Cameron. The Carnival's organisers used social media to call for 'visuals, noise, dress up'. To mock Cameron, some of the protesters donned pig masks to recall the revelations alleged about his Bullingdon Club initiation tasks when he had been a student at Oxford. However unintentionally, the people who walked London's streets as swine performed a 21st-century charivari by using comic actions to reinforce communal expectations about the correct use of political authority. Their actions are strikingly similar to those of the anonymous man who had dressed as a 'court toady' to protest political corruption in London 150 years earlier.

The wearing of fancy dress costume to simultaneously subvert a social threat and solidify a community's values has been

19TH CENTURY

Asouade, a ritual similar to charivari for punishing men, French engraving.

1927

Weldon's Fancy Dress catalogue.

Weldon's FANCY DRESS

FOR LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1/-

38

300 DESIGNS 82 IN 3 COLOURS

77447
The Desert
Chief

77448
Militaire

particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown, people around the world have donned costumes to take out the rubbish. Some couriers delivered in costume. These contemporary examples of fancy dress may seem far removed from their historical predecessors, but they are born of the same motivation. First, by dressing in a comic outfit the wearers proclaim their confidence in the face of the pandemic, which is all the more frightening for being invisible. By making this phantom menace risible through the medium of dress, it becomes palpably resistible. Second, many of the costume wearers said their decision to dress up was informed by a desire to reassure local children and to demonstrate that care and support continued despite the enforcement of social distancing. Playing 'pretend' during the pandemic is a form of clothing as psychological salve.

It is perhaps not surprising that the more exceptional the costume, the more emphatic its role in clarifying social and political realities becomes. The ability of fancy dress costume to undermine social and political iniquities and uphold a community's core values is especially apparent when looking at examples beyond Europe to parts of the world where the sartorial form has a shorter history. In West Africa, in particular, fancy dress costume appears to have been largely unknown before western intervention and colonialism, which intensified during the 19th century. For African people to harness an alien form of cultural expression and to graft it on to existing forms of ludic performance makes a striking point about the perceived efficacy of this sartorial form to communicate, as well as to challenge.

As Britain's overseas empire grew during the 19th century, the introduction of fancy dress costume into a subjected country's society was often interpreted as a negative sign of British cultural hegemony and political

2013

'Penguins' at an Antarctica climate protest, Berlin.

2016

Anti-fracking demonstrators in 'David Cameron' pig masks, London.

interference. The English author Maud Diver appeared to sympathise, if not altogether empathise, with people confronted by European dominion. Speaking through her character, Inayat Khan, in her book *Far to Seek: a Romance of England and India* (1921), Diver uses the advent of fancy dress entertainments to explain the cultural disruption precipitated by imperialism:

We Indians who know how little the bulk of India has really changed, could laugh at the tamasha of western fancy-dress, in small matters; but time for laughing has gone by. Time has come for saying firmly – all rights and aspirations will be granted, stopping short of actual government – otherwise – !

What Diver wrote of India was no less true for Africa. If fancy dress entertainments represented European overlordship, western play books, films and fancy dress guides inspired new forms of drama and costume across the continent. One such guide was *Weldon's Fancy Dress Costumes for Ladies and Gentlemen*. This catalogue, from the London-based costume supplier, featured hand-drawn illustrations for over 300 paper patterns that could be purchased for one shilling. The art historian Courtnay Micots has shown how, in Ghana, men dressed as the plains warrior, or 'Red Indian', from American culture, which was a popular figure in European fancy dress entertainments of the 19th and 20th centuries. The intention of the Ghanaians was to challenge the West and take possession of one of the key symbols of their cultural dominance by wearing the incongruous clothing themselves: another example of clothing as psychological salve.

Symbol of courage
Micots argues that the plains warrior, whom Ghanaians had become acquainted with

through imported books and magazines and the Hollywood western, became a symbol of 'heroic courage in the face of insurmountable odds'. She quotes one Ghanaian who asserted, 'we liked that [the Indians] were fighting white men'. Dressing and performing as 'Indians' amounted to a public show of resistance to European authority. The figure of the 'Red Indian' was even incorporated into traditional *asafo* performances. Asafo ('war people') was a role among the Akan people of Ghana 'with paramilitary and community responsibilities'. The adoption of the 'Red Indian', a figure that was thought to hold positive and courageous associations, was presumably conceived to enrich a Ghanaian tradition of live performance that had existed from at least the 17th century. Simultaneously, the subversive adaptation of a symbol of western culture constituted a rebuke to foreign overlordship.

Fake news

Today, the wearing of fancy dress costume to comment upon, to criticise, or to champion ideas stems from more diffuse, but no less urgent, concerns. In the first two decades of this millennium, the ubiquity of 'kitchen table couture' has increasingly been connected to a perceived political paralysis and the failure of conventional forms of communication to incite action. According to the author Lucy Clayton:

At a time when the words of experts are ridiculed and critics are trolled, when fake news re-brands truth as fiction, perhaps we need tools that are beyond spoken and written language to securely assert our values.

As established forms of discourse appear to be faltering, as the democratic process comes under increasing scrutiny on both sides of the Atlantic and as a global lockdown has created physical and psychological distance between neighbours, it seems that people have resorted

2017

Amnesty International activists at a demonstration marking the first 100 days in office of Donald Trump, London.

to alternative, and more direct, methods of communication. From a historical perspective, it is curious, though not altogether surprising, that they should seek to articulate their views through the language of performance and visuals and through dressing up.

The ubiquity of social media makes the 21st century the most visually saturated and astute since the Middle Ages, when widespread illiteracy meant that performance-based communication had to be used to convey ideas and instructions to large audiences. It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the clearest and earliest accounts of fancy dress costume to be worn as a form of protest dates from the 13th century. In 1266, during the siege of Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire, Henry III requested a papal representative to excommunicate the garrison which was refusing to surrender to him. The men, women and children who resisted the king's attack would be cast out from the Church. They would not be able to find comfort in the seven sacraments and, if they were to die while excommunicate, their souls would reside for an eternity in Purgatory and never reach Heaven. The sentence of excommunication was delivered before the red sandstone walls of the castle, but the garrison did not flinch, let alone relent. Instead, one of their number, a local surgeon called Philip, dressed in a makeshift costume to resemble the pope's ambassador. Standing on the castle ramparts, he proceeded to excommunicate the king and his army below. The garrison's action was almost certainly a form of psychological salve, but it also sent a strident message that the moral and political authority of the king and pope was being called into question.

Shared creativity
The resurgence of non-verbal communication is a timely reminder of the similarities that people share across different periods, cultures and places. It is a reminder of human

'The 21st century is the most visually saturated since the Middle Ages'

creativity, of our perennial desire to play and, above all, a need to be heard. Fancy dress costume is one of the few forms of clothing that all people alive today are likely to wear at some point in their lives, regardless of their gender, race, class or sexuality: its place in history is more than just a laughing matter.

The Vikings who marched in London to protest against Brexit, the Darth Vaders who carried placards proclaiming that a woman's place should be in the resistance at international women's marches, the Mexico City clowns, dressed entirely in white, who walked to urge their government to tackle the rising problem of street violence, along with the costumed Australians protesting against lockdown who formed the Facebook group Bin Isolation Outing, are all clamorous, if not entirely eloquent, examples of fancy dress costume being worn, as it has been for centuries, at pivotal moments in the life of a community. The white supremacists who marched on Washington's Capitol Hill in support of Donald Trump in January 2021 revealed a much darker side. All are occasions when words are believed to have faltered and only the most essential forms of communication suffice to make one's voice heard: the physical agency of the human body.

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14TH CENTURY

The Feast of Fools and Deacons. French 19th-century illustration.

Further reading
● Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (MIT Press, 1988)
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GERLIER   A. RENARD

LITIGIOUS LIVES

The resort to law was an integral and regular part of everyday life in medieval Britain – and not just for men. Town court records offer glimpses into the lives of hundreds of ordinary women, through the lawsuits they were involved in. *Teresa Phipps*

In January 1386 Johanna Burbache brought a plea of trespass in Winchester's City Court against William Crowk, a chaplain. Unlike the modern definition, trespass under medieval law was much broader, pertaining to any form of wrong or 'transgression'. Johanna complained that William had come to her house armed with sticks and knives and, once there, had entered the property, assaulted and wounded her, and stolen £6. Johanna claimed total damages of £10 – the additional £4 serving as compensation for the physical attack and unwanted entry into her house. Though William denied the assault, a jury of 12 local men reported that he was guilty of the trespass. The court awarded damages of £6 3s, much less than Johanna had claimed. This was common: plaintiffs typically claimed far larger damages than were ever awarded, as a means of making a public statement of the harm that they perceived as a result of an attack.

While this case serves as evidence of a woman being the victim of violence at the hands of a man, this was not the only reason that women found themselves in court. In the same year, Alice Mercer used Winchester's court to recover an unpaid debt of 30s 7d from Agatha Spycer. While we do not know how the debt was incurred, this was a significant sum which, combined with both women's surnames, suggests their involvement in mercantile trade. Another Winchester woman, Alice Broun, took her employer Robert Bonne, a butcher, to court to recover 1s 10d in unpaid wages. Though he initially failed to show up in court to respond to the allegation, he later agreed to pay Alice 1s. Whether Alice had been pushing her luck with her claim, or Robert got away with paying only some of what was owed, is unknown. These are just three examples of the multitude of cases in which women acted as litigants in the courts. But, beyond the individual stories, what do these records reveal about the lives of medieval urban women? And what role did local courts play in their lives when they were wronged, or when women themselves broke the rules?

Lawful ages

Towns across Britain administered local courts to deal with disputes between residents, to police behaviour and to regulate trade. They were also a valuable source of income for local governments, as they profited from the small fees paid by litigants to use the court and the fines issued for various offences.

In the popular imagination, medieval society is often depicted as being lawless and bloody. 'Medieval' is used as a synonym for 'backward' in describing certain attitudes (including attitudes to women) deemed to counter the apparent enlightened civility of modernity. These simplistic misconceptions are in part a legacy of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, where the culture of the ancient world and the new 'light' of modernity were contrasted with the Middle Ages, particularly the so-called 'dark ages'.

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But thanks to the later medieval proliferation of judicial and administrative record-keeping at all levels of society we are able to access the stories and identities of women like Johanna Burbache, Alice Mercer or Agatha Spycer. These cases and the women involved were not unique or exceptional, though it is hoped that such an attack was not a regular occurrence in Johanna's life or those of any other Winchester women. Urban courts dealt with a vast number of complaints that were lesser in severity than the felonies heard at crown courts: lower value debts (usually below 40s), contract disputes and the broad range of interpersonal offences and theft classed as 'trespass'. But the everyday and sometimes mundane nature of the disputes captured in the courts' records increases their value. They offer an insight into the lives and experiences of ordinary people as they navigated urban life and work, often in the same streets that we are familiar with today; in these cases, in Nottingham, Chester and Winchester.

Commerce, credit and debt

Interpersonal pleas in town courts mostly fell within the categories of debt and trespass. These legal actions allowed individuals formally to complain about the misbehaviour of others and to seek redress and compensation via the court. Importantly for a largely oral society, they also served as a means of documenting for posterity the transactions, exchanges or altercations that punctuated everyday life in medieval towns. The people who featured in the court records were mostly illiterate and their lives were not captured in diaries or in letter collections such as that of the Paston family of Norfolk; but through the process of going to court, snippets of the lives of ordinary people – including women – are etched onto the historical record.

Pleas of debt dominated. In an economy built on deferred payment, being indebted was commonplace at all levels of society, representative of an individual's commercial network and contacts rather than a symbol of financial mismanagement or precarity. However, when debts were not repaid on time and once other methods had been exhausted, creditors turned to their local courts to enforce repayment, as well as seeking damages.

The majority of litigants in debt suits were men, reflecting their enhanced economic status in medieval society, but women were also regularly found in court in cases relating to a wide range of commercial agreements, both as creditors and debtors. Some debts related to the purchase of everyday household provisions, such as the 3d for milk that Matilde le Spenser of Chester owed to Alice, widow of John Hammes, plus 2d that Alice claimed in damages. Others arose from broken agreements concerning various services. This was most likely the reason that Elena de Sudbury took Ralph Wevier to court in Chester for detaining blue and green pieces of cloth that he had failed to deliver to her in 1423. Occasionally, women used their local courts to claim unpaid wages, reflecting the service roles that were a common part of their urban experience. We have already seen how Alice Broun of Winchester took her employer to court to recover her unpaid wages. Similarly, in 1390 Johanna Brasby of Chester successfully claimed 3s 3d for her wages from Roger Morte.

Bigger things

There is also evidence of women's involvement in more substantial commercial agreements or loans. The debt of 30s 7d recovered by Alice

Mercer from Agatha Spycer in Winchester would have represented a large, probably trading, agreement. Agatha did not contest the debt, but acknowledged it in court, demonstrating how these pleas could sometimes simply be the final stage of a credit transaction, rather than the culmination of a complete breakdown in a commercial relationship. William le Rous of Chester alleged in 1317 that Alice, widow of John Jamube, owed him 54s as recorded via a tally stick, a piece of wood on which debts were recorded using writing and carved notches, before being split in half with a piece given to each party to prevent fraud. Alice did not dispute the claim – presumably because the evidence of the tally stick made it irrefutable – and agreed a form of repayment plan, with portions paid at various feast days throughout the year.

These larger debts were often owed or claimed by widows, who were likely to have continued their late husbands' business arrangements, or were executors of their husbands' testaments. In such cases, women's marital status was carefully detailed. Margaret Stevynson appeared in Nottingham's court in 1492 in a dispute relating to her late husband's will. For the purposes of this case, which she pleaded with her new husband, she was both the wife of Robert Stevynson and lately the wife of William Clemanson, as her ties to both husbands (one living and one dead) were essential to the dispute and the legal process. But in many other cases that did not hinge on widowhood or marriage, women's marital status was not documented – despite the inescapable tripartite division of female status (maid/wife/widow) that is frequently cited by historians.

Women featured regularly in

disputes relating to the production and sale of ale, an important female role in medieval society. This could involve raw ingredients like malt, or the finished product. It was for this reason Margery Tapster, a Nottingham woman whose surname suggests she made a living by selling ale, was sued in 1375 for 1s 4d by brewer and alehouse keeper Agnes Halum. Married women were also involved in the ale trade. Laurence and Isabella Tyrngton of Nottingham claimed in 1375 that Richard and Magota Grantham owed them 2s for ale – a significant amount representing perhaps 20-30 gallons. While the litigants were recorded as two couples, this debt is likely to have related to a transaction between the two wives; perhaps Isabella had brewed the ale and sold it on to Magota to use in her household, or to resell by the cup for a small profit. Because they were married, though, they could not litigate independently of their husbands due to the legal principle of coverture, which in its most extreme form said that husband and wife became one person, with husbands becoming rulers of their wives. Cases such as this demonstrate that coverture did not necessarily mean that married women were legally invisible or that their husbands simply acted on their behalf in court; they still had a role to play in the settlement of commercial disputes.

These joint suits between husbands and wives appear to have been common in 14th-century Nottingham, though less so elsewhere. They are indicative of the commercial partnership of spouses, expanding our view of the household economy in action. Couples may have worked together, such as John and Alice Sutton, who were sued by Matthew of Skegby in Nottingham's borough court in 1375 as they owed him 10s for garlic and onions. This

was a significant amount and suggests that the couple were involved in the wholesale trade in fruit and vegetables. Some couples appeared in multiple joint debt suits spanning several years, encapsulating the enduring economic and legal partnership that came with marriage. Sometimes, however, the court records clearly indicate that a case involving both husband and wife in fact related solely to the wife's activities. William Skegby and his wife Petronella sued William Daniell in Nottingham's borough court for a debt of 10s, lent 'by the hands of Petronella' and not returned on time. Likewise, Godesman and Elena Taylor were the subject of a suit brought by William de Hontesdon concerning 11s owed for a barrel of herring that he had delivered to them for Elena to sell. Presumably Elena was meant to repay the profits (or a portion of them) to William, but he claimed that she had not done so. Regardless of the origins of these cases, the individual recording of excuses for non-attendance (*essoins*) shows that all parties were required to attend court. Married women's inclusion as litigants was not simply nominal, but central to the progress of these suits.

Spilled ale
Trespass pleas heard in town courts typically related to complaints of physical and verbal assault, and attacks on property and theft. It should not be surprising that women featured as both victims and perpetrators of all manner of trespasses – such wrongdoing has no prerequisite of social or economic status. Successful pleas resulted in monetary damages to be paid to the victim, though plaintiffs never won anything like the large sums that they claimed. This prospect of compensation and the opportunity to restore damaged honour –

essential to a reputation-based economy – meant that litigants were not ashamed to proclaim publicly the manner in which they felt they had been wronged. This included men who complained about verbal and physical attacks carried out by women: John Bower of Chester accused Elizabeth Knybbes, wife of Henry Knybbes (though she seems to have appeared in court alone), of assaulting and striking him, claiming damages of 100s. While the case was successful, the damages awarded were 6s 8d, a fraction of the sum he claimed.

The accessible nature of local courts meant that redress could be readily available for victims of trespasses and, while women were more often victims than perpetrators, the local court offered a form of retribution that contradicts the stereotype of the weak and defenceless medieval maiden. Johanna Hurlton of Chester sued Jacob Hatton for trespass in 1423, claiming he broke into her house and broke a pot worth 1s with eight gallons of ale (which were presumably spilled). She sought damages of 10s, reflecting both the unwanted entry into her home and the loss of property.

When married women were involved in trespasses, their husbands were also required to join them as co-litigants. Nottingham's Martin and Emma Tankarder accused John Bredon of trespass, claiming that John had assaulted Emma with a spade. Despite his retort, that having attempted to collect a payment from Emma, she had refused to pay and instead assaulted him, the jury of Nottingham's court found John guilty. Lucy Holegheie was an alleged victim of assault at the hands of Adriana Derby at Chester in 1317, but because both women were married, the plea and response were both made jointly alongside their

husbands and the 100s damages claimed were framed as a loss on the part of Lucy's husband, William.

Spouses also complained of trespasses that harmed them both. John and Matilda Byketoun of Winchester complained in 1366 that Agnes Halle had assaulted them using 'malicious words', calling them false and faithless merchants and causing damages of £20. John Byketoun was a member of Winchester's urban elite who held many official roles in the city, but the allegation and the subsequent lawsuit also featured his wife, reflecting the shared reputation that the couple held through marriage. The jury agreed that Agnes Halle was guilty, but only awarded 3s 4d damages, suggesting there was little sympathy for the Byketouns' elevated status, despite the very large damages claimed.

Spouses and household groups were also accused of joining together to commit offences. In 1411 Edmund de Wheteley of Nottingham accused John and Elizabeth Hodyngs, aided by unknown others, of using weapons to break into his garden, tear down his eight-foot-high stone wall and take away the stones. The jury agreed and ordered the couple to pay 2s damages. Throughout the process, both John and Elizabeth came to court to answer and dispute the claim. In 1386, Alice Rolfys of Winchester complained (via her attorney John Byketoun – the same man who sued Agnes Halle for her defamatory words) that John and Cristina Beneyt came to her house, armed with sticks and knives, and assaulted her and stole a fur tunic worth 10s. Alice claimed damages of 40s and, though John and Cristina initially denied the attack, the later court entries suggest that they came to a settlement with Alice.

What we cannot reconstruct are the stories that lie behind these pleas. What were the events that led up to an attack or a theft, what role did premeditation or longstanding animosity play and how many instances of violence and wrongdoing never made it to court? While it would be too much to claim that women were always able to seek redress when they were wronged or attacked, these records nevertheless show that this was an option for at least some. Equally, women who were accused of committing wrongdoing were required to answer for their offences before the court, even if they were married.

The final stage
Some of the pleas that town courts heard may have represented moments of crisis or extraordinary harm or upheaval, but many of them were simply the final stage in a commercial agreement, or an individual's attempt to claim a few pennies in compensation after a minor altercation. Through the large numbers of individuals whose actions, claims and counterclaims are documented among these court rolls, including many women, we see that law was not simply imposed on people from above, but was something that ordinary people actively negotiated and engaged in. This resulted in widespread knowledge of legal practice and meant that the resort to law was more a part of everyday life than it is today.

The court records allow us not only to identify the many women who litigated in their local courts but also to better understand women's status within the legal systems that governed their world and how they navigated them. Town courts did not operate under a unified set of procedures and there was particular variation in women's legal visibility and engagement with the law across different urban communities. There was no one monolithic legal culture

Further reading
● Richard Goddard and Teresa Phipps (eds), *Town Courts and Urban Society in Late Medieval England, 1250-1500* (Boydell, 2019)
● Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens (eds), *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe* (Boydell, 2013)
● Elizabeth Ewan, 'Scottish Portias: women in the courts in medieval Scottish towns', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 3 (1992), pp. 27-43

across medieval England. Married women living in Nottingham, for example, engaged with their local court far more than their counterparts in Winchester or Chester, particularly when it came to the use of litigation to manage commercial obligations. All these towns existed within the same English culture of coverture, but its day-to-day impact varied locally, sometimes with notable room for manouevre.

While this might seem like a legal technicality, it held significant implications for women's ability to represent themselves as legal persons in their everyday lives, their capacity to seek redress and for their actions to be entered into the historical record. The married women who did use their local courts were not legally invisible but active participants in the legal process. There was nothing stopping men from dealing with commercial disputes without their wives and sometimes they did so. But the frequency with which spouses went to court together, particularly in Nottingham, reveals recognition of

women's economic and legal roles.

Urban court records such as those glimpsed here allow us to reassess some of the dominant myths and stereotypes surrounding the status of women in the medieval period. This was not the 'rough and ready equality' that the historian Eileen Power once described – whether legally, economically or socially – but nor do these records paint a simple or stereotypical 'medieval' picture of female subordination or invisibility. It would be too far to claim that the records allow us to hear the 'voices' of these women (or of the men who used the court). Nevertheless, they allow us to populate the towns of medieval England with women who were traders, producers, servants and key contributors to the household economy, who also had disagreements, broke the rules and were victims of the misdeeds of their neighbours.
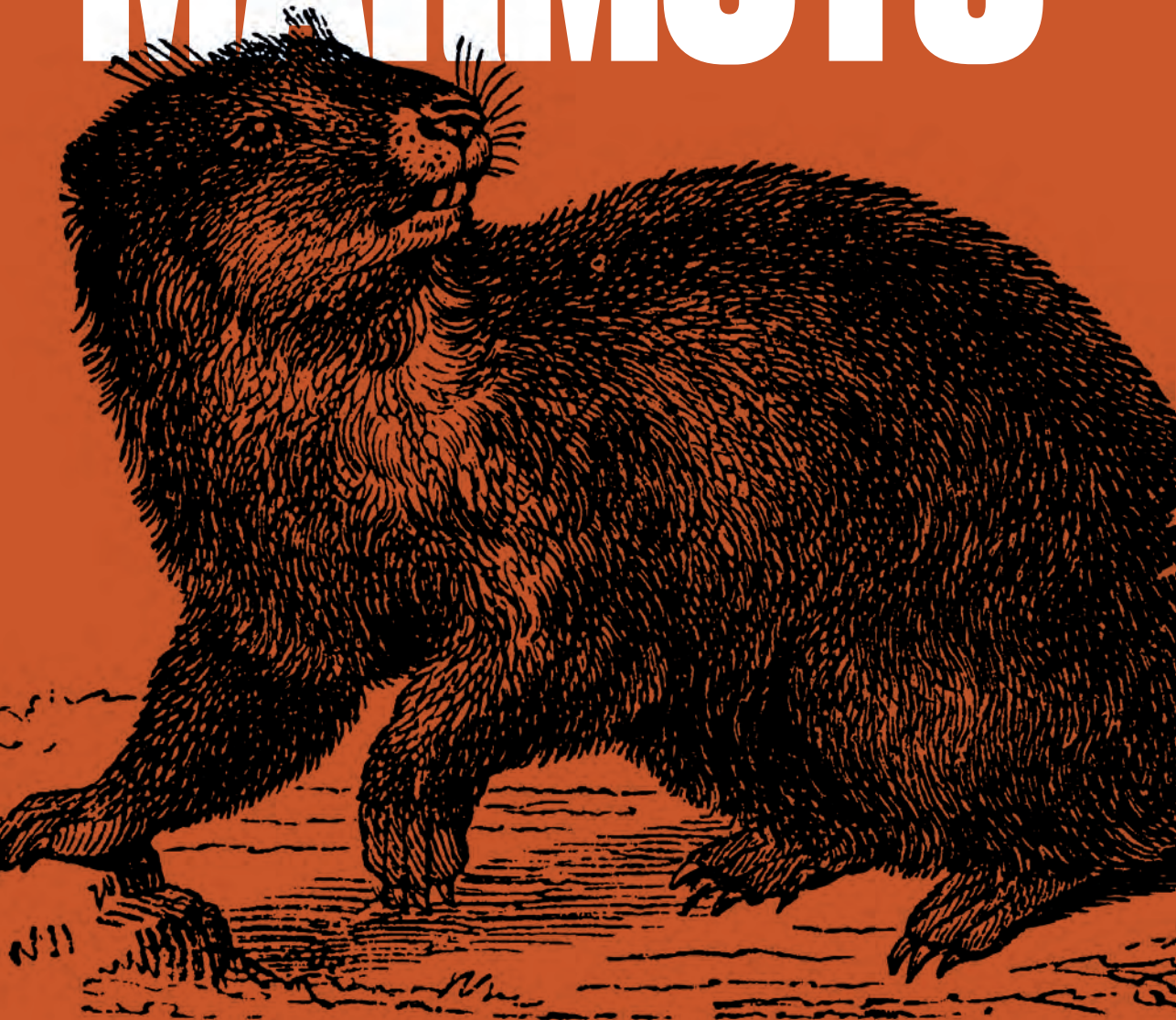
Teresa Phipps is the author of *Medieval Women and Urban Justice: Commerce, Crime and Community in England, 1300-1500* (Manchester, 2020).

Should the finger of
blame be pointed at the
marmot for the global
spread of the plague?
Alexander Lee

MARMOTS

When it comes to the Black Death, rats are usually cast as the villains of the piece – and with good reason. After all, it was most likely thanks to them that the plague (*Yersinia pestis*) was reintroduced to Europe. Though there has been some debate about how and where the original infection occurred, there is little doubt that Italian traders caught the disease from rat fleas in Black Sea ports before taking it back to Messina aboard Genoese galleys in October 1347. Granted, rats were probably not solely responsible for the speed with which the pestilence spread in the weeks that followed. In 2018, researchers from the universities of Ferrara and Oslo demonstrated that human fleas and lice played at least as important a role in transmission between people. But because rats can tolerate higher concentrations of the bacillus in their blood, and tend to live in close proximity to humans, they greatly amplified its virulence. Exactly how many people died is difficult to establish, but it is estimated that, in the period 1347-53, the plague killed 30-50 per cent of the European population. Understandably, rats have borne most of the blame.

But is this really fair? A recent study suggests marmots might have been just as guilty.

Lost origins

It all boils down to where the plague came from. This is a notoriously tricky issue. Although we know a great deal about the course of *Y. pestis* after its arrival in Europe, we are much less well informed about the route it followed before reaching the Black Sea. There are no narrative accounts comparable to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Ibn Khaldun's *Kitāb al-'Ibar* for regions further east; references to outbreaks of sickness in local sources are often lacking in detail; and Gabriele de' Mussis' *Istoria de morbo sive mortalitate quae fuit anno domini MCCCXLVIII* – which contains perhaps the most vivid description of the plague's Asian trajectory – appears to have been written without the author ever having left his home in Piacenza.

This has not stopped historians speculating, of course. For many years, it has been assumed that, since the plague was certainly present in the Caucasus in 1347, it most probably began its journey somewhere in Central Asia around 1331-32, before spreading south to China and India and west through Persia. But the exact site of its birth and the reasons for its sudden dispersal have proved elusive. There have been plenty of theories. In the mid-1970s, for example, William McNeill speculated, rather fancifully, that it originated in the Himalayas. By contrast, in the 1990s, Rosemary Horrox placed its beginnings in the eastern steppe and argued that unspecified 'ecological changes' drove infected rodents closer to human settlements. But, in the absence of documentary evidence, it has been impossible to say which, if any, of these is right.

New suspect: the marmot, *Murmeltier arctomys*, German illustration, 19th century.
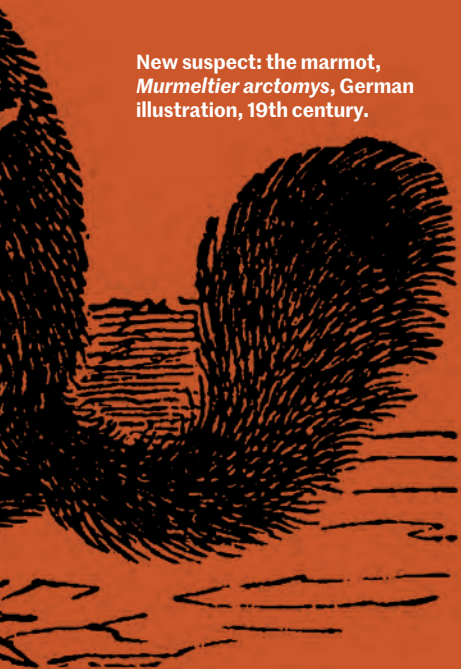
The new discipline of palaeogenetics has changed everything, though. In the 1980s, scientists discovered how to recover ancient DNA (aDNA) from archaeological remains – and it was quickly realised that this had the potential to revolutionise the study of the Black Death. The technique was first brought to bear on a piece of housekeeping. Using samples from an unusually well-dated mass grave in London's Smithfield, it was possible to confirm beyond any doubt that *Y. pestis* was indeed the causative agent of the 1347-53 epidemic in Europe. But in recent years, it has been used to shed light on the origins and trajectory of the bacillus itself.

The idea behind this is relatively simple. As we all know, DNA is a double helix, consisting of two connected strands, which resemble a twisted ladder. Each 'rung' on the ladder consists of a pair of bonded nucleotides. These come in four varieties: cytosine (C), guanine (G), thymine (T) and adenine (A). The combinations in which these occur is distinctive, but over time, the DNA of a micro-organism like *Y. pestis* will undergo a certain amount of random mutation. An A-T pair in one generation might become a C-T pair in the next. Of course, not all mutations will lead anywhere. Most will simply be outcompeted by the original version and disappear from the gene pool. But, every now and then, a mutation wins out. Either it will give one of the organisms an advantage over the others or – more often – it will be transplanted to another area, where there is

less competition and it can establish itself more easily. Once it is dominant, the process can start again.

This means that, for any organism, we should be able to draw a kind of family tree (known as a phylogenetic tree) showing how mutations relate to each other and when a new branch breaks off from the main trunk. The easiest way to do this is by observing the changes as they happen. But it can also be done retrospectively by comparing modern DNA with aDNA. It is not easy, of course. The great difficulty with aDNA is that remains have not always survived for every mutation; and, the further back in time you go, the more gaps there are in the genetic record. But, because mutations occur in sequence, it is possible to identify how many took place between two particular samples – and, by extension, how and when different varieties branched off from one another.

Enter the marmot
This is where marmots come in. As well as rats, *Y. pestis* is prevalent in a wide range of other rodents, including marmots and some Central Asian species, many of which have been present in the region for millennia. By collecting DNA from plague-infected marmots today and aDNA from human victims in the past, it has been possible to reconstruct the development of *Y. pestis* from long before the Black Death down to the present day. By correlating this information with the location of the samples, we can even draw a tentative

Super spreader? A Mongol marmot hunter disguised as his prey, Mongolia, 1990.

'Every time a Mongol killed an infected animal, ate its meat and prepared its hide, they were in danger of catching the same disease'

map of its dissemination.

The results are surprising, to say the least. Rather than existing only in a single form, as most had tacitly assumed, it turns out that there are, in fact, four major varieties of the plague in existence today. The first caused the Black Death in Europe; the second split in two, before moving south and east, towards India and the Caspian Sea; while the third and fourth are currently found in Siberia, Mongolia and China. Most importantly, all four appear to have diverged from a common point of origin, at approximately the same time. Though there are obviously limitations to how accurately the date and location can be determined, it has been suggested that this genetic explosion (known, for convenience, as the 'Big Bang') most likely took place in the Tian Shan mountains, on the border between Kyrgyzstan and China, at some point in the late 12th or early 13th century – that is, at least a hundred years before the Black Death struck Europe.

Marmots and Mongols

This, however, begs a question. If the 'Big Bang' originated in the Tian Shan mountains, how did the new strains of *Y. pestis* spread so far, so fast?

Clearly, the marmots can't have done it on their own. Those native to Central Asia are all highly territorial. They tend not to migrate over large distances and generally avoid interbreeding with other species. But, if this is so, what did happen?

An intriguing possibility has been put forward by the historian Monica Green in a recent article in the *American Historical Review*. Building on a suggestion originally made by Robert Hymes, she has argued that marmots were 'helped' by the Mongols. A highly nomadic people, the Mongols had long nurtured a fondness for eating rodents; and, as foreign observers often noted, they were particularly partial to marmots. This was as much a matter of practicality as taste. Found in large numbers throughout the steppe, marmots were a good source not only of meat, but also of hides and *fanpi* ('nomad leather'). When the Mongols began their conquests under Chinggis Khan (c.1158-1227), they took their culinary habits with them – with devastating consequences.

The trouble began with the conquest of the Qara Khitai in 1216-18. Also known as the Western Liao dynasty, the Qara Khitai ruled over a large empire, covering much of modern Kyrgyzstan, north-western China, and parts of Kazakhstan – including the Tian Shan mountains. According to Green, it is possible that, by then, the Qara Khitai may already have begun to dislodge *Y. pestis* from its original heartlands. Either way, it was there that the Mongols first encountered plague-carrying marmots – and, in doing so, greatly accelerated the process. Every time a Mongol killed an infected animal, ate its meat and prepared its hide, they were in danger of catching the same disease. And when the Mongols eventually marched off in search of further conquests, the cured marmot meats and hides they carried in their baggage train transported the plague to new locations, where emerging strains (which might otherwise have been outcompeted) were able to establish themselves with ease.

The ends of the earth

Having thus provided the impetus for the 'Big Bang', the marmot-loving Mongols then disseminated the four 'new' plagues throughout the Asian continent – and beyond.

By correlating the genetic evidence with known epidemics and accounts of the Mongol conquests, Green has identified the course of each strain of *Y. pestis* with specific campaigns. The correspondence is striking. In 1253, for example, Chinggis Khan's grandson, Möngke (1209-59), sent a huge army commanded by his brother, Hulagu (c.1215-65), against the Luri people of modern Iran, the Abbasid Caliphate and the Ayyubid states of the Levant. Sure enough, the second variety of the plague followed close behind. In the wake of major sieges, outbreaks occurred in Girdkuh (1254), Lanbasar (1257), Baghdad (1258) and a number of cities in Syria. So, too, in the 1270s, revolts in Almaliq and Mongolia necessitated the diversion of traditional postal routes and a series of large-scale punitive expeditions. Admittedly, in this case the paucity of records has made it difficult to pinpoint incidents of epidemic disease, but, as Green has pointed out, it is surely no coincidence that it is in precisely this region that the fourth strain of *Y. pestis* is found today. And, most importantly, campaigns

From east to west: the Black Death at Tournai, 1349, Flemish, 14th century.

against Kwazarazmshah (1218-25), Georgia (1220-23) and the Volga Bulgars (1229-32) would have provided the all-important first branch of the plague with a clear route from the Tian Shan mountains to the Black Sea coast.

Needless to say, none of this is immune to criticism. As Green herself has recognised, the connections she has drawn are necessarily speculative. Many will, no doubt, be questioned, or even challenged, in years to come. But in making use of palaeogenetic research, Green has overcome the limitations of the documentary evidence and opened the doors to a remarkable new way of thinking about the origins of the Black Death.

The questions this raises are profound. Now that it is possible to reconstruct 'hidden' paths of infection, should we ask if there were outbreaks of

plague in other areas of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, which left no trace in written record but which nevertheless cut deeply into human experience? If so, how might that change our understanding of wider social and political phenomena?

But Green's work has also succeeded in shifting a little of the opprobrium from the poor old rat. For, while there is no denying that the Black Death would not have had such devastating effects in Europe without *rattus rattus*, she has shown that, without the marmot, there would have been no plague – or rather, plagues – at all.

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ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Electric cars seem to offer a solution to the problem of the internal combustion engine. But technological advances have other consequences. *Dan Coffey*

BEHIND THE TIMES

There is growing opinion that, in the global car industry, now facing a period of extraordinary change, history will repeat itself. The electric revolution appears poised on the brink of transforming the world of mobility. Yet, while companies such as Elon Musk's US-based Tesla are using and developing cutting-edge technologies, they are also turning to tried and trusted business models, which would have been familiar to Henry Ford and Alfred Sloan.

This is unsurprising: it is hard to think of a more defining image in automotive history than the Model T motor car being produced on moving assembly lines at Ford's gigantic Highland Park factory in Detroit. Ford organised production as a continuous flow, epitomised by the mechanically powered conveyor belt, which, in 1913, became the basis for mass car assembly, copied by corporations around the world. But what ultimately mattered was the scale he achieved. Ford broke record after record, passing in 1920 a factory output of a million cars in just one year.

A new century

More than a century on, and the world watches Tesla to see if it is able to do for battery electric technology what Ford did with the gasoline-fuelled internal combustion engine. The company is working to extend into its battery plants the Ford principle of production without stops and starts, even as it steps up its investments for manufacture at scale. Tesla's immediate target is a little under half Ford's output of a century ago: it claims to have produced half a million cars in 2020.

This has generated understandable excitement among industry observers. It suggests a resurgent industry that can still be managed in familiar ways, but which can also meet the existential threat of global warming head-on by mass building electric cars to eliminate CO_2-emitting engines. But there is a hitch.

The flipside of having cars powered by gasoline is that the history of the car industry is in many ways the story of oil. Verging on an industrial symbiosis, this relationship was every bit as important as innovations in the machine shop and factory line. Ford's breakthroughs followed a great national oil boom, which began some years earlier. After oil was struck at Spindletop in Beaumont, Texas in 1901, the United States quickly became the world's largest oil producer. It drilled with an extraordinary intensity, echoed more recently by the speed with which its fracking industry has developed. The profligacy
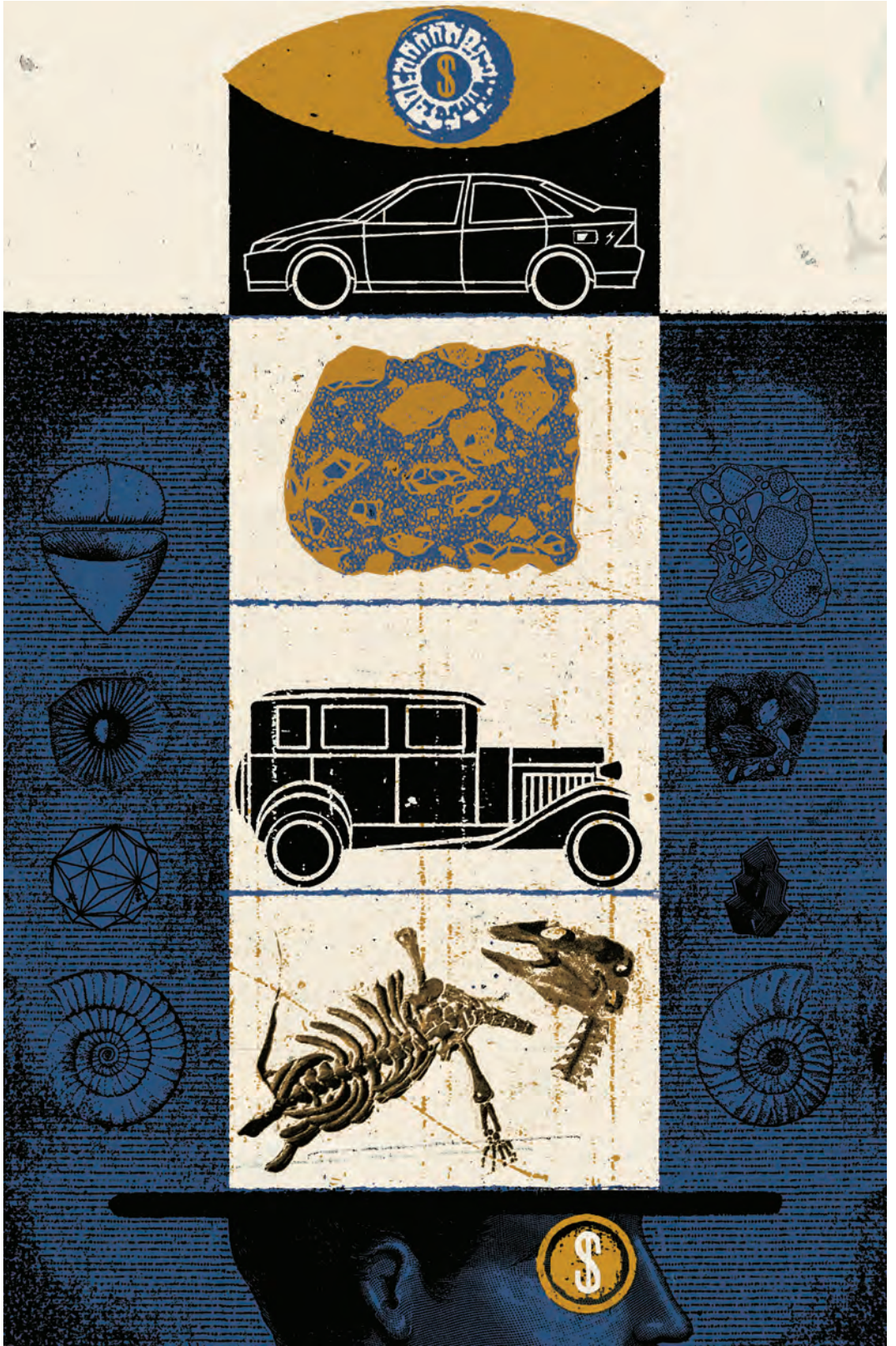
implied by the popular image of Texan oil pioneers dancing under the spray of a gusher is belied by the endeavour which spread a dense network of wells across the oil-rich state. The success of Henry Ford was foreshadowed by the riches of J.D. Rockefeller, the mogul who founded Standard Oil as far back as 1870.

The car industry expanded in tandem with the need for gasoline derived from crude oil. But as fields opened beyond the US, oil became a geopolitical reference point, implicated in numerous wars, invasions, coups, briberies and underhand manipulations. The story of oil is also one of spillage disasters, whether caused by accidents involving tankers, such as the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* spill in Alaska, or oil rig catastrophes, including BP's *Deepwater Horizon* in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Providing the fuel for the vehicles that warm the planet was another nail in the coffin for oil's reputation.

Exploitation
The story of oil and its exploitation also shows how technologies associated with progress can prompt the bitterest abuses of indigenous populations unlucky enough to have critical resources on their lands. In the US, the huckstering of members of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma (having already been forced off their reservation in Kansas), whose territorial settlements gave them rights in oil, degenerated into a series of murders over a 20-year period, peaking in a five year 'reign of terror' from 1921. It took them until 2011 to settle resource

management with the Federal government.

But the most severe example of exploitation of indigenous peoples took place in the Congo, where the first expansions of the car industry fed the growing market for what became known as red rubber. The Congo Free State was established by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1885. European adventurers, backed by Leopold's private army (the Free State was his personal possession), moved on from harvesting the ivory of elephants to forcing the Congolese into the forests to tap the wild rubber tree. The Belgian government assumed control in 1908, but it is estimated that by 1920 up to half the Congolese population had been lost to disease, famine and slaughter. There is no direct connection between the sufferings of the Congolese and the spirit of invention that led to pneumatic tyres and vulcanised rubber. But the tubes, tyres, hoses, raincoats and gloves which demanded rubber for their mass production are also part of this unsavoury legacy.

Back to the future
And history repeats itself. While the electric car does promise to liberate the world from CO_2 and oil spills, the new battery technologies rely on critical materials, such as lithium, cobalt and nickel. These fresh dependencies mean new points of political tension and environmental degradation, remarkably similar to those produced by the industrial exploitation of oil and rubber.

Demand for the critical materials to feed electric car production is already pushing up against supply. In September 2020 Elon Musk held the Tesla Battery Day Event, in which he announced a slew of proposed advancements to shareholders. Little more than a week later, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order declaring American dependency on imports of rare earth minerals, many essential for electronics, a national emergency. China, whose dominance in lithium processing and lithium-ion batteries also makes it integral to electric car manufacture in the United States, is described as a foreign adversary. The obvious alternative source for lithium is Bolivia, a country that has been in political turmoil. With the world's most substantial lithium reserves, Bolivia may be emerging as a focal point in a developing international struggle for access to what is now being called 'white petroleum'.

In an especially troubling echo of the past, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congolese labour is being deployed in cobalt extraction operations in unsafe and contaminated mines. Reports from Amnesty International have monitored the widespread use of child labour and found multiple abuses.

In the same way that the Dunlop tyre and improvements to the waterproofed raincoat created new demands for rubber, the smartphone and the personal computer create demand for cobalt. Congo supplies over 60 per cent of the

world's cobalt consumption. The electric car is part of this. While phasing out cobalt has been an aspiration for some years, it remains to be seen whether, and how quickly, this will actually happen.

Mining operations on the scale necessary to support new mass car production will inevitably disturb, divert and pollute scarce land and water resources. The case of Bolivia, and the freedom of its population to control its resources without external pressures or interference, is one to watch.

Cars for all

There are other lessons from history. Alfred Sloan, another towering figure from the glory days of gasoline, worked with his team at General Motors during the 1920s to improve Ford's business model. There were five brands to manage, running from the mass-market Chevrolet up to the luxury Cadillac models, each with its particular pricing points. Where Ford aimed to change the world by making cars accessible to buyers of modest means, Sloan's aim was to pitch cars at 'every purse and purpose'.

While successful, this helped feed the American ambition to own a bigger and better car than the last one bought. Although hard to believe now, the earliest commercial car makers in the United States built on more modest lines than their European counterparts. But abundant gasoline, sold cheaply, together with public investments to improve on mud roads, made big cars viable. When price

'The earliest commercial car makers in America built on more modest lines than their European counterparts'

hikes by the OPEC oil consortium in the 1970s left many predicting a bright future for smaller cars, the reality was that as oil prices fell again the quest for the perfect big car continued. Japanese manufacturers, who began by selling smaller cars to Americans looking for fuel economy, made their cars larger. Ford and General Motors accommodated this new competition by greatly expanding the market for expensive – and large – SUVs.

The problem now is that, while bets are still being taken on whether Tesla succeeds with an electric car for the masses, practically every car manufacturer with a stake in the game is working on battery electric designs for solvent aficionados of larger cars, sportier cars and luxury cars. This will only ramp up the immediate pressure to mine for metals.

Hidden dependencies

Many tech-led manufacturing businesses, including Tesla, are redeveloping their resourcing and supply chains. Ford and Sloan could not have predicted the downsides of what they saw as their landmark contributions to civilisation – whether environmental or geopolitical. But history matters because it reveals such unexpected consequences. Looking only at oil-dependent technology, the electric car offers a greener and more equitable future. When appraising the realities of its own dependencies, it does not.

Dan Coffey researches the global car industry at Leeds University Business School.

REVIEWS

Laura Varnam finds Beowulf comfortably at home in the 21st century

Andy Bruno follows Europe's longest river through Russian history

Adele Curness considers the fluid and unfixed Byzantine Empire

Just good friends: Peter and Paul embracing, Byzantine mosaic, 12th century.

LITERATURE

BEOWULF THE BRO

Beowulf: A New Translation

Maria Dahvana Headley

Scribe 176pp £9.99

Review by Laura Varnam

In the introduction to his 1952 translation of *Beowulf*, the Scottish poet Edwin Morgan ventured that in translation 'communication must take place; the nerves must sometimes tingle and the skin flush, as with original poetry'. Morgan's aim was to 'interest and at times to excite the reader of poetry without misleading anyone who has no access to the original'. Fidelity and accuracy are all well and good, but a true translation must *speak* to the reader. It must connect in a way that sparks a dialogue with the tingling life fluttering within their bone-house, to borrow a much-loved Old English kenning. And it is precisely this deeply exciting conversation – between translator and reader, between the Old English epic and the 21st-century moment – that Maria Dahvana Headley's radical verse translation of *Beowulf* achieves so brilliantly. From its opening lines, Headley's bold, bombastic style ushers us into a mead hall that is both recognisable and exhilaratingly new:

Bro! Tell me we still know how to speak
*   of kings! In the old days,*
everyone knew what men were: brave, bold,
*   glory-bound. Only*
stories now, but I'll sound the Spear-Danes' song,
*   hoarded for hungry times.*

Much has been made of Headley's presentation of *Beowulf* as a 'bro-story' that brings to the fore the macho heroism, boasting and competitiveness on which the monster-fighting Beowulf thrives (until his determination to pit himself against the dragon leads to his death and the doom of his people). The translation of the opening, declamatory 'Hwæt' as 'Bro!' is deliberately, and refreshingly, different from Seamus Heaney's 1999 rendering: the weighty and measured 'So' of his Irish forebears. For Heaney, Beowulf was a poem of 'mythic potency'; for Tolkien before him (who allowed himself a drinking metaphor that would hold its own in Headley's bar-room *Beowulf*) the poem was 'a solemn funeral-ale with the taste of death'. Headley approaches her task as translator with a similar seriousness – there is precise scholarship at work here and a deep understanding of the language and style of the original poem – but Headley's translation also injects new life into the epic.

In her rich and engaging introduction to the translation, Headley writes that '*Beowulf* is not a quiet poem'. It is 'a dazzling, furious, funny, vicious, desperate, hungry, beautiful, mutinous, maudlin, supernatural, rapturous shout'. Headley's noisy poem would, I think, be welcomed by Edwin Morgan, who insisted that 'whatever the tradition of the original poetry may have been, the translator's duty is as much to speak to his own age as it is to represent the voice of a past age'. Headley's translation fizzes with contemporary energy (Beowulf waits for Grendel 'fervid and flexing'), it made me laugh (when 'Grendel's goose would be cooked') and it is not afraid to puncture the gravity of the story with a knowing understatement ('Bro, Fate can fuck you up'). Such moments often sent me back to the original poem to discover, with delight, that Headley had deftly captured the tone of a speech or offered a fresh perspective that made me rethink my own understanding (which is the highest praise that I can offer a translation).

Headley acknowledges that there can never be any such thing as a 'perfect' translation. 'What the translated text says', she declares, 'is a matter of study, interpretation, and poetic leaps of faith'. In the depiction of the *scop* (the poet) within King Hrothgar's mead hall, she offers a playful aside that nods at the poem's place in the academy and classroom: 'The scop had opinions, and he shared them: compare/contrast.' As our

No dimwit: Beowulf fights with the dragon, from *Stories of Legendary Heroes*, **illustration by Henry Matthew Brock, c.1930.**

'Headley's translation fizzes with contemporary energy and is not afraid to puncture the gravity of the story with a knowing understatement'

scop with her own opinions to share, Headley invites us to compare and contrast, as we might in an essay on the poem. In my own experience of discussing this translation with my students, they have been enormously excited by the contemporary ways in which Headley has welcomed them into her text, one of the most important of which is her feminist approach. Headley not only centres the poem's female characters and ameliorates the words used to describe them (Grendel's Mother, the *ides aglæcwif*, is a 'warrior-woman', rather than the pejorative 'wretch, or monster, of a woman', who appeared in the glossary of Klaeber's 1922 edition of the poem, for example). She borrows marital imagery to describe conflict and male bonding, hinting at the ways in which women in the poem are often relegated to second place. 'War was the wife Hrothgar wed first', we are told, and the king's mead hall is built 'as a house to espouse his faithful'. (This band of brothers ethos recalls Morgan's own description of his translation as his 'unwritten war poem', channelling his experiences in the Second World War.) Yet Headley depicts the dragon as female, foregrounding both her potential vulnerability and her underestimated power in this male-dominated world. When the thief plunders the hoard, Headley translates poignantly: 'Up she rose, raving, grieving, though to cry out / was to confess she'd been stripped while sleeping.' Of Beowulf: 'His plan would be his pyre – he imagined the dragon / a dimwit, clocking neither her courage nor her grit.'

In his much-quoted 1940 essay, Tolkien declared that 'if you wish to translate, not re-write, *Beowulf*, your language must be literary and traditional' and he warned against 'colloquialism and false modernity'. Headley is dragon-like in bringing her courage, grit and considerable poetic talent to the task of translation, yet also conveys plenty of its literary tradition. She makes rich use of alliteration, echoing the Old English metre ('Grendel hurt, and so he hunted') and creates compounds that match the power of the original (Grendel 'howl-haunted' the hall; treasure is 'gore-loot'). The *Beowulf* that emerges not only speaks to us but demands to be heard in our 21st-century moment. And what a captivating shout it is, bro!

Laura Varnam is Lecturer in Old and Middle English Literature at University College, Oxford.

RUSSIA

WRIT IN WATER

The Volga: A History of Russia's Greatest River

Janet M. Hartley

Yale 400pp £25

Review by
Andy Bruno

Europe's longest river weaves through what has come to be seen as Russia's heartland, from the Valdai Hills north-west of Moscow to its delta near Astrakhan where it empties into the Caspian Sea. The Volga also links numerous peoples, including Bashkirs, Mari, Tatars, Udmurts and Russians, all of whom live near its shores. Yet, though its length exceeds all other rivers in Europe, the Volga is still significantly shorter than several of Russia's Siberian arteries and, though renowned regionally, the river nevertheless remains somewhat inconspicuous among the world's 'greatest' rivers. It is certainly less thought about, spoken of or eulogised than the Nile, the Amazon, the Mississippi, the Yangtze or, perhaps, even the Danube.

Janet Hartley aims to correct the Volga's marginalisation in her new book by putting it at the heart of a national history. Previously the author of a sweeping history of Siberia, Hartley proves an able guide on a kaleidoscopic tour of the Volga and the history of the people who have resided by it. From the earliest proto-states of the Jewish-led Khazars and the Islamic Bolgars to contemporary negotiations about the waterway's status as a Russian river, Hartley treats the reader to captivating stories of conflict, conversion, trade, famine, migration and myth. Throughout, Hartley convincingly shows that any understanding of Russian history requires an understanding of the Volga.

For centuries, the Volga was used as a major conduit for trade and commerce, tying locations together economically that were already linked by water. The river's utility for trade made it a confluence for divergent cultures, ethnicities and religions, which interacted with each other along its banks. Engagements among the diverse peoples of the Volga led to the formation of states and empires around it. Facilitated by the river, Muscovy's conquest of the Khanate of Kazan in the 16th century was one of the most crucial early moments in determining the massive continental empire that Russia would become. As the country grew to incorporate the entirety of the river, it became increasingly tied to national identity. As Hartley writes: 'Without the Volga, there would be no Russia.'

Beginning with the river's earliest history, Hartley introduces readers to the populations that lived with the Volga before the emergence of Russian influence, including various Turkic groups in the south and the Mongol Empire in the 13th century. Under Ivan IV the emergent Russian state conquered the Volga towns of Kazan and Astrakhan, replacing mosques with Orthodox churches. The Volga became something of a frontier in the 17th and 18th centuries. Rebellions and uprisings among populations of peasants and Cossacks became common events, even as the river grew more integrated into trade networks. Hartley then turns to social life along the Volga and the river's cultural significance in Russian identity, examining the experiences of villagers and townspeople, the river as a motif in Russian literature and the tumultuous changes of the late imperial era. Concluding with the Soviet era, the book meanders through the 20th century, paying particular attention to the Volga's role in the momentous Battle of Stalingrad – today Volgograd – during the Second World War.

The book is a successful social history of Russia as told through its most famous river and is particularly informative about the many non-Russian ethnic groups who have lived with the river. Some topics, especially the Volga famine of the early 1920s, estimated to have killed five million people, might have been given more attention, but Hartley's long chronology perhaps makes certain omissions inevitable.

One thing the book is decidedly not, however,

Down by the river:
A Port on the Volga,
**by Boris Mikhaylovich
Kustodiev, 1920.**

'Historians looking for narratives of Russia's multi-ethnic past can start with the river that runs through it'

is an environmental history. The waterway is almost exclusively a backdrop for human societies and is barely seen as a natural object until a brief final chapter on the effects of Soviet canal building. The entire premise of decades worth of scholarship on environmental history – including a fair number of monographs on other rivers – is that it is insufficient to write human history with the rest of nature left out. Much of this book reads as a history of a river without water. Historians will have to wait for a biography of the Volga that takes the natural world seriously. That said, it is somewhat unfair to lament what a scholar did not do when their book is a powerful achievement. Hartley demonstrates that historians looking for narratives of Russia's multi-ethnic past can start with the river that runs through it.

Andy Bruno is the author of *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History* (Cambridge, 2016) and teaches at Northern Illinois University.

DEDICATED FOLLOWERS
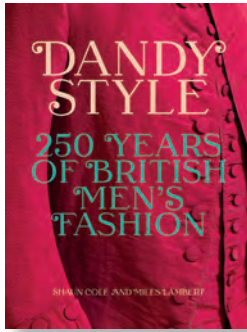
**Dandy Style:
250 Years of British
Men's Fashion**

Edited by Shaun Cole
and Miles Lambert

Yale 168pp £25

*Review by
Jade Halbert*

The fashionable man is something of a shape-shifter in the history of British dress. Alternately worshipped and reviled, he has represented – across various centuries – the vain 'Fop', the ridiculous 'Fribble', the flamboyant 'Macaroni', the posturing 'Peacock' and, most prominently, the exquisite 'Dandy'. 'A Dandy', wrote the historian Thomas Carlyle in an oft-quoted passage, 'is a clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes ... others dress to live, he lives to dress'. This (rather monstrous) caricature has endured and thus men's fashion as a topic of study has sometimes been reduced to overly simplistic analyses (usually tied up with questions of gender and sexuality), or ignored altogether in favour of women's fashion. Of course, there are exceptions – Christopher Breward's *The Suit* (2016) and Peter McNeil's *Pretty Gentlemen* (2018) stand out – but a more holistic treatment of the topic has been long overdue.

With this in mind, *Dandy Style: 250 years of British Men's Fashion* is most welcome. Published to accompany a landmark exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery (now expected to open in November 2021), *Dandy Style* is a thoughtful long view of men's participation in, and consumption of, fashionable dress, which brings together a range of authors to provide a vibrant and meticulous new account of men, their clothes and sartorial self-expression across three centuries. It considers elegance, subversion, globalisation and representation of the masculine in fashion and brings clarity to the historiography around dandyism. Richly illustrated and beautifully designed, it is both an intellectual and visual treat.

For various reasons, far less fashionable menswear has survived the centuries than fashionable womenswear; as Lambert notes, this has resulted in a 'historical paucity of studies of men's clothing' and thus a distortion of the historical record as it relates to dress. Refreshingly, in addition to an excellent introduction on the history of men's fashion and the intellectual frameworks that have defined its study, and chapters that illuminate the importance of portraiture, performance, and extravagance in menswear, *Dandy Style* prioritises surviving objects. Through them, the imbalance of museum collecting policy is highlighted, while the wardrobes of noted modern dandies (including that of the infamously modish Sir Roy Strong) are plundered and studied in microscopic detail for what they reveal not only about the lives of their wearers but about men, clothes and fashionable masculine tastes more generally. What emerges is the clear realisation that dandyism is more than just fashion history; it is a thriving modern fashion culture that stretches across social, economic, race and gendered boundaries. This is the triumph of *Dandy Style*; it is not encumbered by the caricature of the dandy as the wealthy white exquisite who lives to dress, it looks closely, stands back, shifts focus and sees beyond that caricature.

It has proved too tempting in the past to consign men who express an interest in fashion to some imagined category of people who mistake novelty bow ties for personality, or to assume that men who care about style and taste must be lacking in more 'typically' masculine interests. *Dandy Style* demolishes these clichés and shows that the relationships between men and the clothes they choose to wear is far more complex, far more interesting and, actually, far more fabulous than that.

Jade Halbert is Lecturer in Fashion and Cultural Studies at the University of Huddersfield.

THIRD REICH

AN ODIOUS STORY

The Hitler Years: Disaster 1940-1945

Frank McDonough

Head of Zeus 656pp
£35

*Review by
Roger Moorhouse*

Some 75 years after their demise, Hitler and the Third Reich are arguably bigger business now than they have ever been. Their story still dominates television history, while popular history publishing is seemingly as dependent as ever on repackaging and reselling the baleful story of the former Bohemian corporal and his acolytes.

Bearing that in mind, it is interesting to note the arrival of the second volume of Frank McDonough's *The Hitler Years*, taking events from the beginning of 1940 – with Hitler arguably at the peak of his powers – up to that grim demise in 1945. McDonough, a professor of international history at Liverpool John Moores University, is the author of a number of excellent monographs on, for instance, the Gestapo, or the run up to war in 1939.

The Hitler Years marks something of a departure, however, aiming squarely at a more popular market, with a straightforward chronological narrative which – while drawing on the author's academic background – nonetheless wears its expertise lightly. The result is an impressive tome, beautifully presented, with a host of illustrations.

McDonough's narrative rattles along, constantly engaging and enlightening and thankfully free from turgid academic jargon and modish buzzwords. Narrative is a skill the importance of which is perhaps underestimated in academic circles, where other aspects of the historian's art are nowadays more highly prized. Yet the difficulty of maintaining tension and engaging the reader over 600 pages of a familiar story should not be underestimated. In that task, McDonough succeeds admirably.

McDonough is also reassuringly sensible in the historiographical positions that he adopts. He errs towards the structuralist view on the Holocaust, for instance, concluding that that monstrous crime was 'not as coordinated or as predetermined as is often supposed'. He is also scathing of the view, now thankfully rather rare among serious commentators, that Hitler alone drove events, suggesting that the Führer and his senior commanders were much more united in outlook and intention than the latter were ever willing to admit.

Despite its impressive narrative sweep, *The Hitler Years* is arguably at its best when it detours into discrete, set-piece digressions, such as those on the White Rose protests led by the student Sophie Scholl – a subject especially close to the author's heart – or the Stauffenberg bomb plot of July 1944. On these areas, McDonough is a sure-footed guide, as confident in relating the minutiae as he is with the bigger picture and adept at weaving the two together into a coherent whole.

There are a few caveats, of course. A book with as broad a scope as this would have benefited from a few more maps and some of those that there are would have benefited from a specialist eye. Also, though it is understandable that the primary focus should be on events in the various military theatres, a few more diversions to the German home front would have served well to explain better how that country continued the fight long after the possibility of victory had eluded it.

But these are minor points. *The Hitler Years* is no half-hearted rehash, it is a treat of narrative history. It may be a little thin on novelty, but it is a splendid work of synthesis and, as such, it is as readable as it is authoritative. Rarely has the odious story of the Third Reich been so elegantly presented.

Roger Moorhouse's latest book is *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939* (The Bodley Head, 2019).

THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender and Race in the Middle Ages

Roland Betancourt

Princeton 288pp £30

Review by Adele Curness

Writing in the tenth century, the Italian bishop and diplomat Liudprand of Cremona was horrified by the Byzantine imperial court at Constantinople. Liudprand sneered that the Emperor Nikephoros II dressed and acted more like a woman than a man and jeered that he did not deserve to be acclaimed as radiant by his courtiers since his skin was so dark. His idea of Byzantium as the 'other', marred by gender and racial prejudice, has cast a long shadow which, even today, sees it all too often excluded from historical writing about medieval Europe.

Roland Betancourt's book aims to make historians look beyond that shadow. Its title makes use of the term coined in 1989 by the legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how individual aspects of identity, such as race and class, overlap each other and how these aspects must be treated holistically when discussing how people identify themselves and how they are identified by others. Here it refers to the interaction between gender, sexuality and race, how the intersections between these three separate things were understood in Byzantine society and how these understandings endured or shifted across the period of the Empire's history from (roughly) the fourth century to the 15th. While underpinned by a comparatively

modern methodology, and delivered in a prose style that is not totally free of anachronism, the book is rooted in a huge number of meticulously studied late antique and medieval sources. Importantly, Betancourt allows them the freedom to speak for themselves.

The book is divided into five stand-alone chapters, all of which follow the same structure. Betancourt takes an image or text in which two or more of his categories can be seen, analyses it and uses this analysis as a (very effective) springboard for a discussion of broader aspects of Byzantine society. He begins, for example, with a discussion of the Annunciation and how this was depicted in Byzantine iconography and spoken about by Byzantine homilists. There was a shift in late antiquity from a belief that the Virgin Mary conceived at the moment Gabriel appeared before her, to a belief that she did not conceive until she gave her consent to do so. Betancourt uses this to prompt a discussion of how consent – in both sexual and non-sexual contexts – was understood in Byzantine society. In his second chapter Betancourt examines the depiction of the sixth-century empress Theodora, the wife of Justinian, in Procopius' *Secret History*. In contrast to the vast majority of historiography relating to Theodora, which has a tendency to try to refute Procopius' claims about the empress' promiscuity, Betancourt asks why it matters whether or not the gossip about Theodora was true. Instead, he asks us to consider what Procopius' portrayal of Theodora's gender and sexuality reveals about Byzantine attitudes to (female) sexual freedom beyond the imperial court.

While there is virtually no overlap between them, these first two chapters can be said to have consent as a common theme. He follows this by examining fluidity, focusing on a series of *Lives* (that is, biographies) written about a group of saints from the late antique and early medieval period who were raised as women but began, in adulthood, to live as men within monastic communities, taking male names and using male pronouns. While previous scholarship has treated these saints merely as women in disguise, Betancourt is clear that they were transgender men and that their *Lives* reveal communities which accepted and affirmed their identities. This prompts a broader examination of the spectrum of gender identity in Byzantium, offering a particularly

Female attitude: Empress Theodora, detail from Byzantine mosaic, c.547.

'Dark skin was praised throughout the Empire's history as indicative of masculinity and authority. The shock this caused in contemporary western Europeans in palpable'

interesting discussion on the links in Byzantine thought between masculinity and holiness. Betancourt uses the image of St Thomas touching the wounds of Christ to consider the ways in which monastic communities (in this instance, male) talked about same-gender sexual and non-sexual intimacy and sexual and non-sexual desire.

Betancourt concludes with the story of the unnamed Ethiopian eunuch baptised by St Philip in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and, in particular, the representation of this scene in the 11th-century *Menologion* (a collection of religious readings arranged according to the liturgical calendar). Belonging to the emperor Basil II, the representation is unusual as it actually shows the eunuch as being black, rather than the ambiguously light-skinned portrayal more common in Byzantine art. Betancourt uses this image to discuss the Byzantine connection between skin colour and gender stereotypes, with dark skin praised throughout the Empire's history as indicative of masculinity and authority. The shock this caused among contemporary western Europeans is palpable in the sources Betancourt quotes (including Liudprand) and he makes a convincing case for the inclusion of Byzantium as standard in scholarship discussing topics such as race and gender in medieval Europe.

However, there are certain facets of identity, which intersect with gender, sexuality and race and which could deepen Betancourt's analysis of all three, that are missing from this book. Byzantine understandings of class are almost totally absent from the analysis. All of the case studies he chooses relate in some way to the rich and powerful. Betancourt acknowledges this absence and he is certainly not the first premodern historian whose work has been constrained by the need to to rely on elite sources, but several sections of the text have the implication that the powerless would have had broadly similar experiences to the Byzantine elite. It is, however, in keeping with the book's aims that in emphasising what overlaps we are forced to consider what is missing.

Adele Curness is completing a PhD in Byzantine history at St John's College, University of Oxford.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY
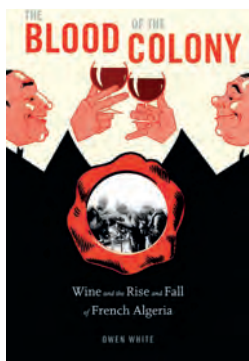
The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria

Owen White

Harvard 336pp
£31.95

The Story of Wine From Noah to Now

Hugh Johnson

Académie du Vin Library 496pp £30

Review by Giles MacDonogh

Over the years Hugh Johnson has had a crack at just about everything when it comes to wine writing and in most cases he got there first. His was the first small-format annual guide, his was the first atlas. He is certainly not the first person to write a history of wine – not by a long chalk – but he may have been the first to present its history on television with his 1989 miniseries *Vintage*. Johnson did for wine what Kenneth Clark had done for civilisation. The series later appeared in book form as *The Story of Wine*. Now, 30 years later, it has been re-released with a new introduction and a foreword by the historian Andrew Roberts.

It is a joy to dip into it again: Johnson writes so well. He is a superb communicator and his affection for the subject is contagious. I have been a witness to this in the flesh on a number of occasions and I have never forgotten the time when I was sitting with him after lunch in a restaurant in Hungary's Tokay Hills and he called for paper napkins. He then began to fold them into little hats to demonstrate the contours of the wine-producing region while he explained just why Tokay was so special.

Johnson modestly refused to label his book a 'history' and maybe he was right to limit his ambitions to the 'story'. Before him many have stumbled, having drunk too deep of the intoxicating liquor they seek to describe. The result I might call 'seeing through a glass darkly'. Johnson's wine history is still 'Whig history' for all that: wine is a process of trial and error that inevitably results in something that will bring us pleasure.

The real history of wine is quite different and it can be a dry – even bitter – beverage, only occasionally enlivened by references to the sort of pleasures that might echo our own experiences. Johnson refers to Algeria a few times in his book, but it is not much more than a footnote to his story. He says Algeria's one-time success was brought about by the fact it had not suffered from the wine blights oidium and phylloxera that made production in Europe so spasmodic in the second half of the 19th century.

In *The Blood of the Colony*, Owen White swiftly debunks all this: Algeria suffered both scourges and it had more besides in the form of jackals and locusts. The blights hit different regions at different times, but most of the time there was wine to be procured.

Algeria became a French colony from 1830 and eventually a 'department' of the nation, something that rendered its wine production difficult to regulate and led to violent rivalries with producers in Languedoc-Roussillon. Algeria had been virtually a *tabula rasa* when it came to wine and there were none of the impediments caused by feudal or ecclesiastical property ownership. France helped itself to land.

Algerian wine was a powerful brew that tilted at the French proletariat, which, since the construction of the railways, had been supplied by the vineyards planted on the littoral of the French Midi. Algeria could do it better and cheaper. The technology it evolved was the envy of the vinicultural world. Visiting the Portuguese Ribatejo 20 years ago I saw equipment acquired from Algeria in 1935 that was still the pride of the massive Companhia das Lezirias. Most of the production was consumed at home in France but

LE VIN ESSENCE DE JOIE & DE SANTÉ

BUVEZ LES
GRANDS VINS
D'ALGÉRIE

SEG
12° & 13°

ROUGES
ROSÉS ET
BLANCS 12° & 13°

F. SÉNÉCLAUZE
ORAN   St EUGÈNE

Cheers!: advertisement for wine grower F. Sénéclauze, 20th century.

'The real history of wine can be a dry and even bitter beverage, only occasionally enlivened by references to the sort of pleasures that might echo our own experiences'

Algerian wines were popular in Britain too: 'M' in the James Bond novels is partial to a glass of the 'Infuriator', which turns out to be Algerian wine.

Before independence in 1962, Algeria was the world's fourth largest wine producer. There were as many as 400,000 hectares, or a million acres, of vines. Europeans made up at most 15 per cent of the Algerian population and could hardly be expected to make a dent in that ocean of wine. Most Muslims spurned it. At its height a quarter of all wine made in France came from Algeria. It might be compared to New Zealand today, which vastly overproduces what has become a successful export commodity.

After 1962, the white colonists or 'pieds noirs' who had made their fortunes from Algerian wine returned to France. The richer ones bought estates in Bordeaux and Burgundy but most of them settled in the south of France and in Corsica and live there still. The older generation still speaks Arabic, a language they use to communicate with vineyard workers who are often the descendants of Muslim 'Harkis' who also had their origins in Algeria but who took the French side in the war of independence. They have altered the face of the region with their couscous, *méchoui* barbecues and their *merguez* sausages and in most cases they have also hugely improved the quality of the local wine.

Giles MacDonogh has written extensively on French gastronomy and wine.

Our Before and After

The pandemic has created a dividing line for our time, like many others in the past. *Eleanor Parker*

Eleanor Parker is Lecturer in Medieval English Literature at Brasenose College, Oxford and writes a blog at aclerkofoxford. blogspot.co.uk.

This past year has introduced many of us to new ways of measuring time. The cancellation of so many events means it has become difficult to mark time in the usual ways, as weekends and work-days, school terms and holidays have merged into each other. In place of our usual markers, though, a novel, shared vocabulary of time marking has developed: we now know exactly what it means to say something happened 'during the first lockdown', a phrase which would have been meaningless a year ago.

At the moment, the pandemic has divided personal and societal measurements of time into a clear 'before' and 'after'. In the future we will probably speak, as we do now, of 'pre-Covid' or 'post-pandemic' life. It will be for later historians to decide whether those phrases persist in the long term – whether they come to mark such epochal time divisions as, for instance, 'prewar' and 'postwar' do in modern British discourse.

For me, an enjoyable aspect of studying history is thinking about how past societies have found different ways of measuring time, both on a day-to-day basis and over the course of centuries. To read many medieval European calendars and chronicles, you need to learn new languages of time marking – an unfamiliar vocabulary of kalends and ides, a code second nature to historians in the Middle Ages but one that is now tricky for the uninitiated. In addition to these, there's an almost infinite variety of other kinds of calendar to learn – lunar and seasonal calendars distinctive to particular places and cultures, which intersect with each other in fascinating ways.

Then there is the language of festivals and the liturgical year, which many pre-modern writers assume that the reader will understand: Lammas and Michaelmas, Whitsun and Lady Day. Well into the 20th century, these were not archaic or rarefied terms but everyday vocabulary in Britain, a shared language that has dwindled away only in the past few decades. This is the result of the decline of a common Christian culture, but also of ever-diminishing awareness of the agricultural year: I am often struck by how readily pre-modern writers expect everybody to know what it means to say something happened 'in harvest', while today many would struggle even to guess what month this might refer to. This too is a new language to be learned, appealing in its novelty.

These different ways of thinking about time also apply to larger questions of periodisation and epoch-defining events. The turning points which we, with hindsight, use to define the bounds of historical time may not always have been perceived as such by people living through them. Perhaps I am entirely wrong to imagine terms like 'pre-Covid' will have any lasting meaning for future historians; within a few years something else may happen

Time of plenty: harvesting, ploughing and sowing, from a book of hours, Flemish, c.1540.

which becomes a more significant epochal event. The most difficult times for historians to label are our own times, those we know best yet understand least.

We are living through 'strange times', as people keep saying – 'unprecedented times'. In many ways that is true. But one way in which our times are not without precedent is in that unsettling feeling of strangeness and novelty. For that, there are many precedents: people throughout history have thought their own times unusual and difficult to understand, and have felt they were living through times of change.

I have recently been working on the life of a medieval historian who lived through what he thought of as unprecedented times. He begins one of his works by saying: 'We have seen many strange changes in England in our days, developments quite unknown in former times.' Many of us

have recently said something similar, but for him, those strange modern times were the years after the Norman Conquest. The Norman Conquest is one of the most familiar epochal events in British history; medievalists often speak of 'pre-conquest' and 'post-conquest' England. But to those living through it, this dividing line was not always so clear. For this historian, his times of change began not with the conquest but in the late tenth century, with the death of King Edgar; not one of the most famous Anglo-Saxon kings today, but epoch-defining in the eyes of some medieval historians.

Conscious of living through history, this historian says he wrote about his own days 'lest the knowledge of them should be lost to future generations'. We do the same, though we can only guess how future historians might label or explain our own strange times.

GLOSSARY

Charlotte Temple *p.52*
Novel of 1791 by Susanna Rowson. A 'tale of truth', written 'for the perusal of the young and thoughtless of the fair sex'. A prominent example of the 'seduction novel' genre, it concludes with the unverified claim that 'vice, however prosperous in the beginning, in the end leads only to misery and shame'.

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) conflict *p.9*
A 20-year violent dispute (1977-97) between the government of Bangladesh and the United People's Party of the CHT, beginning after the Constitution of Bangladesh defined all Bangladeshis as Bengali. The 1997 peace treaty recognised the ethnicity of the indigenous CHT people, who reside in Bangladesh's only hilly area.

Dmitri Mendeleev's predictions *p.27*
Mendeleev predicted the existence of: eka-boron, eka-aluminium, eka-silicon, and eka-manganese. *Eka* is the Sanskrit for 'one'. His predictions were proven correct with the discoveries of scandium (1879), gallium (1875), technetium (1937) and germanium (1886).

Electric cars *p.90*
Elon Musk's less wealthy forebears include: Gustave Trouvé (1839-1902), whose personal electric vehicle was presented at the International Electric Congress in Paris in 1881 and Andreas Flocken (1845-1913), whose 'Flocken Elektrowagen' was manufactured in Coburg in 1888, among others.

Fuller's earth *p.33*
Also known as 'bleaching' or 'whitening' clay, any naturally occurring substance capable of absorbing colours and impurities from oil and grease. The erstwhile practice of 'fulling' – cleansing wool – has bequeathed the phrase 'on tenterhooks' from the giant 'tenter' frames on which cloth was stretched.

'Napoleon and Queen Louise'

Functionalism–Intentionalism debate *p.101*
Concerns the origins of the Holocaust. 'Functionalists' (or 'structuralists') argue that it was not a directive from Nazi leadership, but was initiated by low-level state bureaucracy. 'Intentionalists' (or 'programmists') argue that Hitler planned the Holocaust, though when is disputed.

Geraldine Farrar *p.49*
1882-1967. So popular was the American soprano and silent film star that she inspired a group known as the 'Gerry-flappers', described by the *New York Times* as 'ardent a group of worshippers as ever paid tribute to their idol'.

Harvest *p.106*
From the Old English *hærfest*, meaning 'autumn'. 'It is not always granted to the sower to see the harvest' – Albert Schweitzer.

Napoleon's meeting with Queen Louise *p.112*
Part of the 1807 Peace of Tilsit negotiations. A pregnant Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz was beseeched to flatter Napoleon into offering Prussia a better settlement. It did not work. Napoleon wrote to Josephine that, though Louise had been 'full of coquettishness toward me', there was 'no need to be jealous'.

ON THE SPOT KATJA HOYER

We ask 20 questions of leading historians on why their research matters, one book everyone should read and their views on Edward Gibbon …

Katja Hoyer is the author of *Blood and Iron: the Rise and Fall of the German Empire 1871-1918* (The History Press, 2021).

Why are you a historian of Germany?
I am a confused German trying to make sense of my country's past and its place in Europe and the world.

What's the most important lesson history has taught you?
Human nature always remains the same.

Which history book has had greatest influence on you?
Ian Kershaw's biography of Adolf Hitler.

What book in your field should everyone read?
Neil McGregor's *Germany: Memories of a Nation*.

Which moment would you most like to go back to?
Napoleon's conversation with Queen Louise of Prussia at Tilsit.

Which historian has had the greatest influence on you?
Hans-Ulrich Wehler.

Which person in history would you most like to have met?
'Which person' is easy: Otto von Bismarck. The question is: 'when'?

How many languages do you have?
My native is German, but I write my shopping lists in English. I have a working knowledge of Russian and Latin. My French needs improvement.

What historical topic have you changed your mind on?
I used to think of the past as a serious and grand place where big things happened. Then I read this on an ancient wall: 'Chie, I hope your haemorrhoids rub together so much that they hurt worse than they ever have before!'

Which genre of history do you like least?
History that points the finger.

What's the most exciting field in history today?
Intellectual history. The study of the impact of ideas bears the tantalising thought that we might have some agency over the course of history.

Is there an important historical text you have not read? *Das Kapital*.

What's your favourite archive? The Bundesarchiv.

What's the best museum?
The Pergamon Museum.

Normans or Anglo-Saxons?
Normans – nothing beats those horses on the Bayeaux Tapestry.

Rome or Athens?
Rome – then, now and all times in between.

Braudel or Gibbon? Gibbon.

Michelangelo or Frida Kahlo?
Michelangelo.

What is the most common misconception about your field?
That Prussia was evil.

What will future generations judge us most harshly for?
Everything – what we do, say, eat, wear and think. Every generation thinks it knows better than the last.