Von der Leyen's challenges

Ursula von der Leyen arrives in office with Europe in a state of disarray - will the new Commission President be up to the challenge?

Walter Ellis p.3

The eerie growth in ECB power

The increasingly assertive decisions of Europe's central bankers are a threat to democracy - decisions on monetary policy should be returned to EU member states.

Bernd Lucke MEP p.8

Responding to populism

Advocates for small government should begin by recognising the limits of their popularity, but they can achieve a great deal as part of a broader conservative alliance.

Daniel Hannan MEP p.13

David Cameron chillaxing

Britain's former Prime Minister is a man scarred by defeat in the Brexit referendum, but in his new memoir he is far too hard on himself about the consequences.

Iain Martin p.14

Venice is no city in decline

Venice is strained - groaning under the weight of tourism and vulnerable to rising tides. But there's a case for optimism over the city's future.

Finn McRedmond p.21

OLD-SCHOOL JOURNALISM - REPORTING YOU CAN TRUST

Issue #10 | October 2019

THE CONSERVATIVE

A fortnightly Newspaper by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party | theconservative.online

BATTLE of Boris

Andrew Gimson, the Tory leader's biographer, on the man and his fight for survival p.4-5

Photo: Xander Heinl - Getty Images

CONTENTS

THE CONSERVATIVE

The Conservative is a fortnightly newspaper available in print and online published and owned by the *ECR Party*, formerly known as *Alliance of the Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE).*

The Conservative can be read online at: **theconservative.online**

MANAGING EDITOR
Richard Milsom

PRODUCTION
Reaction Publishing (**reaction.life**)

DESIGN
VIDEOR o.d. (**videor.ba**)

CONTACT
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party
Rue du Trone 4, B-1000, Brussels, Belgium
theconservative.online
info@theconservative.online

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS
Please address submissions and letters to the Managing Editor: **editor@theconservative.online**

Poland's PiS will profit from DIVIDED OPPOSITION

It is difficult to see how challengers to the PiS overturn its majority at Poland's forthcoming general election

by ***Gerald Warner***

Photo: Shutterstock.com

Poland's parliamentary elections will be held on Sunday, 13 October. The stakes are high: for the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) the objective is to confirm its hold on government in order to embed further the socially conservative but fiscally compassionate policies it has pursued since coming to power in 2015; for the left the challenge is to return to a parliament from which it was ousted by the 2015 vote and try to end the PiS ascendancy.

There are 460 seats in the Sejm, the Polish parliament, with 100 seats in the Senate. Members of the Sejm are elected by open party-list proportional representation with seats allocated under the d'Hondt system, with a 5 per cent threshold for individual parties and 8 per cent for coalitions. The Senate is elected on a first-past-the-post constituency system.

At this election the governing PiS is in alliance with several small parties, but they hold little sway in the coalition. In opposition there are four main groupings: Polish Coalition (for Christian democracy, decentralization), The Left, "Lewica" (socialist, progressive), Civic Coalition (liberal) and the Confederation for Freedom and Independence (right-libertarian, nationalist).

It says something about the mountain the Left has to climb that its immediate ambition is to return to the Sejm where it lost all its seats in 2015. In fact it is likely to return, since polls show the new, broader Lewica coalition securing around 14 per cent of the vote. Overall, the latest opinion polls show PiS with a commanding lead of around 20 per cent. In terms of actual votes cast, the nearest guide to voting intentions is provided by the results of the European Parliament elections last June.

Obviously there is a huge health warning attached to any attempt at a read-over of EU election polling to a national general election. However, that risk is slightly diminished by the record turnout in Poland at this year's EU elections of 45.6 per cent, making a comparison with a general election less incongruous. PiS gained its highest ever share of the vote at either a European or national election of 45 per cent (compared with 32 per cent at the previous EU election).

> "The European left has not previously had to contend with the winning combination of social conservatism and social largesse that has become the agenda of the more populist political parties and it has no effective response. Neither do the economically liberal parties whose fiscal agendas exclude significantly expanding social expenditure.

The coalition of opposition parties won 38 per cent of the vote, down from 48 per cent in 2014. Those figures suggest the ruling PiS is maintaining its advantage over opponents; the current opinion polls predict PiS and its allies will gain 48 per cent of the vote. Today electorates have become so volatile that no electoral upset can truly be called surprising anymore, but barring such an outcome PiS looks to be in a favourable situation.

For the opposition the dilemma is that the government's programme is extraordinarily difficult to challenge. One half of its appeal is support for social conservatism and the Catholic Church, nationalism and opposition to immigration. That socially conservative platform is one that the left has traditionally and successfully overcome in many countries by opposing to it a materialist agenda of prodigal welfare and social expenditure.

But that option is not open to the Polish opposition because PiS, as the other half of its programme, has delivered widely-targeted social spending on a scale its opponents cannot credibly outbid. The European left has not previously had to contend with the winning combination of social conservatism and social largesse that has become the agenda of the more populist political parties and it has no effective response. Neither do the economically liberal parties whose fiscal agendas exclude significantly expanding social expenditure.

At the European elections PiS successfully mobilized Poland's socially conservative voters on issues such as rejecting adoption by same-sex couples, defending the position of the Church in society, resisting mass immigration and pledging to delay adoption of the euro currency for an indefinite period. Poland is one of the most pro-EU member states, but its affection for the Union, from which it has derived large economic benefits, does not extend to the single currency, about which voters remain apprehensive.

In personality terms, the PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski is more popular than his most prominent rival, the leader of Civic Platform, Grzegorz Schetyna, who labours under the handicap of being the least trusted politician in the country. The PiS, which is affiliated to the ECR Group in the European Parliament, has some ongoing disputes with EU officials, notably with regard to its reforms of the Polish judiciary.

This issue dates back to the time of General Jaruzelski, the communist strongman in Poland and the most cunning of the old Soviet satraps. Foreseeing the fall of communism, he imposed the notorious Round Table forum on the democratic opposition, one of its legacies being a judiciary manned by Party hacks that remained self-perpetuating in post-communist times.

The Soviet Union has gone, but Russia remains and Poland regards it as a dangerous neighbour. The PiS government is keen to see the American military presence on Polish soil increased. That is a popular security policy. The economy, too, has performed well, with GDP growth of 5.1 per cent last year and unemployment below 4 per cent.

Upcoming general elections is regarded as an especially crucial contest for Poland. If PiS is confirmed in government it will continue to take the country down a novel political path, radically different from that of western EU states but viewed sympathetically in Hungary and the rest of the Visegrad bloc. Its ousting from power would signal a return to socially liberal, secularist and fiscally austere policies.

Although the PiS represents soft euroscepticism it has shown no inclination to break with EU institutions, but it does aspire to assert more control at national level. Whether it will emerge victorious on 13 October to pursue its distinctive course remains to be seen. The opposition's main problem is that it is ideologically at cross-purposes. The current evidence would suggest a return to government by PiS, but predictions can be high risk in the current political climate. ■

Can Ursula von der Leyen save THE EUROPEAN PROJECT?

by ***Walter Ellis***

Ursula von der Leyen, whose five-year term as President of the European Commission begins on November 1, is probably little different than her predecessor, Jean-Claude Juncker. Is she, aged 60, a little bit more interesting than the little Luxemburger? Probably. Juncker began his five-year tenure promising further progress towards a more integrated Europe. He leaves office as the man who got nothing done on immigration and presided, literally, over the chaotic departure of the EU's second-richest state.

The first woman to hold the presidency and the first German since Walter Hallstein more than half a century ago – Von der Leyen takes over with the European Project in a state of disarray.

There are many who wish to see root-and-branch democratic reform, resulting in a more accountable Brussels machine and the restoration to the member states of powers that the Commission has acquired, almost casually, over the years in defiance of the concept of subsidiarity – the idea that power is best reposed where it is closest to those whom it affects. Sovereignty is the issue here, with East versus West (and Italy joined with the East) presenting the most obvious line of battle.

But there are also those, led by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, who, with no hint of irony, use their national leverage to press for movement towards a United States of Europe, with "ministers" in Brussels, a single tax regime, an expanded European budget and at least the beginnings of an EU-wide defence capability.

Where does Von der Leyen stand on all of this? Critics like to say of her that she has risen without trace, citing her ill-starred tenure as German defence minister – during which her country's armed forces continued to rot – as her only significant administrative experience. They will have noted that one of her first moves in charge was to add responsibility for defence and space programmes to the job description of her choice as internal market commissioner, Sylvie Goulard, a former French defence minister, nominated by Macron.

Does this mean that Von der Leyen sees herself as the Joan the Baptist of a European Army? Quite possibly. She certainly said as much in the run-up to her appointment. But if precedent is anything to go by, no such Army will be ready to present arms much before 2050, if then.

In the meantime, much else has to be resolved. There is Brexit, of course. Aware that the intended departure of the UK from EU membership will be followed by a long and no doubt painful set of negotiations covering its future relationship with the 27, she has rather shrewdly appointed Phil Hogan, from Ireland, as her trade commissioner. Hogan, previously in charge of agriculture, is not only acutely aware of the importance to his own country of a viable long-term deal with the British, he is also something of a table-thumper, ready, we are told, to push hard against Donald Trump if the American President's ongoing tariff war with China continues to pose a threat to European economic stability.


Photo: Shutterstock.com

Just as pressing, there is the never-ending Italian banking crisis, ongoing uncertainty over the euro, the need to maintain a close relationship with the City of London, as Europe's banker, and the long-standing imbalance in prosperity between North and South and East and West.

> "Having left domestic concerns behind her, the new President will be watching anxiously as her team of commissioners face confirmation hearings in Strasbourg, where the Parliament will be keen to show off its growing strength and centrality to the decision-making process.

Mass immigration bothers everyone, but in particular Italy, Greece, Spain and the Visegrad quartet of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. There seems to be no end in sight. Juncker got nowhere with his proposal that a better policed external border be combined with a general acceptance of the need to absorb those immigrants – many of them Muslims – already here or who turn up in the years ahead. Italy and Greece continue to bear the brunt, with the former in particular feeling abandoned by its partners. Germany feels it did its bit in 2015 when it admitted close to one million immigrants. Like Austria and France, it has since more or less closed its doors, taking in only those who somehow manage to sidestep border security – making asylum and citizenship a prize for enterprise and determination rather than a response to human need.

Hungary favours a very different approach. As far as Budapest is concerned, the way forward is clear. The government doesn't want Muslim minorities moving into its territory and it is resolved to stem the tide with or without help from Brussels. With this in mind, it was striking that when Von der Leyen turned up in Brussels last week to announce her new team, she tasked the Greek Commissioner, Margaritas Schinas, with responsibility not only for migration, integration and cross-border security, but "the protection of our European way of life".

Such an emotive choice of words did not sit easily on the Left, and the likelihood is that a cosmetic change will be introduced to the title. But in the former East Bloc there will be some satisfaction that their concerns for a "Christian" Europe have at least been acknowledged.

Immigration is not the only crisis blowing in from the East. The Visegrad four, and others, have long felt sidelined by Brussels, given the least important Commission jobs and treated by the Western member states as if they were still on probation. To address this legitimate concern, the Polish Commissioner, Janusz Wojciechowski, has been handed the key role of agriculture commissioner, presiding over a budget running into the high billions, while Hungary's László Trócsányi, a former justice minister, known to be close to President Viktor Orbán, is tasked with preparing for further EU enlargement and maintaining good relations with Europe's near-neighbours, including Turkey and Ukraine, as well as Serbia and other non-EU Balkan states.

This is not to say that Brussels – not only the Commission, but the Council and Parliament – does not wish to bring the East Bloc onside on issues such as free speech, the independence of the judiciary and, generally, respect for the EU *acquis*. But unless the divide between East and West becomes clearly unbridgeable, Von der Leyen can be expected to speak loudly while carrying a little stick. Belgium's Didier Reynders, has been asked to devise some means of suspending, or reducing, structural funds running into billions of euros for those member states judged wilfully non-compliant with "the European way of life". Whether such a high-risk approach will be honoured in the breach rather than the observance is an open question.

Leading the charge on the ever-accelerating digital revolution will be Margrethe Vestager, of Denmark, one of the undoubted success stories of the Juncker years, remembered for imposing multi-billion-euro fines on mega corporations – mostly American – she deemed to have engaged in industrial-scale tax avoidance. Vestager, one of two *Spitzenkandaten* Von der Leyen beat for the top job, will add digital affairs to her existing competition portfolio, as well as the shared job title of executive vice president, making her one of the most important officials in the whole of the European Union.

Finally, the green elephant in the room. Von der Leyen has asked the Dutchman Frans Timmermans, another of the defeated *spitzenkandidaten,* also an executive vice president, to draw up the EU's "Green New Deal".

No one doubts that the public throughout Europe, from Lisbon to Tallin, has been aroused from its carbon-induced slumber, and there is hardly a single political party of consequence, on the left or the right, that does not accept the urgency of the challenge. But if the new Commission genuinely embraces a radical approach that starts on Day One and leads to a carbon-neutral environment within the next ten years, expect an indignant response from industry and other interest groups across the continent. Everybody wants a clean world. No everyone is ready as yet to make the sacrifices required.

Those who wonder where in all this there is time and space for democratic reforms are unlikely to receive an answer anytime soon. Von der Leyen was born in Brussels and attended the European School. Her father was a top Commission official, who inculcated into his daughter the belief that a United Europe was not only desirable, but inevitable. If the existing system turns out to work to her advantage as she tries to keep Europe on track within an increasingly aggressive world order, it would be naive to expect much that is genuinely transformative.

Having left domestic concerns behind her, the new President will be watching anxiously as her team of commissioners face confirmation hearings in Strasbourg, where the Parliament will be keen to show off its growing strength and centrality to the decision-making process. Getting her priorities in line so that she ends up with an agenda supported by all, or most, of the member states as well as by a majority of MEPs is likely to be key to the success or failure of her mandate. ■

THE FIGHT of Boris's life

The Tory leader is in trouble. His biographer says don't bet against him finding a way out

by ***Andrew Gimson***

Puritans cannot stand Boris Johnson's performances. To them, the theatre of politics is flippant, sinful and should be closed down. The British Tory leader's love of putting on a show, his desire to bring a smile to our faces and insatiable urge to hold forth from centre stage, are proof, for these austere moralists, not just of a disgusting egotism but of an intolerable frivolity. They purse their lips, and trust this star will soon meet with the rejection he in their view so richly deserves.

Perhaps he will. Anything could happen this autumn. The inescapable duty of any party leader is to take the blame when things go wrong. But it seems to me, having written a biography of him which first appeared in 2006 and which was described by former Labour mayor of London Ken Livingstone as "the scariest thing since *Silence of the Lambs*', that Johnson's puritan critics underestimate his chances of success.

For he is not frivolous. No one in British politics is more determined to succeed. If this were not so, he would long ago have limped away from the field of battle. But when he went on BBC *Desert Island Discs* in 2005, and Sue Lawley reminded him of his ex-mother-in-law's observation, "Boris is very ambitious and always said he wanted to be Prime Minister," he replied, after beating about the bush for a moment or two: "I suppose all politicians in the end are like kind of crazed wasps in a jam jar, each individually convinced that they're going to make it."

That describes him. He is crazily competitive, and convinced he is going to make it. But his way of going about this is rather unusual. Most of those who pursue a political career seek to rise by pleasing the powers that be within the party hierarchy. Johnson's instinct is to play to the widest possible audience, and to do so by mocking the hierarchy. The obvious comparison is with David Cameron. At Eton and Oxford, Johnson became a famous figure by playing to the gallery. He developed his brilliant ability as a comic speaker, and realised that forgetting, or seeming to forget, his lines could be much funnier than giving an immaculate performance.

Cameron, who attended the same establishments, made no attempt to become famous, and after Oxford went off to work for the Conservative Research Department, where he won golden opinions from senior ministers, while remaining unknown to the wider public. Johnson after Oxford entered journalism, where he soon infuriated the editor of the *Times* by making up a quote and airily suggesting all the quotes in the paper were made up, and then – having been sacked from that paper and made a second start on the *Daily Telegraph* – infuriated the powers that be in Brussels by mocking their pretensions, often in stories neither they nor his rival correspondents regarded as accurate.

> His ability to enrage and disgust his opponents is in the eyes of many British voters a reason to rally to Johnson's side. They like his irreverence, his willingness to break the rules, his fearlessness in the face of adversity.

Photo: Bloomberg - Getty Images

On returning to London, Johnson proceeded to make an even wider reputation by his amusingly chaotic performances on the BBC satirical show *Have I Got News For You*, a programme avoided by conventional careerists, for it was subversive and flippant, and made a point of ridiculing those politicians who dared to appear on it, at least on their first appearance. To his fury, Johnson himself was stitched up on his first appearance. But he recovered from this setback, made it up with the presenters and became one of their most valued guests. When asked why he appeared on such a light-weight programme, he said the real shocker was "not that people are so foolish as to appear on TV, but that people are so idle as to watch it" – an answer which indicated his underlying seriousness.

Both Johnson and Cameron entered the Commons in 2001, but while Johnson ignored prudent advice and took the risky course of also continuing full-blast with his journalism – he was by now editor of the *Spectator* – Cameron positioned himself as a careful, cautious, reliable insider, quick to see the attractions of modernisation in all its most modish forms, ready to promote whatever the Establishment regarded as sensible. Towards the end of 2004, Johnson came a cropper, first when the *Spectator* published a leading article attacking the people of Liverpool, and then when he wrongly dismissed the allegation that he was having an affair as "an inverted pyramid of piffle", which gave the tabloid press the chance to prove him a liar. These blunders meant he was in no position, the following year, to enter the Tory leadership race when Michael Howard stood down after losing the 2005 general election. The relatively unknown but far more dependable Cameron came through and won.

Johnson found himself kept at a distance by the new Tory leader, for the last thing Cameron wanted was a loose cannon Old Etonian stealing his thunder. At this juncture, Johnson could have decided to leave politics and concentrate on his ever more lucrative media career. He instead ran against Livingstone for Mayor of London, a role which no other Conservative anyone had heard of was prepared to take on, and he won. For here was a popularity contest in which Johnson's ability to connect with the wider public, and refusal to kow-tow to his party leadership, were just what were needed.

The same qualities were in evidence when he led the Leave campaign to victory in the UK's 2016 referendum. Remainers denounced Johnson as an opportunist for doing this. After all, had he not written two articles, one for leaving and one for remaining, while he made his mind up?

In my opinion, it was intelligent of Johnson to admit that there were arguments for both courses of action. It was also in accordance with his past practice that he declined the honour of becoming a loyal cog in the Cameron-Osborne machine, and instead chose the riskier but more enjoyable choice of defying the Brussels establishment and pretty much the entire British establishment.

During the referendum campaign, Cameron prevailed on Barack Obama to come to London and advise Britons to vote to stay in the European Union. Johnson assailed the American leader. As so often, the details of Johnson's attack were neither accurate nor tasteful, but the general point – that it was outrageous of the President to come over here and ask Britons to go on tolerating sacrifices of national sovereignty which the United States would never dream of accepting – was entirely justified. As a result of this episode, the polls moved a few percentage points in Leave's favour. Johnson's feeling for how things would play outside Westminster, and ability to articulate anti-establishment views, had helped him lead his side to an unexpected victory over Cameron.

These qualities did not help him to win the resulting Tory leadership battle in 2016. Before he had time to create an efficient leadership campaign, his ally, Michael Gove, suffered a public loss of faith in him, and ran against him.

This year, things were different. Johnson had realised he needed an efficient campaign, and had one ready to go when Theresa May threw in the towel. More importantly, she had discredited the belief that Brexit could be done in a slow, cautious, tactful way, and had created an appetite for more adventurous leadership and Boris's high risk strategy.

H.H. Asquith, Prime Minister from 1908-16, wrote in 1926: "The office of the Prime Minister is what its holder chooses and is able to make of it." Johnson set out to prove the truth of this. He wanted to be a Prime Minister who at least during the critical phase of Brexit meets the voters with astonishing frequency. As a journalist, he was astonishingly productive, and hoped to achieve by rate of fire what he was unlikely to achieve by immaculate craftsmanship.

The same applies to his encounters with the public since he won the leadership. These are too numerous, and in some cases spontaneous, to be immaculately choreographed, but the rate of fire is astonishing, and the imperfection of some of his performances – the empty podium at the press conference with the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, the angry father in the NHS hospital – made them more newsworthy.

We do not yet know what effect this electioneering before a UK general election, expected this autumn, has been called will have. His critics refuse to engage in the willing suspension of disbelief which is required if a piece of political theatre is to be a complete success. Many of them think this sort of clowning is unworthy of an illustrious democracy, and are in no way mollified by his pre-emptive readiness to mock himself.

But his ability to enrage and disgust the puritans is in the eyes of many British voters a reason to rally to Johnson's side. They like his irreverence, his willingness to break the rules, his fearlessness in the face of adversity.

While writing this piece, I consulted a shire Tory whom I have long found to have an acute feel for wider public opinion. She said she thought Johnson would get credit for possessing more "gumption" than either Jeremy Corbyn or Liberal Democrat Jo Swinson. Despite the setbacks, the Tory leader looks a bolder and more energetic figure than either of them, performs in front of the cameras more frequently and entertainingly than they do, and unlike them is committed to fulfilling the referendum result by driving through Brexit. Behind the flummery, he is trying to get something done which needs doing. His grasp of the big picture is correct. In the eyes of the public, Johnson could yet come to be seen as the serious figure, Corbyn and Swinson as lightweights.

It is possible, of course, to accept that Johnson is a considerable performer, while also maintaining he is intolerably vulgar. According to this line of thought, he belongs in a pantomime rather than in power. And it is certainly true that much of what he does is not in the best possible taste, and he is cavalier with the details.

But this will not necessarily work against him in the end, as long as his overall strategy is sound. Because his aim of leaving the European Union on 31st October, deal or no deal, commands widespread approval, so do measures designed to help achieve this. Attempts to derail his plan by picking holes in the detail may well produce a reaction in his favour. So may Corbyn's evasions.

A young Remainer told me as I wrote this article that she preferred Johnson when he was a buffoon who told jokes. Now that he has become the person dedicated to getting Brexit done on 31st October she cannot stand him. But this too is a kind of tribute to his seriousness of purpose. His enemies fear he means what he says, and are right to do so. Johnson looks at ease on becoming Tory leader. The post of captain suits him better than any subsidiary role in the team. He shares with Benjamin Disraeli an ability to drive Gladstonian prigs to distraction, and hence to make them look mad. Here is an outsider who recognises, as Disraeli wrote in one of his most obscure novels, *The Rise of Iskander*, that "Success is the child of Audacity".

For that quotation I am indebted to a slim volume, *The Sayings of Disraeli*, edited by Robert Blake and soon to be republished by Duckworth with a foreword by Alistair Lexden. Disraeli got the Second Reform Bill, which gave many working men the right to vote, through Parliament in 1867 by behaving with impudent freedom and resourcefulness, or as Lexden puts it, "by brilliant manoeuvres which won him the temporary support of first one opposition group, and then another". It is by no means impossible that Johnson will do something similar with Brexit. Tory Democracy is in the hands of a new adventurer, who confounds his opponents by what strikes them as his sheer unscrupulousness, and by his mysterious ability to enlist working-class support. ■

Andrew Gimson is contributing editor at Conservative Home, and author of Boris: The Making of a Prime Minister *(Simon & Schuster, £10.99), and of* Gimson's Prime Ministers: Brief Lives from Walpole to Johnson *(Square Peg, £10.99)*

The sayings of BORIS

ON BEING TORY
I'm a one-nation Tory.

ON VOTING CONSERVATIVE
Voting Tory will cause your wife to have bigger breasts and increase your chances of owning a BMW M3.

ON WINNING THE LONDON MAYORAL RACE
Never in my life did I think I would be congratulated by Mick Jagger for achieving anything.

ON UKIP
I can hardly condemn UKIP as a bunch of boss-eyed, foam-flecked Euro hysterics, when I have been sometimes not far short of boss-eyed, foam-flecked hysteria myself.

ON NIGEL FARAGE
He's a rather engaging geezer.

ON SEX
I've slept with far fewer than 1,000.

ON CANNABIS
It was jolly nice. But apparently it is very different these days. Much stronger. I've become very illiberal about it. I don't want my kids to take drugs.

ON BEING OVERWEIGHT
Face it: it's all your own fat fault.

ON EXAMS
Exams work because they're scary.

AFTER BEING SACKED AS SHADOW ARTS MINISTER
Nothing excites compassion, in friend and foe alike, as much as the sight of you ker-splonked on the Tarmac with your propeller buried six feet under.

ON THE EU
First they make us pay in our taxes for Greek olive groves, many of which probably don't exist. Then they say we can't dip our bread in olive oil in restaurants. We didn't join the Common Market – betraying the New Zealanders and their butter – in order to be told when, where and how we must eat the olive oil we have been forced to subsidise.

ON THE CITY OF PORTSMOUTH
Too full of drugs, obesity, underachievement and Labour MPs.

ON INEQUALITY
No one can ignore the harshness of that competition, or the inequality that it inevitably accentuates; and I am afraid that violent economic centrifuge is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth.

ON TONY BLAIR
It is just flipping unbelievable. He is a mixture of Harry Houdini and a greased piglet. He is barely human in his elusiveness. Nailing Blair is like trying to pin jelly to a wall.

ON HILLARY CLINTON
She's got dyed blonde hair and pouty lips, and a steely blue stare, like a sadistic nurse in a mental hospital.

ON CHINA
Chinese cultural influence is virtually nil, and unlikely to increase...

ON TURKISH PRESIDENT TAYYIP ERDOGAN
There was a young fellow from Ankara
Who was a terrific wankerer.
Till he sowed his wild oats
With the help of a goat
But he didn't even stop to thankera.


Photo: Pool - Getty Images

> Boris is crazily competitive, and convinced he is going to make it. But his way of going about this is rather unusual. Johnson's instinct is to play to the widest possible audience, and to do so by mocking the hierarchy.

Nazism and Communism have no place in Europe

MEPs unite behind the ECR's condemnation of totalitarian regimes

A resolution paying tribute to the victims of communism, Nazism and other totalitarian and authoritarian regimes brought by the ERC was adopted on the 20th September by an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament. In particular, the text indicated that the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols, officially known as the Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, led to the outbreak of the Second World War. Furthermore, it proved the basis for the division of Europe along totalitarian lines and for the territories of hitherto independent states to be split between the influence of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The move would foster a "common culture of remembrance", MEPs said.

Lawmakers stressed that the Kremlin's promotion of the fantasy that Poland, the Baltic States and the West were the true instigators of WWII, is a function of its strategy to divide the West by information war. The resolution, supported by 535 votes in favour, with 66 against and 52 abstentions, calls for the 25th May to become the International Day of Heroes of the Fight Against Totalitarianism, the same date as the anniversary of the execution of the Auschwitz hero, Rotamaster Witold Pilecki.

ECR foreign affairs spokesperson, Anna Fotyga MEP said: "On the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, we want to remind people of the tragic consequences of the policies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. I see it as a ray of hope, that the European Parliament, and Europe, is capable of a shared memory. That we are able to describe history according to indisputable facts, draw conclusions, and commemorate all victims of great totalitarianisms and other dictatorships.

"We must also honour those heroes from our part of Europe, who stood against two terrible regimes. That is why we propose May 25th, the anniversary of the execution of such a hero, Rotamaster Witold Pilecki, to be the International Day of Heroes of the Fight against Totalitarianism."

Pilecki (1901-1948) was a Polish cavalry officer, intelligence agent, and resistance leader. He founded the Secret Polish Army, a group of resistance fighters in German-occupied Poland. Imprisoned in Auschwitz for his anti-Nazi activities for over two years, he mounted an audacious escape in 1943 and later took part in the Warsaw uprising in August-October 1944.

When the war came to an end, he continued his dissident activities, organising underground resistance to the Soviet occupation. In 1947, he was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Public Security and was condemned to death at a show trial. His last recorded words were as follows: "I've been trying to live my life so that in the hour of my death I would rather feel joy, than fear."

Summing up the hard work that proceeded the adoption of the final text of the resolution, Fotyga added: "The negotiations on the text were not easy and required a lot of cross-party negotiation and cooperation but I am happy that, finally, we found wide support." ■

Geoffrey Van Orden on Brexit

Both sides want a deal and it's time to get on with it

Photo: European Union 2019 - Source: EP

Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator, needs a "hurry up" call to agree a Brexit deal before the UK leaves on October 31. That was the message from Geoffrey Van Orden, vice-chair of the ECR and leader of the ECR's delegation of UK Conservative MEPS, in his speech to the European Parliament during a key debate on Britain's departure.

Mr Van Orden, 74, thanked both Mr Barnier and Commission President Jean Claude Juncker for their "broadly helpful and positive" remarks at the start of the debate. But he stressed that the UK would be leaving on October 31 and EU capitals should be urging Mr Barnier to "get on with it" to deliver a deal.

Mr Van Orden said: "The British Government wants a deal. Not any old deal, but one that is acceptable to the British Parliament and people. And we need to get it over with quickly. We must leave on 31 October. What would be the point of further delay? Some of you may think that if we drag this out a bit more then there will be a change of regime in Britain, and maybe a change of heart. I believe this is delusion."

He warned that the wrangling between Britain and the EU over the shape of Brexit could permanently sour relations: "What sort of relationship do you want to see with Britain in the future - a positive one, based on friendship and goodwill and mutual interest? Or one based on anger and bitterness and exclusion?"

Mr Van Orden used an interview with Sky News in July to raise concerns over the state of the UK-EU negotiations. He singled out President Emmanuel Macron of France for criticism over his tough stance on Brexit: "It is pure politics, the obstructionism we are seeing from certain countries." He continued: "France, in particular, have been poisonous in terms of negotiations with the United Kingdom."

First elected to the European Parliament in 1999, Mr Van Orden served as the Conservatives' spokesman for Foreign, Defence and Security policy. He was instrumental in the foundation of the ECR group in 2009 and is the Founding President of the ECR's think-tank, New Direction - the Foundation for European Reform.

A reshaped Withdrawal Agreement should retain joint commitments over citizens' rights, Mr Van Orden told MEPs: "The EU needs to adopt a similarly generous approach towards British nationals in the EU as the British government has towards EU citizens in the UK."

The most significant stumbling block in the negotiations remains the Northern Irish backstop, but Mr Van Orden noted: "No one has a greater interest in peace than the people of Northern Ireland and the British government." He criticised EU negotiators for taking a maximalist view on North-South cooperation and the border: "We [the UK] are committed to the Good Friday Agreement. This Agreement, by the way, does not mention the border," he said.

"It is however," he continued, "based on parity of esteem between the two communities, the two traditions, in Northern Ireland. Please do not forget that the majority of people in Northern Ireland are Unionists - they are proud to be both Northern Irish and British and wish to remain so."

He concluded by urging Mr Barnier to "apply some creative thinking" to the negotiations and find a way to facilitate a managed withdrawal for the UK from the European Union: "Let us not lose the opportunity for that 'fresh and exciting partnership' between the European Union and the United Kingdom, to serve all our people well in the years ahead." ■

Photo: European Union 2019 - Source: EP

Anti-FGM campaigners win deserved recognition

ECR Group nominates the Restorers for the Sakharov Prize 2019

Five teenage girls from Kenya who founded an app to help girls affected by Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) have been nominated for the 2019 Sakharov prize on the initiative of ECR MEP Assita Kanko. The European Parliament awards the Sakharov Prize every year to honour exceptional individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Known as The Restorers, a group of five Kenyan students developed the i-Cut app two years ago – it was designed to allow girls and young women who find themselves at risk of genital mutilation to find help. The app gives five clearly defined options: "help", "rescue", "report", "information on FGM" and "donate and feedback". A user can then seek medical or government assistance in the event of an impending genital mutilation. As a result of their hard work, these five students reached the final of the Technovation Challenge in 2017, an initiative to attract more women to the technology sector.

MEP Assita Kanko, 39, said: "These girls have shown a lot of courage to develop this app. Apart from the help that this can offer, it brings FGM's gruesome practice into even more attention. A big compliment to them and I hope the app will be used by threatened girls and women all over the world."

She added: "This app is a very good example of how grassroots initiatives can help girls to take their fate into their own hands, especially in communities where this remains far from evident today."

Ms Kanko suffered female genital mutilation as a young girl in her native Burkina Faso. She has since worked to ban the practice. Kanko moved to the Netherlands in 2001 to study journalism. She was elected as a Member of the European Parliament in 2019 and sits as a member of the New Flemish Alliance party.

According to the World Health Organization, three million young girls worldwide are at risk of FGM every year. Currently, 200 million girls and women have to live with the terrible consequences of genital mutilation. This practice remains widespread in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but thousands of girls are still at risk each year throughout the EU.

More worrying still is that in more and more countries, genital mutilation is now being effectively "medicalized"; with medical care providers being summoned to circumcise girls, a phenomenon which has created the impression that genital mutilation no longer entails health risks, a belief that has been shown to be untrue. ■

TRAINING ACADEMY

The ECR party's inaugural Training Academy in Madeira early this September will be followed up by a second series of training sessions in December to be held in Granada.

This will build on the success of the ECR Party's first event, where political activists, journalists and strategists were invited to engage with conservatives of different backgrounds from Europe, to share ideas and strengthen relationships across borders.

Sessions ranged from the nitty gritty side of politics (how to design a campaign leaflet or how to write a press release) to more complex issues–on how best to organise focus groups and build models for voter identification.

To this end, the ECR Party bought together some of the worlds leading experts on strategic communications, campaigning and fundraising.

Additionally, panel discussions were held on how best to train participants on how to interact with traditional media, as well as how to navigate the changing societal landscape. Extensive discussions took place on how best to harness the influence of technology for political ends.

In addition, the ECR Party organised a range of cultural activities for delegates. The island might be a small archipelago, but it boasts a rich history that belies its size. There are few places in Europe that can match its curious mix of rustic beauty, its abundance of ancient sites and its proud sense of place, a wonderful tonic to the stresses of modernity and industrialised life. ■

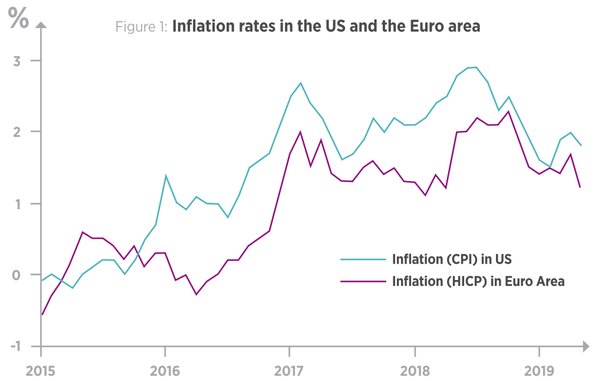
The eerie growth in ECB POWER

The increasingly assertive decisions of Europe's central bankers are a threat to democracy

by ***Bernd Lucke MEP***

> Decisions should be taken democratically in the elected parliament of the member state. In future, however, the ECB will interfere and say what it considers reasonable. And everyone will know that the ECB can cause a lot of trouble by selling off government bonds if it is not listened to.

Figure 1: **Inflation rates in the US and the Euro area**



The cornerstone of democratic societies is democratic control. Few areas of government activity are beyond democratic control and, if so, this typically reflects deliberate decisions. For instance, most countries have opted for central banks which are – at least on paper – independent. In this case, parliaments or governments have no say in the monetary policy decisions of the central bank. It follows that such central banks should adhere strictly to their statutory mandate precisely because they operate without democratic control.

This is, for example, the view of the German Federal Constitutional Court, which has repeatedly emphasized that Article 20 (1) of the German Constitution ("The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and social federal state") requires a narrow interpretation of the mandate of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB). This is because the principle of central bank independence is an exception to the principle of democratic control and the decisions of the ECB therefore lack democratic legitimacy. In particular, the ECB is not empowered to interpret or define the limits of its mandate itself. In shorthand: The ECB does not have the competence to define its competences.

This is quite at odds with the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which, in its recent (December 2018) ruling on the ESCB's Public Sector Purchasing Programme (PSPP) reiterated its view that the ESCB enjoys "broad discretion" in questions of monetary policy. As a consequence, the ECJ does not object to the fact that the Eurosystem now holds government bonds from Eurozone countries worth about 2.1 trillion euros. This is almost a quarter of the Eurozone's total national debt. The system of European Central Banks is by far the greatest creditor of Eurozone governments.

The ESCB has officially justified its bond purchases with an inflation rate that is too low – far lower than the target of close to but below two percent. This monetary policy goal is legitimate, however the justification for the large-scale purchases of government bonds is unconvincing. For instance, let us compare the development of inflation rates in the US and in the Eurozone, cf. Figure 1. In March 2015, when the PSPP began, inflation rates in the US and in the Eurozone were almost identical and close to zero. In the following four years, the ESCB bought 2.1 trillion euros of government bonds, while the Federal Reserve Bank did just the opposite: It sold off treasury bills.

Despite the widely different monetary policies, inflation rates in both jurisdictions moved almost in parallel, with the US inflation rate being consistently somewhat *higher* than Eurozone inflation. Only in the first year of Eurozone bond purchases did the inflation rates move in opposite directions. But this must have been quite unwelcome news for Draghi and the ESCB board because during this time Eurozone inflation rates *fell* despite massive bond purchases, while US inflation increased despite bond selloffs.

It is therefore hard to argue that the ESCB's bond purchases were a necessary monetary policy intervention. Moreover, the purchase of government bonds violates Article 123 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and oversteps the mandate of the European Central Bank since Article 123 prohibits the direct purchase of government bonds from public authorities of member states.

Since the direct purchase is prohibited, the ESCB took a detour. Through the PSPP, the Eurosystem is not buying government bonds "directly" from the state. Rather, it buys them from big banks and the big banks buy them from the state.

Not even the ECJ wanted to accept tricks which circumvent the Treaties. In an earlier ruling (the so-called OMT ruling of 16.6.2015), the ECJ had laid down that the ESCB must not acquire government bonds through commercial banks, if "in practice" this would have the same effect as a direct acquisition. Banks must not be used as "de facto intermediaries" of the ESCB.

But this is exactly what has happened in the PSPP since 2015. The ESCB bought government bonds worth 2100 billion euros from the private banking system. Clearly, such a huge amount of bonds did not coincidentally lie around without proper purpose in banks' securities portfolios and – not knowing what else to do with it – banks decided to just sell it off when the ECSB launched the PSPP. The truth is that the PSPP specified exactly how many billions of government bonds the ESCB would buy each month and hence, even if the ESCB bought randomly from various banks, each bank could compute with little statistical effort the average monthly volume of government bonds the ESCB was likely to buy from them. As a result, banks bought 2,100 billion euros more government bonds from the state than they themselves needed. And then they sold them on to the ESCB, just like a middleman. They did exactly what the ECJ had found inadmissible.

Surprisingly, in its December 2018 ruling, the ECJ did not object to this practice. The new argument was that no bank had a certitude that a *specific* government bond acquired on the primary market would indeed be purchased by the ESCB. But that is not the point at all. Banks buy large quantities of different government bonds from the state and they do so for different reasons related to trading purposes or regulatory requirements. Banks mostly do not care which concrete bonds they keep and which they resell to the ESCB. What is important to them is the volume of bonds they need for their own purposes and the volume they can sell (profitably) to the ESCB. They increase their bond demand exactly by the latter amount.

Like all courts, the ECJ is – for good reasons – itself an independent institution beyond democratic control. In its rulings the ECJ is therefore bound to refrain from any kind of arbitrariness in its judgements. In particular, the ECJ is not empowered to interpret and develop EU law in such a way that it legitimizes whatever action the ECB considers appropriate in a specific situation. Rather – and precisely because the ECB is not subject to democratic control - the ECJ is charged with scrutinizing the policy measures of the ECB and to square them with the pre-defined limits of its mandate rather than revise these standards ex post in an apologetic manner.

In its December 2018 preliminary ruling the ECJ has done just this. But a recent study by the renowned German professor of constitutional law, Professor Hans-Deltlev Horn, now concludes that this is incompatible with Articles 20 and 79 of the German Constitution. These articles protect the identity of the Federal Republic of Germany as a democratic state. A ruling by the ECJ which legitimizes the ECB's monetary (and economic) policy decisions in violation of Article 123 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union would itself lack democratic legitimacy because no sovereign power has been transferred to the ECJ which would allow the Court to tolerate the ECB overstretching its mandate to the extent of an outright breach of the Treaties.

The study calls on the German Federal Constitutional Court (GFCC) to correct this lax attitude of the ECJ in its upcoming ruling. This would be an act of revolt by the GFCC against the hierarchically superior ECJ and it may be that the GFCC will eventually back out - it has done so already on previous occasions. But this time may be different. It may be different because what is at stake is probably the greatest transfer of power to an institution beyond democratic control in recent history.

If the GFCC does not object to the ECJ preliminary ruling, it would be legal for the ECB to be by far the largest creditor of all euro states for decades to come. Bear in mind that the ESCB has shown no intention so far to gradually sell off the stock of government bonds. Quite the contrary: the ECB board has decided to reinvest the proceeds from maturing government bonds and thus to perpetuate its role as the super large creditor of Eurozone countries.

Large creditors have enormous influence over their debtors. If the ECB were to sell a country's government bonds on a large scale, private investors would do the same because there is usually no point in speculating against the actions of a central bank. Such a general wave of sales would deprive the state concerned of practically any financing possibility on the capital market and possibly drive it into sovereign default.

Would the ECB go that far? This is not clear, but smaller steps in this direction may be painful enough. The ECJ itself addressed this problem with refreshing naivety in its ruling. Naïve, because the ECJ apparently sees no problem at all in the Eurosystem having "the option of selling purchased bonds at any time, which enables it to adapt its programme according to the attitudes of the member states concerned".

Read this a second time: According to the ECJ, whether the ECSB holds or sells the bonds of a particular member state shall depend on the "attitudes of the member state concerned". This is to say that member states which behave well (in the eyes of the ECB) will enjoy the goodwill of the ECB. member states whose democratically elected parliaments wish to adopt fiscal policies which do not find the approval of the ECB must expect the ECB to use its influence to prevent these decisions.

This influence was already apparent during the euro crisis. The ECB was part of the troika and as such it imposed conditions on the crisis states as to which reforms they had to implement. Pension cuts, for example, were imposed by the ECB (together with the EU and the IMF). But by what right does a democratically uncontrolled institution whose task is to maintain price stability decide on pension cuts in Greece?

The future could now look like this: a highly indebted state wants to invest billions in infrastructure in order to become more competitive. Or it wants to invest massively in schools and universities in order to get a better qualified workforce. Or it wants to increase social benefits because it believes that the economy will pick up as a result of increased purchasing power. Suppose these measures are to be financed by increases in government debt.

True, the usefulness and economic prospects of these measures may be controversial, but ultimately these are political and economic differences of opinion. Decisions should be taken democratically in the elected parliament of the member state. In future, however, the ECB will interfere and say what it considers reasonable. And everyone will know that the ECB can cause a lot of trouble by selling off government bonds if it is not listened to.

The Treaties prohibit the monetary financing of member states by national governments. One concern is that this would give rise to inflation, which is essentially a tax on money holdings without any democratic legitimacy. In times of low inflation, this may not be the primary concern, though. Currently, a much greater concern should be the fact that monetary financing by the central bank makes all Eurozone governments dependent on a single institution, the European Central Bank. This dependence is undemocratic since the ECB is beyond democratic control. If in a democratic society all state authority shall be derived from the people, the financing of the state must also come from the people. We can only hope that the German Federal Constitutional Court is aware of this fact. ■

Trump in poll position for 2020

President Trump has a tight grip on the Republican machine ahead of next year's US election, and his Democrat rivals have yet to come up with a convincing challenger

by ***Gerald Malone***

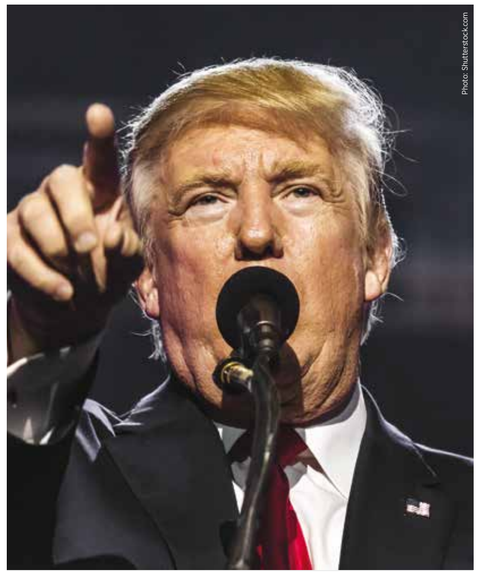


Photo: Shutterstock.com

The boiler house of Republican gossip is the downstairs restaurant of Washington's Capitol Club – the national social club for Republicans, 300 First Street, in the shadow of the Capitol. It has been since 1950.

It has an unassuming, elegant, green canopied entrance and glows with burnished wood. The restaurant, in which legislators have been known to book three lunch tables to hop among meetings with lobbyists, journalists and more lobbyists, is a buzzing hub of power. Pork is being barrelled before you, budget lines are being written, Congressmen tossed morsels to keep their constituents happy.

Nowhere is there talk of the big news in the liberal leaning New York Times – that President Trump is being threatened by three Republican upstarts in the primaries. Democrats hang on to these three challengers like life belts, as their own primary process becomes ever more mired in infighting and inconclusive debates, no breakthrough candidate emerging.

President Trump, with his Twitter laser, has dubbed the three Republican challengers as "The Three Stooges". They are, Mark Sanford, the former Governor of South Carolina, Joe Walsh, the former Tea Party supporting Congressman from Illinois, and William F Weld, the former Governor of Massachusetts.

They make a bizarre trio. Mark Sanford was censured and almost forced out of office when, while Governor of South Carolina, he went AWOL for six days. His staff claimed he was on a hiking tour on the Appalachian Trail, but he was really with his Argentinian mistress, Maria Belén Chapur, in Buenos Aires.

He is entering the Primary race because the President has not eliminated the budget deficit. No one else in the country, Republican or Democrat, seems to give a tinker's cuss about that.

Joe Walsh, once a Trump supporter, is on a self-proclaimed moral mission. He says: "Donald Trump is not fit to run the country". As a candidate in 2016 Trump was the best known quantity – morally and intellectually – to stand for election, probably in the last 100 years, so this is a bit rich.

William F Weld is hoping to appeal to moderate voters in New Hampshire and take it from there. After resigning as Governor of Massachusetts in 1997 Mr Weld was appointed Ambassador to Mexico – by President Clinton. He then joined the Libertarian Party to become the running mate of former Governor of New Mexico, Gary Johnson in the 2016 presidential election. He rejoined the Republican Party – to stand against President Trump. He is not touting his record of consistency.

Do the trio present a serious obstacle to Donald Trump's assumed coronation at the Republican's Charlotte convention in August 2020? No. Republican primaries are on the point of being cancelled in Kansas, Arizona, South Carolina and Nevada.

The Republican National Committee, working hand in hand with the Trump re-election campaign, arranged a non debate among all three earlier this month. Sanford took an Appalachian hike and didn't attend. Sensible.

At the 2016 Cleveland Republican convention I asked every National Committee representative I bumped into if they were supporting the Trump election effort. The most emphatic said, tepidly, "perhaps". The explanation was that the coming together of party and election campaign teams could be expected only after the nomination was settled. Truth is, there was residual hope – right until the floor vote – that "something" would result in Trump being trumped. Fat chance.

> The Republican re-election committee has been up and running for months in its quiet Washington DC HQ. They are ready for battle while their opponents struggle to group their forces.

The difference now is that President Trump owns the Republican Party. Sometimes through gritted teeth, but with the President's approval ratings at the grass roots hitting 80%, the party machine knows that any split will devastate their hopes of gaining ground in Congress. The man best placed to give the President a run for his money, Senator Mitt Romney, knows that too and is sitting this one out.

The Republican re-election committee has been up and running for months in its quiet Washington DC HQ. It has been doing boring things. Data mining to shape door to door campaigns in battleground states, shaping social media campaigns, then leveraging those contacts to gather small donations, rather than be in hock to cigar chomping donors. Ninety per cent of donations fall below the $100 level. They are ready for battle while their opponents struggle to group their forces.

Democrats continue to fight like cats in a sack. There were twenty four candidates at one point.

There are four well funded runners left; former Vice President Joe Biden, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and – surprisingly – Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana. The much tipped California Senator, Kamala Harris' campaign seems to have run into the ground.

Cards on the table. The Democrat candidate will be either Elizabeth Warren or Joe Biden. Bernie Sanders is flapping about manically, looking more like Waldorf, one of the grumpy old guys in the Muppets, by the day, and Pete Buttigieg is cutting no ice nationally.

President Trump has Elizabeth Warren and Jo Biden boxed as "Pocahontas" (mocking Senator Warren's attempts to claim American Indian heritage) and "Sleepy Joe" (a bullseye on the former Vice President).

If the Democrats want to win they will pick Joe Biden, sleepy, often forgetful, or whatever. He is best placed to win back middle ground voters that couldn't stand Hillary and voted Trump in 2106. But the party has become so introspective and determined to pander to its far left activists that it will probably plump for the angry librarian from Massachusetts.

One portent. The cheery panhandler I pass on 1st Avenue and 57th Street in the mornings used to sport a sign, "Give me a $, I'm running for President". Now the sign reads, "Give me a $". If even he is out of the race, the Donald has it made. I gave him a $. ■

Downfall of Trudeau exposes the hypocrisy of woke politics

The carefully calibrated image built by Canada's liberal-left Prime Minister was a hollow sham and now he has been found out

by ***Ben Kelly***

After years of carefully cultivating an image, it has emerged recently that the sun does *not*, in-fact, shine out of haloed Justin Trudeau's backside. Ahead of the federal election in Canada, taking place on October 21st, the liberal Boy Wonder's reputation has taken quite the battering. That's why we see so much of that well-practised face he pulls where his famous big blue eyes look like they're about to well up. Boo-hoo.

It's like watching a cute but half-witted puppy get a kicking for burrowing around in the bin bags again, but the exposure of insincerity is a beautiful thing.

I've heard it said that his tarnished reputation is bad for *all* liberals. Spare me. Liberalism is a substantial philosophy with a deep intellectual foundation that inspires a diverse range of ideological interpretations. It's sad that this airheaded frat bro should be perceived as one of its most important global ambassadors. His politics is an ode to superficiality. His liberalism is shallow, typified by his virtue signalling in-your-face wokeness.

Embarrassingly for Trudeau, in September Time Magazine published a photo from a 2001 private high school yearbook which showed the 29-year-old Trudeau, then an English teacher at the school, wearing blackface for an "Arabian Nights" themed party. Yikes.

Hours later a photo of him in blackface from his own high school yearbook went public too. Then, another video of him in blackface was published. To top it off, Trudeau admitted that in high school he sang Harry Belafonte's "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" in blackface for a talent show.

The puppy dog, weepy eyes were deployed for the apology.

The concocted image really began to unravel with his 2018 family trip to India. Never mind his clumsy diplomacy, what sticks in the mind is Trudeau flouncing around dressed like a patronising caricature of an Indian. The cringeworthy photo of him pressing his hands together in mock piety was peak Justin.

His exposure as a husk was inevitable from the moment his successful Liberal Party election campaign in 2013 was noticed around the world. Trudeau posed in Vogue and had interviews with the New York Times. He became a global celebrity and the darling of the liberal left.

When he was sworn in as Canada's prime minister, he stood beside the 15 women and 15 men of his cabinet. A reporter asked him why he felt gender balance was important. Pausing only for a moment, Trudeau replied, "because it's 2015." And a million hands slapped him on the back.

It was a line reported all over the world. For that, he can thank his adviser Gerald Butts. Of course, they'd had it all planned out. Everything about Trudeau's brand was planned and created. In discussions beforehand, Butts had told him, "I think just calling people's attention to the year is all you really need to say."

From then, the woke meme in Canadian politics went into hyperdrive. Trudeau was a daily feature on every Canadian's social media as his stage-managed political career went from strength to strength. But Justin Trudeau the politician and liberal hero is hollow.

On the day he was sworn in with his 50/50 cabinet he also stood by the newly appointed justice minister and attorney general, Jody Wilson-Raybould. This year, Trudeau was accused of bullying Wilson-Raybould into helping SNC-Lavalin, a Quebec-based engineering company, avoid a corruption trial in order to avoid hurting his electoral chances if they relocated.

So here we have the self-declared feminist, champion of transparency, defender of minority rights, throwing his ethical code out the window in pursuit of his political goals.

Four more years of this? Perhaps, but if he somehow is reelected let's not spend those years fawning over a phoney. He bedazzled Canada with clever marketing and celebrity stardust, and now he has been rumbled. ■

LEADER COLUMN

Time for European reform

The installation of a new EU Commission is always a significant event, but the changing of the guard on 1 November this year occurs at a moment of unprecedented tension within the European Union. For the first time, the EU is about to lose a member state, there are continuing concerns regarding the Euro, difficult relations between northern and southern members, confrontation between Brussels and eastern European states and an intractable and divisive immigration crisis.

How will the incoming Commission cope with these challenges? Confidence in the new Commission president Ursula von der Leyen is already tempered by her poor record in handling the German defence portfolio and the slimness of her mandate – elected president by just 383 votes out of 747.

On the other hand, her team is one-third composed of veterans of the Juncker era with valuable experience. It also includes heavyweights such as former Italian premier Paolo Gentiloni, in the Economy portfolio, providing a useful link to the political establishment in Italy, the likeliest fiscal trouble spot.

Another question mark over the new Commission president is how far she has truly resiled from her ultra-federalist ambitions of a few years ago. The integrationist leopard seldom changes its spots. Nor is it reassuring to see failed presidential aspirant Frans Timmermans nominated as Executive Vice-President for a European Green Deal. This socialist will now help implement the new Commission's policy on climate change. Climate change is occurring, but common sense indicates it is far from apocalyptic and politically-motivated hysteria is distorting scientific reality.

Ursula von der Leyen wishes to formulate climate legislation within her first 100 days and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by as much as 55 per cent by 2030. The ECR Group has always regarded sensible and sustainable measures which do not place unnecessary and costly burdens on businesses and member states as the correct response to climate and other issues. It seems questionable that the Commission's climate initiatives will meet those criteria.

The immigration crisis, too, needs to be solved by supporting member states in protecting the EU's external border, increasing returns of failed asylum seekers to their countries of origin, adopting EU-wide measures that have the unanimous backing of member states and working with third countries to deter migrants from making dangerous Mediterranean crossings. Will the new Commission adopt this realistic policy or continue to wave a stick at migrant-excluding member states?

Besides the incoming Commission, there are also concerns with regard to the policies of the outgoing president of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi. At the close of 2018, with some fanfare, the ECB announced the end of its quantitative easing programme which had seen it create more than €2.5 trillion over four years. Now, QE is back. As the last major decision of his term as ECB president, Mario Draghi has pledged to buy €20bn in bonds and other financial assets every month, from November, for "as long as necessary".

This decision was made in the face of opposition from Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Estonia. Its wisdom is greatly open to challenge. Money-printing in the current fiscal context does not appear a sensible or liability-free solution to Eurozone problems. Already, commentators are talking about the "Japanification of Europe", a term with discouraging implications.

Brexit, another concern, is a failure on the part of the EU. Brussels officials are open to the charge of having provoked the UK's departure by refusing to give David Cameron the reasonable concessions he needed to win a referendum. Since then, a misguidedly punitive policy towards the UK, 'pour encourager les autres', has endangered future EU-UK relations. In that context the appointment of Phil Hogan, a former Irish minister and reportedly close ally of Leo Varadkar, as trade commissioner may not augur well for post-Brexit negotiations.

The new Commission has a responsibility to mend fences with many member states and to bring the political nous which is clearly its principal asset to bear on the issues that must be resolved to restore equilibrium to the EU. The future of the European Union depends on the success of that endeavour. ■

European CONSERVATISM needs to reclaim its IDENTITY

Conservatism in Europe has a rich philosophical heritage. If the European Union is to be revitalized and remoulded constructively in a conservative direction, its aspiring regenerators must reacquaint themselves with their history

by ***Gerald Warner***

What is Conservatism? How is it defined? What are its origins, its justifications, its core philosophy? Even for the most committed and articulate conservatives those are not easy questions to answer. Unlike its progressive antitheses, conservatism is not a contrived, synthetically manufactured blueprint for society: rather it is an instinct, an intuitive response to the circumstances of life, guided by the traditions of an evolved culture, polity and civilization. That makes it an elusive idea to categorize.

Conservatives, for the most part, do not greatly dwell on such philosophical questions. There has always been a small minority, though, in each generation, that has been impelled to formulate the conservative ideal and present a coherent intellectual thesis in its defence. In recent decades, some conservative commentators and politicians, by losing sight of the essential tenets of the philosophy they profess to champion, have arguably done their cause more harm than good.

> To restore intellectual integrity to their beliefs and aspirations for society is the urgent task facing European conservatives. After decades of freewheeling it is time to pause and re-examine the roots of conservatism

In many European countries today, individuals and political parties that call themselves "conservative" have embraced a mélange of ideas that are not only incoherent but often contradictory. They have lost sight of authentic conservatism. In practical terms that is partly due to the speed and superficiality of modern communication, with soundbites, headlines and social media comment churned out with little intelligent analysis.

In philosophical terms the problem arises from the schism that has occurred between traditional conservatism and a hybrid neo-liberal construct that interprets conservatism as little more than an umbrella protecting market economics and extravagant individualism. This is not a purely 21st-century phenomenon: in 19th-century Spain the tensions between Traditionalism and Conservatism were a significant factor in politics.

Traditionalism is the original and purer version of the philosophy we call conservatism today. It is embedded in the roots of society: family, faith, community, property rights, locally evolved organs of governance and cultural identity. In refutation of Rousseau's contrived social contract notion of society, Edmund Burke defined society as "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" – a secular equivalent of the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Its marginalization from modern conservatism has left a gaping hole at the centre of an ideology that has lost coherence.

To restore intellectual integrity to their beliefs and aspirations for society is the urgent task facing European conservatives. After decades of freewheeling it is time to pause and re-examine the roots of conservatism – to "go back to basics". Burke's observation "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it" has never been more relevant than for conservatives today.

What will be essayed here is a brief outline of the history of the conservative idea, to be followed in the pages of The Conservative in future editions by a series of articles focusing on individual conservative thinkers and schools of thought across Europe. The object will be to identify the varied strains of conservatism arising from the historical experience of different nations, the divergences of thought and the unifying principles that have created this significant ideological tradition. Finally, in the light of that investigation, some proposals will be advanced for the regeneration and propagation of a contemporary version of conservatism that Europe desperately needs if the continent is to recover from its current crisis of confidence and identity.

When did conservatism originate? Conceivably there were died-in-the-wool intransigents who deplored the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age; but this seems unlikely. When society is primitive and limited in ideas and technology, progressive change is generally beneficial and legitimate. Only when society has attained a certain level of sophistication and complexity may change threaten institutions, customs and interests widely perceived as being of proven worth. That is when the urge to conserve is activated.

Some have plausibly regarded Aristotle as the father of European conservatism. They cite his empirical observation of political reality rather than abstract reasoning (in contrast to Plato), his acknowledgement of the family as the primary unit of society and his preference for an evolved, institutionalized social order directed towards morally good ends. Those are undeniably basic conservative instincts.

At the beginning of the Christian era, while it could be argued that those defending the old pagan classical religious beliefs during the first three centuries of Christianity, including the Roman emperors, were taking a conservative stance, it was also true that the early Church, even in the face of ferocious persecution, never adopted a revolutionary political stance. Despite attempts by "liberation theologians" in the last century to depict Christ as a revolutionary, his admonition "Render unto Caesar" prevailed until, under Constantine, the Church and the Empire embraced.

Thereafter, for more than a millennium and despite the collapse of the Roman Empire and relentless warfare and social dislocation, the Church remained a crucial stabilizing factor in European society. Then, in the 13th century, St Thomas Aquinas in his writings produced what amounted to a codification of proto-conservatism. Although his chief preoccupation was theological, there was an inevitable socio-political sub-text to the philosophy of Thomism.

Aquinas, it has been said, "baptized" Aristotle's ideas. His Natural Law thesis breathed a soul into concepts that would later be called conservative. His rejection of egalitarianism, support for social hierarchy, insistence that freedom was inseparable from inalienable property rights, respect for tradition and wary recognition that change could produce evil consequences as well as good – these were beliefs intrinsic to all future conservative movements.

Those principles were broadly respected for the first millennium and a half of the Christian era. Whatever devastation was inflicted upon Europe by wars, plagues and famines, established traditions continued to command universal assent, even if often breached. The first sundering of this seamless consensus and the first challenge to the established order came with the Reformation. To contemporaries it was a seismic event; yet, in social and political terms, it did not appear revolutionary.

Apart from phenomena such as the radically revolutionary Anabaptists in Munster who were suppressed, the spectacle of Protestant princes in Germany and elsewhere appropriating Church lands to expand their domains and assuming authority over the souls as well as the bodies of their subjects hardly reeked of social revolution. The hierarchic order in Catholic and Protestant states was similar so that, in the secular sphere, life seemed to go on much as before.

That perception was misleading. Once the spiritual consensus had been broken, so that Christianity no longer spoke with a single voice, it was inevitable that a parallel schism would emerge in the political sphere. A religious fault-line ran through Europe, opening the way to dissent of every kind. A divided Christianity bred scepticism and ever more radical speculation, culminating in the 18th century in the so-called Enlightenment.

It is from that moment of extravagant iconoclasm that conservatism, in the modern sense, derives. Present-day conservatives have to ask themselves a serious question: is the fashionable, politically correct narrative of the Enlightenment as Europe's Great Leap Forward either intellectually credible or compatible with conservative principles?

Certainly those conservatives who lived through the Enlightenment experience and its chief consequence, the French Revolution, answered No to both questions. Edmund Burke's denunciation of the *philosophes* and "sophisters" who brought bloodshed and anarchy to Europe was echoed by Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald and the large school of Counter-Enlightenment philosophers who rallied to reassert traditional ideas of society. They were denounced for that as "reactionaries", which was an accurate description since they were reacting to a devastating experience.

> Something has gone wrong with the thought processes of European conservatism. Many of its supporters have so minimalist a concept of it that they interpret it as exclusively an economic preoccupation: to promote markets.

Was that not a reasonable response to revolution? Did they not have a point in condemning charlatans like Jean-Jacques Rousseau who wrote modern Europe's supposedly seminal work on education, while consigning his own children to an orphanage? And while the one unassailable intellect of the period, Adam Smith, was a brilliant economic theorist, might he not have been capable of producing *The Wealth of Nations* independently of the philosophical vapourings emanating from France?

David Hume's empiricism, dubiously interpreted by some as a symptom of conservatism, by legitimizing unfettered scepticism arguably put the human imagination into a straitjacket, excluding the metaphysical and laying the ground for a two-dimensional interpretation of the human condition. The Enlightenment philosophers saw Reason, that is to say their individual brains, as the sole means of understanding human existence. By creating a *tabula rasa* they cut themselves off from the wisdom of the centuries so that post-Enlightenment European thought became a deracinated, wholly subjective archipelago of individual speculation.

Today it is blasphemy to question the intellectual revolution that some conservative thinkers called the Pseudo-Enlightenment. Everything prior to that experience is seen as a dark age. When attempting to discipline recalcitrant member states in the east, Brussels officials cite "Enlightenment values" like sacred scripture.

Why? Why is a movement that was purely speculative and subjective unchallengeable after two and a half centuries of experiencing, from a conservative perspective, its negative consequences? Is it forever to place a firewall between contemporary thought and the past? Surely conservatives have a duty to reappraise a phenomenon that set Europe on a path of continuous radicalization. In the words of an American commentator, John Daniel Davidson: "Maybe the only way forward is to go back and rediscover the things we left behind at the dawn of the Enlightenment."

That is what a scientist does in his laboratory when an experiment has failed: retraces his steps to discover his error. The very narcissism of the term "Enlightenment" invites scepticism. The Enlightenment's first-generation children were the terrorist Jacobins, proto-Nazi in thought and action, including the now acknowledged genocide in the Vendée. Karl Marx could never have confected his dark creed had the Enlightenment not taken place.

It might be that, after a rigorous reappraisal, conservatives would give the Enlightenment a clean bill of health; but that does not relieve them of the responsibility to carry out such a re-evaluation. They also need to ask why, after Marxism has been so comprehensively discredited in the economic and political sphere, it is fast achieving hegemony in the even more crucial cultural arena.

Something has gone wrong with the thought processes of European conservatism. Many of its supporters have so minimalist a concept of it that they interpret it as exclusively an economic preoccupation: to promote markets. Simultaneously and without any apparent sense of contradiction they proclaim themselves 'socially liberal'. Since politics is about the organization of society, to be socially liberal is to be liberal *tout court*.

Conservatives need to find a richer philosophical hinterland than the wasteland of postmodernism. If the European Union is to be revitalized and remoulded constructively in a conservative direction, its aspiring regenerators must rediscover their identity. The first step towards that end is to reacquaint themselves with their history, so a series of articles on conservative thinkers will follow, drawn mostly from mainland Europe, but beginning inevitably with Edmund Burke. ■

EU ready for CLASH WITH BIG TECH over new digital tax

by **Maggie Pagano**

> It's not surprising that the EU's failure to agree on a digital tax led President Emmanuel Macron to introduce a new levy on tech giants like Google and Amazon. Nor was it surprising that the move threatened an all-out trade war between France and the US after President Trump said he would retaliate by raising taxes on French imports like wine.

The new European Commission has yet to be sworn in but the battle lines are already being drawn up for an EU-wide digital tax aimed at Silicon Valley's Big Tech.

Within days of being appointed the new Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Paolo Gentiloni, warned he will go ahead with an EU digital "web tax" targeting the world's tech giants if global negotiations between the OECD and the G20 fail to come up with a new proposal.

In no uncertain terms, Gentiloni declared that the EU is no longer "prepared to wait."

That's street-fighting talk from the usually mild-tempered former Italian prime minister. It's certainly a big change of tone – some might say an overly ambitious one – considering the spectacular failure of the EU's earlier plans for a web tax which were dropped late last year after some member states blocked the move.

But Gentiloni's threats will be backed to the hilt by Margrethe Vestager, otherwise known as Silicon's Valley tormentor-in-chief. Vestager, who is now the EU's second most powerful woman after president, Ursula von der Leyen, has been reappointed Commissioner for competition but also has a new role as executive vice-president with the grand title of being in charge of a "Europe fit for the digital age."

It's an enormous role, one that Vestager will take on with alacrity if her past record of beating up tech giants like Apple and Google is anything to go by. With her new powers to set the EU's broader policy on the digital area, you can be sure she will be even more of a vocal critic of what is perceived as the unfair tactics of the FAANG companies – the Facebook, Apple, Amazon and Google tech monsters.

Yet Vestager's crusade for a more equitable tax regime might also set her on a collision course with some of the EU's member states. If there is one subject that EU members, particularly smaller countries such as Luxembourg, Ireland and to some extent, the Netherlands, don't like being lectured on, it's their tax affairs.

A member state's flexibility to set national tax rates and play tax arbitrage is to many countries a question of national status and an emotive one. It's also a potentially explosive one: Ireland is fighting against an order from Vestager herself to claw back a record 13 billion euros in back taxes from Apple.

Yet having the ability to cut corporation tax has been, for countries such as Ireland, a huge boost to their economy. By offering lower tax rates to attract tech firms such as Apple, they have been able to create thousands of jobs.

But for countries such as France, Italy and Germany – which drove the EU's digital tax proposals – allowing Google and Amazon to not pay their fair share of corporation tax in the country of operation has become acutely political and led to widespread public outrage.

So it's not surprising that the EU's failure to agree on a digital tax led President Emmanuel Macron to introduce a new levy on tech giants like Google and Amazon. Nor was it surprising that the move threatened an all-out trade war between France and the US after President Trump said he would retaliate by raising taxes on French imports like wine.

Trump's threats appear to have paid off. Indeed, there are suggestions that the potential skirmish was smoothed over at the recent G7 meeting at Biarritz. Officials from both countries are said to have come to some form of agreement that France would refund any levies if there is a future international agreement.

So what happens next? The OECD is due to publish the outlines of a plan in mid-October, ahead of the next meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bankers set for October 17 in Washington. The OECD's officials have been working with policy-makers in more than a hundred countries to discover what sort of tax arrangements would be palatable to reach consensus.

That won't be easy. The OECD's Pascal Saint-Amans, who is leading the negotiations as head of tax policy, knows he has two tricky issues that need sorting: how to tax companies that are not taxed currently, and how to reallocate tax assessment rights. The second is the creation of a minimum tax on profits.

Saint-Amans has admitted that the first challenge is to make a company taxable in a country even when it is not physically present. It's a goal that can only be reached if companies are made to pay a bigger share of its global profits to the country where its market and clients are. For example, allowing France to tax foreign digital firms.

The second is to work out how a minimum global tax on profits would work. It is understood that the proposals are such that if a company operates abroad – and this activity is taxed in a country with a rate below the minimum – the country where the firm is based could recover the difference.

Whether the OECD can come up with proposals that are acceptable to all the EU member states is impossible to tell. What is known is that past relations between the OECD and the EU do not augur well. Previous attempts at working together have been marred by competition, and indeed animosity, over policy.

Stef Van Weeghel, global tax policy leader at PwC and Professor of International Law at the University of Amsterdam, hopes the OECD will be able to find a consensus that meets approval with the EU.

But Weeghel is not sanguine about the outcome: "Achieving a fair taxation policy across the EU is riven with politics. Countries do not want to give up their tax policies. But it is important there is a positive outcome because businesses need certainty."

And if these tech companies are to stay operating in the EU, taxes must be fair. As Jean Baptist Colbert, the French finance minister under King Louis X1V, remarked: "The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to get the most feathers with the least hissing." ■

How should conservatives respond to the present age of populism?

by **Daniel Hannan MEP**

The world is going through an angry and authoritarian spasm. Populists of Left and Right thrive by elevating grievances over potential solutions. Liberal doctrines – free trade, low taxes, private enterprise – are being squeezed by tribalism and identity politics.

There is an ugly element of Führerprinzip in the air, too. Followers of Jeremy Corbyn and Donald Trump have at least this much in common: that they will follow their leader through 180 degree rotations, clinging to some past position against what they imagine to be hostile media even after their principal has climbed down. As the popularity of interventionist policies grows, so does impatience with constitutional constraints and the demand for a strongman.

How should free-market conservatives respond? Many of our doctrines, after all, are counter-intuitive, running up against millions of years of evolution. The claims made by protectionists, whether of the Corbynite/socialist or Trumpian/nationalist variety, have been proved false a thousand times. But they feel plausible. "We can't carry on with a trade deficit!" "We need to protect strategic industries!" "We can't compete with slave-wage economies!" "We should be self-sufficient in food!" All these ideas lead, over time, to poverty. (Singapore imports all its food, water and electricity, while North Korea has elevated self-sufficiency – juche – as its supreme principle. Where would you rather live?) All, though, chime with our hunter-gatherer instincts.

Small-government conservatives should begin by recognising the limits of their popularity. Classical liberals tend to be slightly to the left of the centre of gravity on cultural issues, and well to its right on economic issues. They – we – can achieve a great deal as part of a broader conservative alliance. But we are only ever the riders on the back of an elephant. That great beast is impelled by forces that have little to do with economics: patriotism, distrust of officialdom, resentment of political correctness and so on. The wise mahout can steer the animal to a degree; but he cannot make it move against its will.

> Small-government conservatives should begin by recognising the limits of their popularity. Classical liberals tend to be slightly to the left of the centre of gravity on cultural issues, and well to its right on economic issues. They – we – can achieve a great deal as part of a broader conservative alliance.

Perhaps the most influential classical liberal in Britain during the second half of the 20th century was Ralph Harris, who founded the Institute of Economic Affairs. Shortly before he died, he told me something quite extraordinary. After the 1950 election, which had seen the obliteration of the Liberal Party, he and a handful of free-marketeers had debated how to inject their ideas into the mainstream.

Some wanted to preserve the purity of their precepts, meeting occasionally at the Mont Pelerin Society and publishing their tracts, rather in the manner of those Irish monks who, at the edge of the known world, painstakingly copied out Christian texts during the Dark Ages. But Ralph saw no point in doctrines that were not implemented, even if patchily and messily.

The problem was that, in those days, neither of the two big parties was friendly to classical liberalism. Clement Attlee's Labour was unapologetically socialist, of course, and was busily engaged in nationalising the means of production. But Churchill's Tories were hardly free-marketeers. My party, at that time, was imperialist, paternalist and mildly protectionist.

Still, Ralph and his allies regarded it as the more promising of the two, and set about trying to convince individual Conservative candidates and MPs.

They succeeded. Enoch Powell was one of the first to understand that Britain's post-war problems were largely the result of bloated government, and he was soon joined by Geoffrey Howe, Nick Ridley and others.

The breakthrough came with the winning over of Sir Keith Joseph, a brilliant intellectual who until then had been a textbook paternalistic Tory, chiefly interested in the social work that he carried out through a family trust. Reading Hayek and Friedman, and listening to Alfred Sherman and Anthony Fisher, Sir Keith was transformed. "It was only in April 1974 that I was converted to Conservatism," as he later put it. "I had thought I was a Conservative but I now see that I was not really one at all."

Except that he had been. His previous views had been squarely in the tradition of One Nation Toryism – the pragmatic tradition of Benjamin Disraeli and Stanley Baldwin, of Randolph and Winston Churchill, of Harold Macmillan and R.A. Butler, of David Cameron and Theresa May.

Sir Keith went on to win Margaret Thatcher to his new creed. But let's not delude ourselves: he and she were only ever the mahouts, never the elephant. They could steer the mighty pachyderm as long as it was content to move; but, ultimately, the elephant was carrying them, not the other way around.

Purely libertarian parties – ACT in New Zealand, say, or Gary Johnson in the United States – have never risen above single figures. When free-marketeers spend their time arguing about pornography and drugs, they sound eccentric. When they argue about fractional reserve banking and a return to the gold standard, they still sound distant from most people's concerns.

But when they concentrate on the areas where they agree with traditional conservatives – welfare reform, tax cuts, school choice, Euroscepticism, property rights – they can achieve extraordinary things, as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan did.

Conservatism is an instinct, not an ideology. The elephant has a powerful, though unspecific, sense of where it wants to go. It is moved, not by any philosophy, but by what Disraeli called "the sublime instincts of an ancient people". Don't jab your goad into that great beast: that won't end well for you. Rather, coax it, encourage it, whisper into its vast ear and, if your arguments are as good as you believe they are, it will respond. ■

A multitrack Europe is the best tonic to anti-EU sentiment

by **Ben Kelly**

European political circles have been discussing the concept of a "two-speed" or multitrack Europe for years. Intended to prevent the enlargement process diluting progress towards an "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe", it has never come to fruition.

A multitrack EU has positives – it would allow the core members to integrate further with other less willing states allowed to move at a slower rate and remain in a looser association. By allowing less unity, Europe will ultimately be more united because it considers the varying desires of its member states.

With each major step forward in integration, the concept has become more important, but it has remained a mere concept, to be discussed and never actioned. The Euro created a multitrack Europe in practice, but despite decades of theorising it has never been formalised. Brexit has proven this oversight to have been a terrible mistake.

If a multitrack Europe has been legally formalised in a treaty, would Brexit have happened? Many British politicians and voters were unconvinced by the promises within David Cameron's renegotiation because they didn't trust either Cameron or EU officials. However, a formal treaty that had formalised the UK's semi-detached membership and exempted it from "ever closer union" could have turned a close vote. This move would have gone some way to neutralising concerns of the UK being part of a single European "super state".

Now a more severe separation than was necessary is on the cards, to the detriment of both sides.

Although Brexit is undoubtedly a blow to the project, there is a silver lining for European federalists. It's already evident that Brexit has strengthened the identity and solidarity of the EU, which is already functioning in many ways more like a state. Far from being a contagion, Brexit may be a vaccination against further separatist movements.

After a decade in which the EU has faced the crisis in the eurozone, a massive influx of refugees and Brexit, now is the time to focus on the future and work towards a vision of a more integrated core union which will necessitate the creation of a multitrack Europe.

The EU will face more crises in the future, and it will be better equipped to navigate them if it can respond like a state, with joint institutions and coherent decision making. This means a more federal core union, with reluctant member states left in the outer circle.

> Brexit should inspire a more imaginative neighbourhood policy built around dynamic association agreements designed to foster a closer partnership that evolves over time and encourages economic and political convergence with non-member states.

There will be objections to this from hardcore European federalists and from non-core members who fear they will be treated as second class status members. Despite these valid concerns, it seems inevitable that there will be further integration of the monetary union and the creation of new institutions to drive that. This will create a de facto two-tier Europe which will need formalising in a new treaty.

If the EU is to learn anything from Brexit, it should be that it needs more flexibility to accommodate the varying objectives and priorities of its members. A flexible, multitrack Europe is necessary if the EU is to revive its enlargement process and renew its faltering neighbourhood policy, which is essential to managing its new partnership with Britain.

Brexit should inspire a more imaginative neighbourhood policy built around dynamic association agreements designed to foster a closer partnership that evolves over time and encourages economic and political convergence with non-member states. This may lead in the future to a "three speed" Europe consisting of the federal core, EU members outside monetary union and associated partners outside of the political union.

This may, in turn, lead to the creation of an "associate membership" status to form a privileged partnership with countries, like Britain, that are unwilling to implement the *acquis* and accept all the obligations of full membership.

This reformed, multitrack Europe will no doubt become the focus of the inevitable re-accession campaign in Britain, which now has an impassioned pro-EU movement inspired by Brexit. However, Euroscepticism remains a strong and persistent part of British culture and many political incompatibilities remain. For a viable and sustainable UK membership of the EU to be achieved in the future, Britain itself would need to be reformed. The years of difficulties caused by the "British problem" and the trauma of Brexit may well be remembered for years to come. ■

David Cameron's For the record

David Cameron should stop beating himself up

Britain's former Prime Minister is a man scarred by defeat in the Brexit referendum, but in his new memoir he is far too hard on himself about the consequences

by *Iain Martin*

In the run-up to the Scottish referendum of 2014 I was sitting in the House of Commons café area at Portcullis House, chatting to a friend from the BBC in Scotland and generally minding my own business. We were discussing some aspect of David Cameron's premiership when my colleague told me to look up. I could, he said, ask the man himself. Cameron strode over, breaking out of the little procession of power, advisers and bag carriers in his wake, to make a point about the campaign to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom.

Among pro-Union commentators and journalists there had been, said Cameron, a lot of stuff which suggested that he was lax and devoting insufficient attention to winning the vote triggered by his decision to accede to Nationalist demands for a referendum that autumn. Unionists needed to be assured – he said – that in 2014 for him, as PM, there was no higher priority than keeping Scotland as part of the UK.

At various points in Cameron's leadership I had been critical – as a newspaper columnist – of his decisions. But on Scotland I had written a few days before that Cameron had, in strategic terms, played a blinder, that is on this he was making sensible decisions and doing well.

The Prime Minister looked taken aback to hear that I had praised him on something, anything. He hadn't seen that article, he indicated. There was so much journalism these days and so much to read that eventually it all – criticism, praise – blurred into one, he said.

That's perfectly true, and I remember laughing, but as a remark – you journalists and your articles all blur into one – it is still probably not the wisest thing for a party leader to say to a journalist.

I mention the encounter because it stuck in my mind as typical Cameron, making a quick-witted joke, taking a rare compliment and then flippantly and amusingly discarding it, leaving a faint impression of carelessness in the perception created.

That theme – a tendency for Cameron at times to misread people, or even worse at times to fatally misunderstand their motives – runs through For the Record, the highly entertaining and well-crafted account of his life and career, published earlier this month.

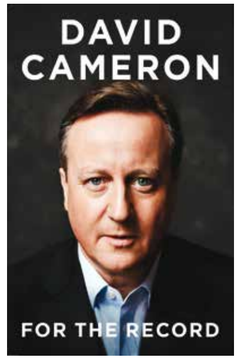
He seems most baffled and hurt when Michael Gove decides to campaign for the Leave side in the 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. His decision was preceded by Cameron and George Osborne getting Gove into Number 10 and trying to persuade him not to be so silly.

"Michael seemed torn - and really pained by the fact," writes Cameron. "I found it hard to believe what was happening. Michael was a close confident. Part of my inner team. Someone I turned to for advice. Why hadn't he told me this before?"

Cameron acknowledges that Gove was a Eurosceptic, but despite years of conversation he seems to have failed to grasp the full extent of it or what that meant in terms of his friend's crisis of conscience. Gove was not just quite Eurosceptic, like Cameron. Gove was hugely Eurosceptic, privately and at times publicly one of the most consistently Eurosceptic figures in British politics and media of the previous two decades.

At no point does it seem to occur to Cameron that another aspect of their relationship could be in play too. Gove – an intensely academic and polite figure – clearly admired Cameron a great deal, but their friendship was by its nature unequal. Cameron and Osborne were the older brothers dealing with a geeky younger brother. The assumption – on Cameron's part anyway – seems to have been that Gove would respect the code of the Tory moderniser brotherhood, pull himself together and in the end do as David Cameron wanted. Gove broke away because he had his own views and ambitions and placed them above personal loyalty. That's politics.

On Boris Johnson, Cameron also expresses hurt in For the Record when his friend plumps for Brexit and fronts Vote Leave, although he seems more street-wise and realistic when assessing the Johnson approach. As he watches Boris withdraw from the leadership race in 2016, after Gove decided to run himself, Cameron texts him: "Should have stuck with me, mate."



Ultimately, I fear the former Tory leader misses the essential point that Gove and Johnson are both, at heart, mischief-making journalists operating with a different mindset from Cameron, a leader with a very particular ethic and a quite traditional public service notion of hierarchy that comes with a presumption of automatic loyalty to those at the top.

Fatally, in his renegotiation attempt Cameron makes a different mistake and misreads Angela Merkel, Germany's Chancellor, overestimating her power and resolve. The hope is that the dominant leader in Europe will ensure that the renegotiation with the EU 27 produces enough of substance to satisfy British voters worried, at that point, about the migration crisis. As usual, Merkel fails to rise to the historic challenge. The EU concedes a little, but not enough to give Cameron a winning hand in the referendum he loses in June 2016.

The unravelling of these three key relationships – Gove, Boris and Merkel – is the backdrop to the concluding chapter of a book titled, gloomily, "The End."

By that point Cameron is beating himself up no end, as though pleading for readmission into polite society. The decisions he made that led to Brexit cause him to reflect every single day, he says. I really hope that is not true. It is a waste of energy and a first-rate brain, because his most vocal critics will never forgive him. Appalled British Remainers blame him for holding a referendum that produced the wrong result, which they believe signalled the end of civilisation, because it is easier than trying to understand why they lost in the first place.

Some of his critics talk of him as though he is a criminal. It is mad. He hasn't committed any crime. Losing a referendum, letting the voters decide, is a perfectly noble course. Much worse has happened in democratic politics. Cameron did not start disastrous major wars or almost bankrupt the country.

The hysteria extends to Brexit more broadly. European civilisation is ancient, around 2,500 years old. In contrast, the European Union is a fluctuating set of governing relationships and alliances less than forty years old. Europe will weather changes. Once the current excitement settles down, Britain will end up with a fairly close relationship with its friends and neighbours.

Indeed, Cameron's central judgement on the European question and on holding a British referendum turned out to be absolutely correct, even if the campaign he ran was ineffective.

He grasped that the question had not been put properly to the British voters since 1975. At each major treaty change it was avoided and integration achieved by deception. Of course, the subject – the EU – had low salience with British voters but they were consistent in saying they disliked excessive EU integration, when asked. No-one can say the voters didn't care. On a high turnout, 17.4m Britons said Leave.

At some point the question of Britain's status in the EU was going to be tested and needed to be resolved eventually. It is not Cameron's fault that his successors as Tory leaders have, so far, made such an awful mess of getting a deal with the EU.

I mentioned a personal story at the beginning that perhaps puts Cameron in a poor light and then analysed several misjudgements. Who is without flaws?

But there is much to praise about this book and the man. Many politicians shed friends on the way to the top. Cameron stuck with his dearest friends, making time for them – as they explained to me with delight – in office. In power, he was always comfortable in the role and maintained a sense of humour. He managed to leave Number 10 not having been driven mad by it, unlike many of those before him.

Once the Brexit emergency has subsided, his premiership and party leadership will deserve to be seen in a much better light. The public finances were a mess after the Gordon Brown era and Cameron took a range of difficult but broadly right decisions on the economy. Education reform under him was a major success.

On his electoral record, it is worth pointing out that after a long period during which it was said widely that the British Tories, ruined under Sir John Major, would never be back in office, and certainly not in a majority administration, he served for six years as Prime Minister and won the 2015 general election. He also won that referendum in Scotland too, and held together the United Kingdom.

It is said now that the Union between Scotland and England is imperilled anew by Brexit. Perhaps it is, although I recommend taking a longer view. After the difficulty Britain has had unravelling itself from the EU, the idea of Scotland untangling itself from the much deeper Union with England will not be an easy sell to Scots. If the UK survives, and Brexit is concluded, I hope people will look back on David Cameron as a pretty decent Prime Minister. ■

In search of Camilleri's master detective Salvo Montalbano...

Like Holmes and Conan Doyle, Andrea Camilleri and Montalbano will go down in history as one of the great literary double-acts

by *Robert Fox*

Andrea Camilleri, who died this August at the age of 93, often grumbled that he was being monstered by the success of his great creation, Commissario Salvo Montalbano, top cop in the not-quite fictitious port of Vigata, Sicily. Indeed, after twenty-seven novellas and a clutch of short stories, and as many films for television, Montalbano is one of the great detectives of world literature, with fame to match Sherlock Holmes or Chandler's Philip Marlowe.

Camilleri and Montalbano have done more for the image of Sicily than any other two individuals in the past century and more. Because of the books and films, which illuminate the island's landscape, the food and wine, new visitors have come by the million. Tourism increased in Syracuse and Ragusa by forty per cent in the two years following the release of the first two film productions of the Montalbano series, *The Shape of Water*, and *The Terracotta Dog*.

> "Camilleri and Montalbano have done more for the image of Sicily than any other two individuals in the past century and more. Because of the books and films, which illuminate the island's landscape, the food and wine, new visitors have come by the million.

"It has had a huge effect," I am told by Alessandro, manager of *L'Eremo* a hotel in a converted monastery just south of Ragusa. Room 11 in his hotel was the setting of one of the first murders in the series – and is itself a point of pilgrimage. "The quality of tourism, the food and produce have all benefited and the new local wines aren't bad either. You may remember Vittoria just a few miles from here from your travels in the sixties. It was pretty much a dump then – now it has two of the best restaurants around." Vittoria with its grand Baroque main piazza and facades is a favourite Montalbano location.

It began almost by accident. Andrea Camilleri was in his mid-sixties when he retired from a successful career as a film and theatre director. He had a stab at writing historical novels, one winning a prize, but gave up. He had invented Montalbano for stories to tell at his dying father's bedside, taking the name from Manuel Vazquez Montalban, a Catalan detective writer whose hero Pepe Carvalho shared an obsessive taste for good food with the future Salvo Montalbano.

In 1994, the first Montalbano novel was released, *The Shape of Water*, and it became an instant hit. Camilleri's creation was a runaway success. At one point, his books occupied all six of the top places in the Italian fiction bestsellers list.

Salvo makes an inauspicious entrance onto the world stage at the close of the first chapter of *The Shape of Water*. Two beachcombers have discovered a body in an abandoned car. They don't want to report it to the Carabinieri station because it is commanded by a Milanese. "The Vigata police inspector, on the other hand, was from Catania, a certain Salvo Montalbano, who, when he wanted to get to the bottom of something, he did."

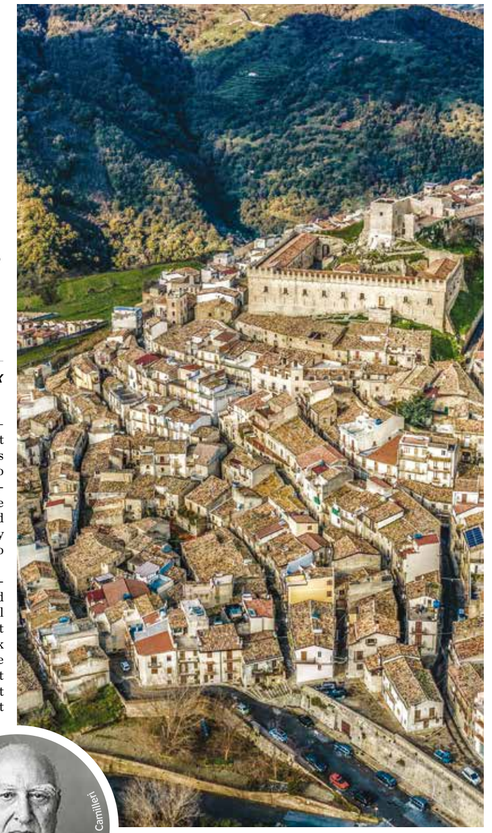
Montalbano is a bit of a loner, always clashing with those in authority. Camilleri soon began to use the novels to attack politicians, corrupt functionaries and judges. Billionaire prime minister Silvio Berlusconi was always a favourite target.

In the television series, Luca Zingaretti portrays Montalbano with great subtlety. He was a star pupil in the acting academy, and has a crucial part in shaping the drama and staging along with director Alberto Sironi. Round him is a circus of *fedelissimi*, his deputy Inspector Mimi Augello, an inveterate *donnaiuolo* (skirt chaser) played by Cesare Bocci and their younger sidekick Inspector Giuseppe Fazio, portrayed by the timeless Peppino Mazzotta, who once ran his own acting company in Calabria.

Frequently Camilleri himself has been present for shooting. The company decamps to Ragusa for months, scoping locations and auditioning local actors. He has also helped with the scripts of the 2012 spin-off show *Young Montalbano*, which ran for twelve episodes with Michele Riondino in the title role.

The original twenty-seven novellas – one is yet to come – are written to a tight formula: eighteen chapters of ten pages each. The touch of genius, according to Cesare Bocci, who plays Inspector Augello, "is in the dialogue. The books are like scripts – the chat in Sicilian and Italian come straight off the page – they don't need touching when we come to the filming."

The other touch of genius is the setting of old and new Sicily, mostly old Sicily – baroque palaces, the occasional classical and medieval ruin; the ancient colonnade at Selinunte and the Greek temples of Agrigento. Today there are special tours to the Montalbano sites at Scicli, Modica, and Noto. You can stay at Montalbano's apartment on the coast on the Lido di Ragusa at Punto Secco and even seek out his favourite gastronomic haunt, *Da Enzo* at Vigata. A few years back Camilleri's birthplace Porto Empedocle changed its name to Porto Empedocle – Vigata, by mayoral decree; the road sign is there to prove it.



The squares and balconies are deliberately set up with an air of unreality – almost a fantasy theatre set. "There are no parked cars, and road signs – it is all to drive the drama and focus on the characters," according to Luca Zingaretti. Towns like Noto, Ragusa, Scicli and Modica are more than worth a visit. Huge efforts have been made to restore the fabric of dozens of sites. I would recommend particularly Palazzolo Acreide. It is a jewel on a high escarpment – across the ravine a miniature basilica seems to have been slipped by shoehorn into a chink in the granite cliffs.

Camilleri told his father he couldn't write straightforward cop stories in Italian, so invented an ingenious amalgam of Sicilian dialect and Italian. The Sicilian actors and extras speak the language with a peculiar directness. Among the finest cameos are the encounters between Montalbano and the old patriarch of the Sinagra, one of the two local Mafia clans. Balduccio Sinagra, brilliantly played by Francesco Sineri, an old stage professional, summons Montalbano to an audience to request protection for his grandson. In the simple grandeur of the terrace at the Donnafugata Palace (as in *The Leopard*) he explains what it is to be "A Man of Honour." "A line has to be drawn," says the ancient capo, "an agreement between men who must be men, but if they cross the line they become beasts of the field."

Montalbano nods, says he has learned two things, then walks away.

Another glorious and rather late addition to the television series is the singing and occasional presence of Olivia Sellerio – whose deep throaty rendition of folk songs opens and closes each episode. She is now a star in her own right, as is the publishing house – *Sellerio editore Palermo* – she and her brother inherited from her parents Elvira and Enzo. Sellerio remains the Montalbano publisher, selling millions of copies.

Alongside Camilleri, Sellerio publishes novels by crime writers Gianrico Carofiglio and Maurizio de Giovanni. They are too far more than *poliziotteschi* action dramas. There is something of the Gary Cooper at High Noon about Salvo Montalbano and his compatriots Pietro Fenoglio of Carofiglio's Bari, and Commissario Ricciardi in De Giovanni's brilliant depiction of fascist Naples.

Camilleri himself was sensitive to the charge that he was *buonista* – a goody-goody always allowing the good guys to win. He rarely allows the Mafia to take centre stage although the wars of the Sinagra and the Cuffaro are the background to almost every story.

Like his great friend and mentor Leonardo Sciascia, Camilleri knows it – *La Cosa*, the thing – is always there. "From the day of my birth," Leonardo Sciascia told me a few months before he died, "Mafia was part of the air I breathed. It was always for the bad – *una cosa da delinquere*."

Camilleri has taken steps to remedy the *buonista* charge. He has left a book with Sellerio, not to be released until after his death. Either then or in a subsequent short story, Salvo meets his end – no Reichenbach Falls recovery for him. "Sherlock Holmes was retrieved," Camilleri told an interviewer in 2012, "but not Montalbano. In that last book he's really finished."

The relationship was getting testy. In Camilleri's short story, *Montalbano Refuses*, the detective pursues two young rapists. After murdering their victim, they propose roasting her eyes – but before they can act, the detective phones the author. He says he hates the story, and he resigns – "this isn't my thing and you have made a *stronzata* of it."

The author tries to excuse himself because critics say he is a *buonista* with sugary tales, and only with an eye on royalties. He says he has to get modern and "spreading so much blood on paper doesn't harm anyone."

Salvo stands his ground. "For me Salvo Montalbano is this story's *cosi*, and not that. Mr Boss (*Padronissimo*), you talk of writing differently: well then go and invent another protagonist. Do I make myself clear?"

"Very clear. But then how do I finish this story?"

"Like this," says the Commissario.

And he hangs up.

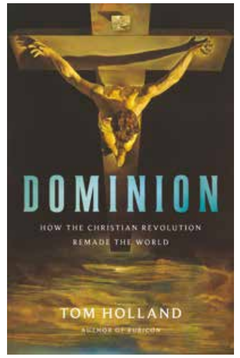
The world will surely not hang up on Salvo Montalbano and his creator – twin immortals like Holmes and Conan Doyle. ■

Tom Holland's Dominion – How Christianity changed the world

Can Western culture survive without Christianity?

The revolutionary character of the Gospel gave us civilised life, argues leading historian Tom Holland

by ***Marcus Walker***



Tom Holland's latest work *Dominion* is a revolutionary book. It asks us to overturn our thinking about our twenty-first century world almost completely. This is apt, for this is also a book about a revolution – a revolution which has been so successful that we have not only adopted its core revolutionary principles as our own but retrospectively imposed them on every other era and culture and called them universal.

Tom Holland's expertise in ancient history enables him colourfully to set the scene of a world profoundly alien to ours – where human beings have no intrinsic value and life is not just "nasty, brutish, and short" but is celebrated as such. Into this blood-soaked world, where the norms that we think of as universal are very clearly absent, come our two heroes. The first is obvious: Christ; the second was St Paul. It is Christ, the Son of the Living God, suffering and dying on one of the most appalling instruments of torture ever devised by man, who transformed the way in which human beings saw God and each other; and it was Paul who realised the enormity of this event and crystallised it with his catchphrase – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, nor slave nor free, nor male nor female; but all are one in Christ Jesus."

Holland takes us on a canter through Western Christian history and shows how the Christ Event overturned almost all of previous understandings of the world, although you don't feel you are being taken along too quickly. Each period or theme is a well-constructed gobbet, featuring an illustrative character, and exploring the underlying philosophies and events which he or she illustrates. We see Christianity at its best – but also at its worst – and, over two thousand years, are shown the recurring patterns of thought and debate out of which has come all that which we, in the twenty-first century West, value most: the knowledge that every human being has value because he or she is in the image and likeness of God; that laws apply to the poor as well as the rich; and that the preserve of the sacred and the secular are not coterminous. Indeed, he shows how the underlying theories of the Copernican Revolution were essentially (in the real meaning of the word) Christian, and overturned the Western (Aristotelian) and Eastern (Confucian) understandings of the Cosmos.

> "We see Christianity at its best – but also at its worst – and, over two thousand years, are shown the recurring patterns of thought and debate out of which has come all that which we, in the twenty-first century West, value most...

He takes us through the atheist revolutions (of France, Communist Russia, and Nazi Germany) and argues that they fitted into a pattern of Christian thought (universalist, utopian) and that, as foreseen by the Marquis de Sade and Friedrich Nietzsche, when you remove God from the equation, you lose what comes with the God of the Cross. You can preach human rights all you like, but if humans have no intrinsic worth, it becomes acceptable (and desirable) to remove those who get in the way of your utopian project, sometimes in industrial numbers.

He compares these revolutions to the Christian Empires and their sorry stories of evil and abuse. The difference, he posits, is that despite the evil often being committed in the name of the Crucified God, by placing that cross next to the silver mines of Mexico or the slave plantations of the West Indies, they wrought their own destruction. The dialectic which has run right through Christian history almost guarantees that figures like Bartolomé de las Casas or William Wilberforce would rise up in outrage brandishing that same cross. This counterreaction is, suggests Holland, a feature unique to Christianity and one which we cannot presume is found – or desired – in any other school of thought.

This is not a history. Although most of it is in the form and substance of a history book, it is, in fact, a commentary on our current age, and a controversial one at that. The question that runs through every chapter, and is asked explicitly at the end is this: most of what we value as twenty-first century Westerners has Christianity as its bedrock; can we survive without it? ■

Chris Stokel-Walker's YouTubers: How YouTube shook up TV and created a new generation of stars

YouTube changed media forever and we are only just catching up

This well-paced book is essential reading for tech addicts, providing a vital insight into one of the most important, and least understood, digital platforms around

by ***Charlotte Henry***

YouTube has made celebrities, and millionaires, of a host of young "creators" who produce videos and build a devoted global fan base. Their presence can sell out arenas and shut down shopping malls. The likes of KSI and Jake Paul are some of the biggest stars in the world, accruing millions of views and advertising dollars, but most people under the age of 25 have never heard of them.

In his book *YouTubers* (Canbury Press, 2019), Chris Stokel-Walker tells the story of the platform – a cultural phenomenon the effects of which we are only just beginning to appreciate. He expertly explains how people have grown to stardom and wealth, and rightly describes the shift of advertiser dollars from traditional media to YouTube as "a revolution," explaining: "YouTube is different to a conventional media company: its reach is wider, its diversity is broad, it demographic younger, and its power stronger."

Stokel-Walker is one of the best-informed writers about YouTube around, having reported closely on it for years. He combines his expertise with original, exclusive polling. For example, The Insights People surveyed 20,000 children and parents about their media usage for the book. They found that "one in 20 children aged 4-12 say their parents never check what they're watching," demonstrating perfectly the lack of understanding older generations have about the YouTube phenomenon and the risks their children may be exposed to. YouGov, in further exclusive research, found that a third of 18-24-year-olds who knew superstar YouTuber Zoella's name said "that they felt they knew her well," highlighting the connection many young people feel they have with their favourite YouTubers. Tellingly, many children these days desire to be a YouTuber more than many other traditional professions, including a television presenter, Stokel-Walker notes.

Not all of those who make videos are as big as Zoella though, and *YouTubers* also looks at the different layers of these so-called influencers – the micro and nano influencers who have smaller, but more dedicated, audiences than the "elite" influencers and therefore provide brands with better value for advertising money. One such micro-influencer is Eniyah Rana. She started out on YouTube giving tips about wearing the hijab to fellow Muslim women. Posting videos gave her a career and confidence, especially after an acrimonious divorce. Stokel-Walker also details how at all levels, far from just sitting in front of camera, YouTubers now are running small businesses.

Of course, YouTube has a dark side, which Stokel-Walker illustrates neatly. He tells the story of how Monalisa Perez shot her boyfriend Pedro Ruiz for a stunt he designed in a desperate bid for views, symptomatic of the slavish following of the platform's algorithm undertaken by so many of its users. The bullet penetrated the thick book Ruiz was holding and he bled out and died, aged 22. Perez returned to YouTube after serving time in prison. Her videos are now viewed a couple of thousand times a day.

> "YouTube is different to a conventional media company: its reach is wider, its diversity is broad, it demographic younger, and its power stronger.

The algorithm, that collection of code that dictates which videos are pushed in front of us and why others disappear into the ether, also contributes to burnout. Creators feel they can never stop feeding the beast. One YouTuber, called Lucy Moon, recalled being chased by a fan on Twitter when she took a brief pause from posting videos. "The YouTuber's dilemma," Stockel-Walker explains, is that "the algorithm wanted her to post regularly, and she wanted to be authentic but making and posting videos so regularly was draining and she felt she was giving up too much of herself."

These young creators share every aspect of their lives with fans who demand authenticity. Parents no longer drive their children to football practice, but set up cameras and edit video for them. Children as young as four begin posting videos and become stars on a site that knows almost no boundaries. It all feels somewhat sordid, exploitative.

Perhaps the only weakness in this otherwise comprehensive work is that it doesn't go into too much depth about other issues, such as the extremism that can be found in some corners of YouTube. Overall, this well-paced and deeply researched book is essential reading, providing a vital insight into one of the most important, and least understood, digital platforms around. ■

LOST CLASSIC

The Italians by Luigi Barzini

Lost Classic presents great works of art that are under-appreciated or forgotten

by ***Toby Guise***

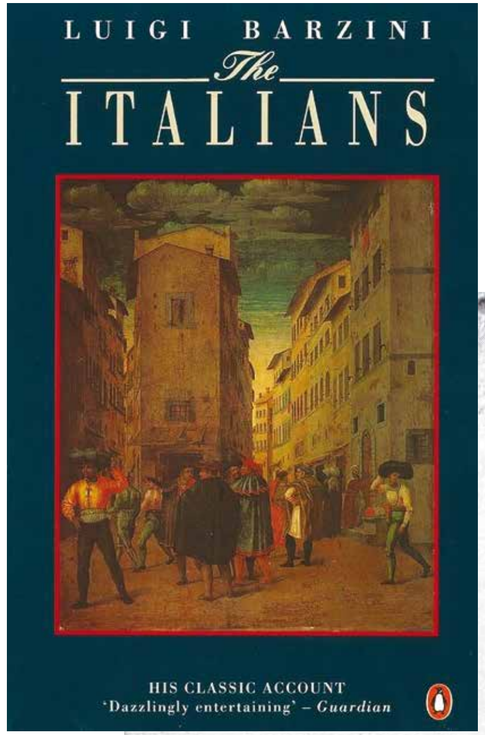
If you are going to Italy this year – even for the tenth time – you need a copy of Luigi Barzini's 1964 book *The Italians*. That Barzini should have written his masterpiece in English is a clue to his unique perspective: Italian to his fingertips, the great man was also a US-trained foreign correspondent. The resulting combination of gentle self-mockery and vivid historical colouring has never been equalled. Central to his concern is revealing the paradoxical nature of the Italian peninsular to the foreign reader. It is a country obsessed by beauty yet riven with violence; fiercely proud of its culture yet deeply ashamed of its incapacity; its collection of dazzling regions never adds up to the sum of its parts.

Indeed, like many Italians, Barzini treats anything beyond a purely geographical definition of "Italy" with some degree of scepticism. This is a country ruled not by national sentiment but by the age-old principle of *capalinismo,* meaning loyalty to your local campanile – bell tower – and it emerges as the defining factor of Italy's achievements and woes (it is still common to see rooms advertised in Italy only open to locals). The dividends of the Renaissance were driven not by cooperation but by the fierce internal loyalty and external mistrust of the city states. Their competitiveness invited cataclysms from which the country never recovered. First among these was when the warlord of Milan invited the French Army into Italy in 1494; a guileful act by which he hoped to do down his rivals, which instead shattered the peninsula with six decades of abasement at the hands of foreign armies. And these were real armies, which scorched the earth; nothing like the prancing *condottiere* who had once harmlessly sated the city states' desire for glory. Within twenty years, Rome itself was subject to a six-month ordeal of rape and destruction; within thirty, the peninsula's bitter internal jealousies had turned on its richest jewel: Venice.

Barzini accordingly offers a thrillingly detailed account of the events of 1494 – and, in the surrounding chapters, draws out from them some central lessons of Italian life. Foremost among these is a comparison between the two great writers on statecraft who emerged from the period of the Italian Wars: Niccolo Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini. In spite of his eponymous adjective, it is the republican Machiavelli who is presented as the hopeless idealist; forever dreaming of a unified Italy which could resist assault, and ending his life in exile. The aristocratic Guicciardini, by contrast, consolidates his position at the top of society by never allowing his private ideals – and religion – to inform his public choices. As such, the Guicciardini-Strozzi landholdings survived not just the treacherous Medician period but are still producing wine to this day.

It is no surprise that Guicciardini reappears in the chapter "How to Succeed" – and that this represents a masterpiece of cynicism. Never trust anyone outside your family; never speak plainly; use powerful friends and flattery at all times. Align yourself to the quality of the *furbo* – cunning man – not the credulous *fesso* (fool), who alone among Italians pays his taxes, keeps his word, and believes what he reads in the papers. Barzini acknowledges that any country – even Italy – needs a minimum number of such people in order not to fall apart, and foresees this moment approaching as their number diminishes.

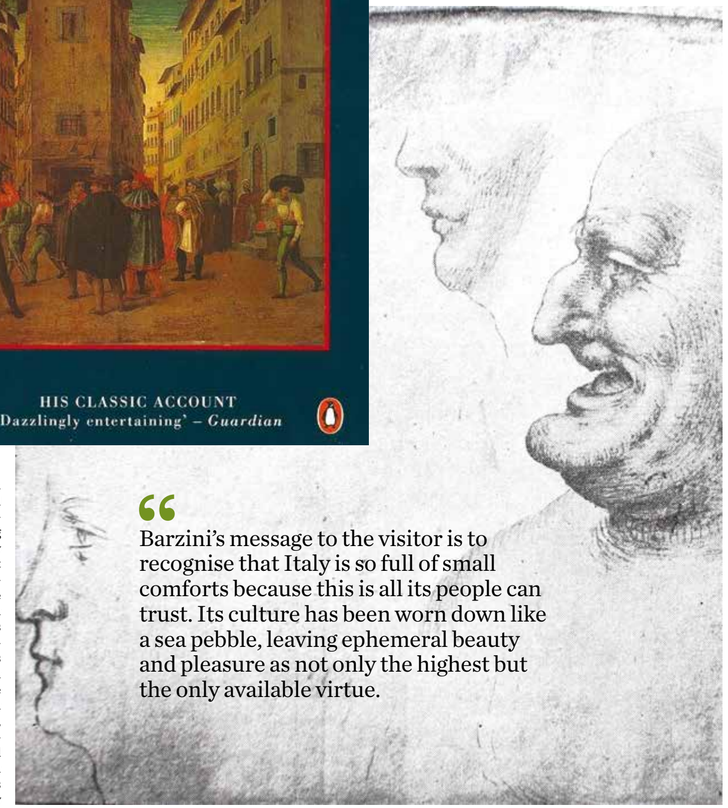
Yet – although this *furbezza* may be the underlying principle of Italian life – its enaction requires mastering the most Olympian virtue of all: *garbo*. This untranslatable quality indicates a combination of appearance, bearing and worldliness, which sweeps all before it. It is "the careful circumspection with which one slowly changes political allegiance when things are on the verge of becoming dangerous; the tact with which unpleasant news must be announced; the grace with which the tailor cuts a coat to flatter the lines of the body; the sympathetic caution with which agonising love affairs are finished off; the ability to restore order to a rebellious province without provoking resentments."



Foreigners should tread carefully. Barzini lovingly records the typical arc of experience of a foreigner moving to the country; initially delighting in how beautiful everything is and how easily the tradesmen greet him (what a contrast with France!). Only gradually does the realisation dawn that he is being cosseted by a carefully-drawn artifice. At best disillusionment sets in; at worse, the collision of underlying values leads to disaster. He proffers the example of a high-minded English family who decide to provide for the welfare of their distraught maid when she falls pregnant. But, within weeks, furious writs and lawsuits start arriving from her family. They have arrived at the only logical conclusion known to them: the Englishman himself was the father. Having smelt money, they were not going to miss out. And so, the English family departs Tuscany, leaving an irreparable hole in the social fabric.

Illusion and reality entwine most closely in his chapter on the Sicilian Mafia. The belated realisation of Machiavelli's dream of unification in 1871 forced underground the local armed bands which had protected the large estates. Resistant to the new authority being imposed from the north, these became the "primordial and Arcadian form of the mafia, with its mixture of ruthless brutality and noble sentiments". Barzini dissects these self-delusions with a pitiless irony, as he maps the thoughts of an ageing *mafioso* of the old school: "The good ones are unfortunately getting scarcer. Things are no longer what they were. More and more men seem bent on violating the old rules merely to make money for themselves. It is not so much the Mafia's fault as that of the times. Similar trends are visible everywhere in the modern world. All men are inclined to serve their private interests and forget moral duties. Nevertheless, good Mafia men still exists: those who want, above all, to be helpful to others. This they consider their mission in life." And so it is here – in the pit of Italy's dark heart and among its most famous export – that the suspension of disbelief finally becomes complete.

Barzini's message to the visitor is to recognise that Italy is so full of small comforts because this is all its people can trust. Its culture has been worn down like a sea pebble, leaving ephemeral beauty and pleasure as not only the highest but the only available virtue. The same themes appear in later books – notably John Hooper's, also called *The Italians* (likely in homage to Barzini and shared scepticism of the idea of "Italy"). Written almost exactly 50 years later, it provides a perfect companion volume; showing the wounded splendour of Italy still echoing forwards through the centuries. ■



> "Barzini's message to the visitor is to recognise that Italy is so full of small comforts because this is all its people can trust. Its culture has been worn down like a sea pebble, leaving ephemeral beauty and pleasure as not only the highest but the only available virtue.

AD ASTRA

CINEMATIC VOYAGES LIKE THIS DO NOT COME ALONG TOO OFTEN

Brad Pitt stars in a sci-fi epic full of intelligence and ambition

by **Alexander Larman**

Amid the myriad comic-book sci-fi films of the past few years, there has been another genre existing alongside, catering to a, shall we say, more grown-up audience. These films, which include Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* (2016), Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013), tend to treat space and time travel in solemn, almost reverent ways, with careful attention paid to how physics and philosophy might usefully complement one another. Thanks to advances in modern technology, a talented filmmaker can now focus on the enormity of space to mind-blowing effect.

In the case of *Ad Astra*, directed by the auteur James Gray, there is no doubt that this beautiful, deeply serious and profoundly thoughtful film will attract an appreciative, mainly arthouse, audience. Despite the starry presence of Brad Pitt in the lead role, and the likes of Tommy Lee Jones, Donald Sutherland and Liv Tyler in support, it is probably too esoteric and abstract for the mainstream, and, like many of Gray's earlier films, seems destined to remain a cult curiosity. Yet it should be sought out on the biggest screen if you can, possibly with a glass of something strong to hand, and wallowed in. Cinematic voyages like this do not come along too often.

The storyline owes something to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* as well, inevitably, to Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), but Gray's influences are rich and varied, including Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011), Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and even Andrew Niccol's horrendously underrated *Gattaca* (1997). Major Roy McBride (Pitt) is a talented and heroic astronaut who nevertheless has a deep feeling of existential ennui, communicated to the audience by a moody voiceover that often resembles a more comprehensible version of Malick's characters' musings.

He is the son of famed space pioneer Clifford McBride, who is believed dead after a mission to Neptune vanished years before. The purpose of his mission was to discover whether there was other intelligent life in the universe, and it was believed to have failed, but mysterious energy surges appear to be emanating from the mission, which are threatening life on earth as we know it. McBride is therefore tasked with a dangerous and personally taxing journey, to see if his late father has left something behind, or if the world is simply doomed.

Gray, whose last film *The Lost City of Z* starred a miscast Charlie Hunnam but was otherwise terrific, is a very underrated filmmaker. His earlier collaborations with Joaquin Phoenix, including *We Own The Night* (2007) and *Two Lovers* (2008), indicated that he was a writer-director of unusual intelligence and compassion, and this, by far his grandest and largest-scale work, finally allows him to play at the level of his great influences. Although *Ad Astra* is nowhere near as cryptic or esoteric as *The Tree of Life* or *2001,* it still moves slowly by conventional sci-fi standards, and relies on inference and suggestion rather than one-liners. It does feature some astonishing action set-pieces – a moon buggy chase, a zero-gravity fight that rivals Nolan's *Inception* (2010) and virtually any of the scenes in space – but they are shown in almost abstract fashion. Even as the characters on screen are locked in life-and-death struggle, the audience is hard pressed to find more excitement than a solemn mood of contemplation.

This, of course, is Gray's intention. He portrays his milieu extraordinarily effectively, setting his world around two or three decades in the future – where the Moon has been colonised and grinning tourists take selfies by plastic aliens, and where global brands like Virgin Atlantic and DHL have become, quite literally, universal – and neither glamorises it nor makes it seem scuzzy. He is helped by one of Pitt's greatest performances. Between this and *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, this fine actor is having a splendid year, and here he delivers an iconic performance, often in extreme close-up, which makes one empathise with a character who, for most of the film, is a miserable and emotionally isolated loner.

Apart from Pitt, there is good work from Sutherland as an enigmatic fellow astronaut, Jones as his missing father and, in tiny cameos, Tyler as Pitt's estranged wife and Ruth Negga as a helpful scientist. If one was to criticise the film, it would be for the lack of human interest; with the exception of its lead, this is a picture that rhapsodises in the sense of the unknown, with vast vistas of inky black swimming into view, accompanied by Max Richter's brilliant, mournful score. Yet, by the end, this criticism seems an unfair one. It would be unfair to hint at what happens, but, eventually, what initially seems to be a superbly accomplished but cold film reveals its emotional core, and, for many, it will resonate very movingly indeed. It is unlikely to be a box office smash, but *Ad Astra* is that rare thing in our not-so-Marvellous age – a serious, grown-up film with something to say, which does so with sombre integrity. And that, surely, is worth cheering to the stars. ■

Pet Shop Boys at BBC Radio 2's Live in Hyde Park, London

Pop's last intellectuals the PET SHOP BOYS have staying power

by **John McKie**

If you spend a spare forty minutes on YouTube, you will find an experience belonging to another era, almost another planet. Kenneth Williams is interviewed by Michael Parkinson alongside Sir John Betjeman and Maggie Smith. He references Keats, Shelley, Byron and quotes Voltaire. This all happens in about twenty minutes.

Fast forward to 2019. Who does that anymore? Only one person immediately springs to mind, and he happens to be a pop star. On the Pet Shop Boys' thirteen studio albums, Neil Tennant's lyrics reference Pinter (*Bilingual*), Stravinsky (*Very*), Richter (*Yes*), Shostakovitch and the Bolshevik uprising (*Behaviour*) as well as contemporary issues like the Special Relationship (*Fundamental*) and Peter Mandelson's multiple sackings (*Release*). He also writes love songs. Probably their greatest 21st century song, *Love Is A Bourgeois Construct*, was inspired by David Lodge's 1988 Booker-nominated novel, *Nice Work*.

The Pet Shop Boys closed this year's Radio 2's all-day festival at Hyde Park after Simply Red, country singer Kelsea Ballerini, Bananarama, Clean Bandit, Status Quo and Westlife (none of whom has written a song about the Bolshevik uprising, unless there's a Quo B-side I didn't hear). The light show, choreography and (small detail) songs utterly justified their headlining slot.

With a catalogue of hits including *It's A Sin*, *Left To My Own Devices*, *Domino Dancing*, *Always On My Mind*, *What Have I Done To Deserve This* and *Suburbia* all performed, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe showed that they belong with other great British song writing duos, such as Jagger & Richards, Difford & Tilbrook, John & Taupin et al. That's no idle comparison – on the 2006 documentary, *A Life In Pop*, their EMI record company head Tony Wadsworth likened them to Gilbert and George meets Lennon and McCartney. Having written the musical *Closer to Heaven*, a ballet (*The Most Incredible Thing*), and sound tracked a screening of *Battleship Potemkin* in Trafalgar Square, as well as holding a residency at the Savoy Theatre, Gilbert and George meets Gilbert and Sullivan might be a better comparison. (The fact they covered a Gilbert O' Sullivan song with Elton John is a side detail.)

Chris Lowe's signature look, sunglasses and oversized headgear, is a work of performance art on its own. Tennant even helped judge the Turner Prize, won by Chris Ofili, in 1998. He is from the North East rather than the North West, but to this writer at least, many of his recurring fascinations in song, such as the capital (*London*, *West End Girls*), royalty (*Dreaming of the Queen, the King of Rome*), spying and surveillance (*Nothing Has Been Proved, Integral*) and homelessness (*Theatre*) express an understated sense of camp and thwarted love reminiscent of Yorkshire playwright Alan Bennett, who often explores these themes.

His other touchstone can be found in another comment Tennant made of the group: "I see us in the tradition of Joe Orton and Noël Coward in that we are serious, comic, light-hearted, sentimental and brittle, all at the same time." While it may be tempting to wheel out Coward's maxim, "strange how potent cheap music is", that's a little unfair on Tennant and Lowe. Besides, the playwright once famously mixed up Sibelius and Delius. Tennant, a classical musical nut, has not.

A better Coward comment might be this: "Thousands of people have talent. I might as well congratulate you for having eyes in your head. The one and only thing that counts is: Do you have staying power?" In the words of two of their album titles - *Yes, Actually.* ■

European immigrants made 18th century London

CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

The late 18th century was much more than the era of John Bull, patriotic fervour and Imperial expansion – it was a period of vibrant cultural exchange with the continent

by **Alex Colville**

In the popular imagination, the 18th century is when Britain began being great. After emerging from the chaos of the Stuarts, the Hanoverians beckoned to power and plenty. It was the age of Whigs and Tories debating the fate of an Empire and brave heroes sacrificed on the battlefields of Blenheim and Waterloo. In this story, Europe is only ever something to be freed from. But there is another side to this tale, one where Europeans were our neighbours and allies, whose presence helped make Britain's fortunes. In an era of burgeoning globalisation, London became a hotbed of ambitious and talented European immigrants.

The union of Scotland and England in 1707 was risky, both nations reluctant to overlook histories of near-constant war. Scotsmen who fought for Britain in the Seven Years War could return to London and face a mob shouting at them to go home. By 1760, Scotland had rebelled against Hanoverian rule three times, Jacobite troops marching to within 100 miles of London in 1746. In England, the word **"**English**"** was the preferred term for those in the British Isles, **"**British**"** used with relative rarity. The Union was a fragile fledgling, with no basis in culture or society. What on earth was "British"?

The answer, all too often, was "whatever we aren't". English and Scots bonded by fighting against the French and Spanish. Britain was so often at war with France that the years between 1688 to 1815 are termed "The Second Hundred Years War" by some academics. The earthy John Bull emerged in cartoons, proudly championing the strength of English liberties against archetypes of drunk Dutchmen, Italian sodomites or effeminate Frenchmen. Catholics too faced anger and outrage, outsiders in a Protestant nation. Some areas of London were burned by a mob in 1780 when the government suggested lifting bans that restricted Catholic presence in public life.

Despite this, Britain began to depend on Europeans in the 18th century. This went beyond simply having a German head of state. The spoils of the Seven Years War meant Britain's Empire expanded so quickly the British Isles ran out of people to fill it. French Huguenots settled in Quebec and Granada, along with families from Germany. The British army grew to include troops from the German state of Hanover. Some became extraordinarily successful: the Swiss mercenary Frederick Haldimand became Governor of Quebec, guarding the province during the American Wars of Independence. He received a knighthood for his trouble.

Europeans were at the fringes of Empire, but also at the heart of a new, cosmopolitan nation - there was a community of some 3,000 black men and women living in the capital, mainly filling the role of servants-cum-fashion statements. Reynolds had a black manservant, as did Dr Johnson.

Continental influence was there too. A man was not considered sophisticated if he had not taken a Grand Tour through France and Italy. Italian opera was high culture and German musicians the finest to be had. Musicians, painters, singers, dancers, sculptors and language tutors all braved the hair-raising storms of the Channel in pursuit of lucrative profits. Mozart was among them, along with Haydn, Casanova (intent on mischief) and Jean-Paul Marat. Originally brought to London as a prisoner of war in 1758, Frenchman Dominic Serres made a living by painting British naval victories against his own countrymen, even becoming "Marine Painter to George III".

Goods flooded in from all across the empire, some flowing straight back out again to Europe – the industrialist Matthew Boulton was still minting French coins for Parisian bankers three years into the French Revolution. German traders watched out for ships from their homeland, guiding their countrymen to safety. The musician Georg Griesbach recalled being whisked off to a tavern, "where the Hamburg ships' captains dine", run by a landlord "named Werner".

As to who "Werner" was, or the Germans who toasted each other in his tavern, we have no idea. There are traces and fragments – the Dutch Inventor Anton Georg Eckhardt had some of his patents for cannon and navigation adopted by the British Navy, and was praised in one letter by Matthew Boulton as a man of "superior skill and genius" working "for the sake of our country". Hardly anything else is left of him. Reynolds' Italian assistant, Giuseppe Marchi, is permanently in Reynolds's shadow, despite the two working together for 40 years.

Some European arrivals became famous. The German painter Angelica Kauffman was a national treasure, so much so that she was invited to paint murals in St. Paul's cathedral. The Italian engraver Francesco Bartolozzi was offered £400 a year by the government if he refused a tempting job offer in Portugal. The Hanoverian William Herschel discovered Uranus, the first new planet since the invention of astrology, naming this planet "the Georgian Star" in honour of Britain's sovereign. Indeed, when the Royal Academy was founded in 1768, 25% of its founding members were Italian, French and German.

At the same time, Europe wanted to know about Britain. A German count living in Mayfair set up a meeting between one of the members of the Board of Longitude and a Parisian watchmaker, passing on details of John Harrison's famous H4 watch. Herschel's remarkably powerful telescopes were shipped to astronomers across Europe. Portuguese scientist smuggled one of Boulton and Watt's steam-powered looms to France, angry that the government of "this jealous country" had imposed a ban on doing so.

> "Intermingling with Britons seems to have been the rule. Pastors in every one of the eight German churches of London complained of poor attendance, and were amazed at the speed with which members of their congregation diffused into English society.

Some adopted Britain as their homeland. The Italian scientist Tiberio Cavallo kept a notebook of genteel English phrases ("it was pouring with rain", "they are dying to see him", etc.). If a foreigner wanted to become a naturalised subject of the King, a specific act of parliament had to be passed for that individual, both costly and time-consuming. Some registered simply to ensure their property could be inherited by their descendants. But assimilation could be total – William Herschel insisted European correspondents write to him in English, despite his fluency in French and German, fondly describing the advantages of "old England" compared to his native Germany.

Some found the British irritating. Botanist Daniel Solander wrote to a Swedish colleague: "The English people are generally polite to foreigners, if only you flatter them and tell them that everything you have seen in England is better than anything you have seen before". Once again, old habits die hard.

It wasn't all bad. Thanks to the writings of Voltaire, and the international renown of Newton, Hobbes and Locke, England was seen as a land of liberty. The German naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster told a colleague back in Gottingen: "I went to the land of freedom, where work is rewarded". For some, Britain was a place where the unorthodox individual "could breathe quietly, and without political fear". In an encounter with the Austrian Emperor, painter Johann Zoffany stated that he was English, "for in that country I received protection and encouragement".

What was it like being a foreigner in London? Diasporas gathered around fixed points – a building, urban area or social clique. Italians were invited to dine with General Paoli, a Corsican freedom-fighter exiled to London. Neighbours helped each other gain employment, and banded together in times of trouble. The Swedish Church in Prince's Square allowed Swedes to meet every Sunday. Great Titchfield Street in Fitzrovia harboured groups of artists of French origin.

Catholics and Italians faced more difficulties assimilating than most, but the endless variety of London meant if you were excluded by one social circle, there was always another in which you would be welcomed. Tiberio Cavallo was denied membership of the British Museum for being of the papist faith. But that didn't stop him gaining a reputation as a socialite, befriending foreigners and natives, inviting them to dine at his house in Fitzrovia and regularly taking them to meetings of the Royal Society as his guest. Cavallo managed to live comfortably in the capital for well over forty years.

Intermingling with Britons seems to have been the rule. Pastors in every one of the eight German churches of London complained of poor attendance, and were amazed at the speed with which members of their congregation diffused into English society. Many intermarried. The nuptials of socialite Hester Thrale and her singing teacher, Gabriele Piozzi, caused a scandal. Yet Thrale sacrificed her social life for true love, married in two weddings, one Catholic, the other Anglican, in July 1784.

Amid the present wrangling over Britain's place in Europe, it is worth remembering that European co-operation was abundant while modern Britain was being forged. Arguably it was one of the country's great successes, a nation that was open to an outside world of trade, culture and competition. ■

Alma Deutscher at The Greene Space, New York

Greta Thunberg? Not a patch on child

PRODIGY ALMA DEUTSCHER

Photo: Michael Grabeyl/Life Ball 2017 - Getty Images

Heralded as the most prodigiously talented composer since Mozart, 14-year-old Alma Deutscher deserves all the acclaim she has won so far in her short career

by *Gerald Malone*

Hate pushy kids? Same here. It's Tuesday evening. I'm heading to a concert in Soho, Manhattan. My phone chirrups a message announcing; "It's Greta Thunberg's World".

No it bl..dy well isn't. At least, not yet. And her "Hail Mary" movement – are the handlers now trying to upstage the Catholic Church? – can keep "hailing" all it likes. If I could work out how to unsubscribe from the oxymoronic "Intelligencer" – just one of a raft of in-thrall news feeds peddling her stream of simplistic eco-drivel – I would. I big-finger fruitlessly instead.

Forget it. This concert is more important. Tonight's bill at New York classical music station WQXR's performance studio, The Greene Space, in deepest Soho, features a performance by Alma Deutscher playing violin and piano. Nothing astonishing there, except it's a curtain raiser to her already sold-out debut at Carnegie Hall on December 12th.

There, she will perform a violin concerto, selections from a new opera version of Cinderella, a piano concerto, and an orchestral concert waltz, "Siren Sounds". All are her compositions. Amazing!

At Carnegie Hall Ms. Deutscher will appear alongside The Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by British born baroque legend, Jane Glover. The Orchestra of St Luke's has been mis-described as "New York's hometown band". It is no such homey thing. It is one of the most respected baroque ensembles anywhere on the planet. More amazing!

She has composed sixteen works, including two operas, "Sweeper of Dreams" and "Cinderella". Discography includes three CDs, the latest being the recently released "My book of Melodies" on Sony Classical. Shades of Mendelssohn's "Songs my Mother Taught Me". Even more amazing!

Surely the Carnegie Hall appearance must mark the apex of Ms. Deutscher's long career?

Not a bit of it. Turns out she's another pushy kid! Alma Deutscher is, mind bogglingly, only 14 year of age. She first played the piano when she was 2 and picked up a violin at the age of 3. That was in 2007/8 – aeons ago.

I have stripped this introduction – pace Thunberg invective - of adjectives, adverbs, hyperbole and the slew of Mozartian comparisons that customarily adorn reviews of Ms. Deutscher's playing and composing.

The fact that she is a prodigy is the unavoidable elephant in the room, beyond contradiction, maybe defying understanding, but it needs no distracting adornment. For the quality of her musicianship, whatever her age, invites comparison with well-established concert performers. That counts more than marvelling at the mystery of her early onset maturity.

Her compositions are original, astonishingly polished, promising much to come as, rolling down the decades, her style evolves. To do her real justice it is important to strip away the hype focused on her youth now threatening to engulf her. She is not a fairground freak from "America Has Talent". She is a musical force for the future in the making.

On Tuesday evening she performed a live broadcast for WQXR. Their Greene Space studio accommodates a tightly packed audience of 50. I was sitting in the second row – I'd bought a VIP ticket (50 bucks) - ten feet from the gleaming black Italian Fazioli grand piano on which she was about to perform. It was a better vantage point than I can ever hope to secure in Carnegie Hall.

In the run up to transmission I was introduced to Hugo Deutscher, Alma's father. I shook his hand. He was preoccupied, clearly in no mood to chat. I didn't trespass. Deutscher père is a slight, diffident man, an academic linguist. He, or his wife, Janie, accompany Alma on tour, much as Leopold Mozart chaperoned Wolfgang Amadeus from court to court across Europe three hundred years ago. Damn!! A Mozart allusion.

I had the sense these performances were more tense for Mr. Deutscher than his daughter. When I glanced across at his corner seat during the fervent applause and whoops that greeted each completed work, he remained completely still, expressionless, seemingly detached.

> "At the age of 4 she started improvising on known themes. Then, she began to express the melodies surging like a spontaneous spring in her head, especially when she was twirling her skipping rope – the one with the silver tassels. When her mind cleared of other things – the detritus of everyday life – it filled with music.

I wondered about the life choices he and Janie have made to nurture Alma's talent. She is educated at home. School was too dull. Her ever-churning mind consumes more than any conventional school could provide. The family moved from Basingstoke to Vienna. I've got nothing against Basingstoke, but it seems like a no-brainer.

Alma's musicianship is nurtured by a global network of teachers, deploying all the artifice of modern communication - playing on each other's pianos via a Skypy Instagrammy Drop Box thingy. Imagine Mozart and Beethoven holding jamming sessions on Baroqueobox: "Ah, Ludwig, bring your harpsichord closer to the microphone. I'm not sure about you starting that symphony with just four notes".

Alma is announced and appears on stage. There is no artifice. She wears an unremarkable, white frock; something that would not seem out of place at a Long Island kids' party. Her hair is restrained by a subtle Alice band. Her motion on stage is characterised by a barely suppressed urge to add a skip to her gait. Her expression is mobile, eyes sparkling.

Elliott Forrest, WQXR's veteran presenter, does not fall into the fatal trap of condescension. Alma weighs each response carefully, her speech patterns are mature and thoughtful. She has been round this race track of explanation many times before.

Asked about the inspiration for her music Alma is straightforward. At the age of 4 she started improvising on known themes. Then, she began to express the melodies surging like a spontaneous spring in her head, especially when she was twirling her skipping rope – the one with the silver tassels. When her mind cleared of other things – the detritus of everyday life – it filled with music.

At 6 she was developing musical ideas, adding accompanying parts and shaping narratives. The easy bit is thinking about melody. It is hard work to control and develop it.

She sketches her music in a make believe world, Transylvanian, populated with Grimm characters and courtly composers - Antonin Yellowsink, Shell, Greensilk, Bluegold and Ashy. She is unabashedly prepared to lay bare for inspection childhood fantasies most of us have probably entertained, but cringe to acknowledge. I know what she means. I used to think John Major was a serious politician. But I'm over that now. Don't tell.

Alma's piano playing technique is elegant, her hands lifting gently from the keys in the classic Hanon style, allowing a lightness of touch and the emphasis of melodic line. Hanon – a sort of Bismarck of pianoforte technique – was a terror of my youth, brandished as an awful exemplar by my long suffering spinster music teacher. When I went looking for him to seek revenge for years of exercises I was disappointed to learn he had died in 1900.

In both her violin and piano work Alma's effortlessness impresses. The instruments seem mere extensions of her mind. Asked if she was nervous before performing she looked puzzled and replied, "Why should I be nervous"? Her virtuosity is hard wired in her being.

Her reworking of the Cinderella plot for her opera was inventive - not a simple, smug recasting in modern times for "relevance". The slipper is gone. The Prince and Cinderella are musicians - one with the words of a song, the other with the music. When they bring them together - Bingo! No glass slipper needed. With sarcastic sleight of hand the Ugly Sisters are portrayed as manipulating operatic divas. I predict that the work will be increasingly performed by small opera companies, as it can be produced on a manageable scale, won't break budgets and will attract audiences.

And there is a broader point. Melody in opera died in 1943 with Rachmaninoff. We entered an era of dissonance, Sturm und Drang with a vengeance. Alma Deutscher's sell-out concerts are a cautionary tale for opera house managers faced with declining numbers of "bums on seats". Maybe melody matters. ■

VENICE is no city in decline

Venice is strained - groaning under the weight of tourism and vulnerable to rising tides. But there's a case for optimism over the city's future

by *Finn McRedmond*

When Napoleon invaded Venice in 1797, bringing about the end of the Venetian Republic, he nicked a giant Veronese painting. The painting now sits in the Louvre, as possibly the most ignored artwork in the entire building. It is displayed, unfortunately, opposite the Mona Lisa.

Happily, plenty of work from the greatest Venetian artists still adorns the walls of palaces and churches on the main island. The Tintorettos in Scuola di San Rocco are worth a trip there alone. But on my visit in January, I found that nothing matched coming out of the church into a deserted square doused in watery sunlight. The contemporary image of a city plagued by tourists is not entirely accurate, if you visit at the right time.

There is something Le Carré-esque about the city's alleys and sparse lanterns at night-time. No part of town invokes this sinister feeling more than Canarregio. Just outside a "natural" wine bar on the canal is the spot of an assassination attempt on Paolo Sarpi – the theologian and propagandist of Venice against the papacy in 17th century. There is, quite literally, murder in the air.

Just down the road from the wine bar is the Jewish ghetto, where Jews were made to live by Venetian authorities during the Republic. The ghetto today now boasts some of the best restaurants and bars the city has to offer, and the unmissable Museum of Jewish Art.

In these less trodden areas Venice comes into its own.

But a narrative of decline has plagued the city in recent years. The Guardian recently published a gloomy outlook on the city's future, groaning under the weight of thirty million visitors every year. Around half are day-trippers – the tourists who pour off cruise ships, bringing a packed lunch, taking photos of San Marco, spending no money and leaving nothing but trash.

The result is a throng of shops selling mimics of the glassware Venice is famous for, knock off Venetian masks, a Hard Rock Café looking seedy and incongruous at the base of the Rialto bridge. Too few tourists interact with the city in a meaningful way, and make a negligible economic contribution to boot.

There are moves to reverse this trend. In late December of last year, Venetian authorities announced they would charge day trippers a tax up to 10 euro. The measure should bring in tens of millions in revenue a year – and will be directed to the costly upkeep of the city.

This measure is part of the volte face the government has undergone, heralded by the election of Luigi Brugnaro as Mayor in 2015. His predecessor Giorgio Orsoni headed a centre-left government. The left traditionally held Venice – but Brugnaro shook up the narrative, as an entrepreneurial conservative.

On my trip last month our hosts told us over lunch that Venetians feel conflicted about this change. Public services are in decline following the loss of the high-spending left wing government, they say, but Brugnaro could save the city from itself. The very few permanent residents of the main island will all attest to the pressing need to address the tourism problem.

The difficulty lies in changing the culture of tourism. European travel has gone through a democratisation over the past 30 years, heralded by the influx of budget airlines. There is nothing wrong with the democratisation of travel, it is a good thing.

But in the case of Venice, locals are insistent that the trend needed to be at least partially reversed. Now Venetian authorities are looking to encourage tourists to interact properly with the city – to spend money in restaurants and hotels, populate the galleries and the churches. Venice is home to an international film festival, and the Biennale. Authorities want to offer more events of this quality all year round.

In any case, the Biennale or cruise ships aside, it is not hard to explain what ultimately draws so many people a year to Venice.

> "It is not a city that wants to be navigated. Throwing your phone in a canal would be as helpful as Google Maps.

Venetian food is notoriously ropey. This is part of the charm. Mashed fish on toast is exactly as delicious as it sounds. Anchovies and artichokes are the currency of choice. You would think Venice is nestled in a raddichio forrest for its otherwise inexplicable ubiquity. But it's less the state of the food but the culture of eating which is appealing. The city is adorned with chichetti bars at every bend, where you graze on variations of mashed fish on toast washed down with prosecco or spritz.

It is not a city that wants to be navigated. Throwing your phone in a canal would be as helpful as Google Maps. A friend who is studying there gave us some invaluable intel – streets labelled "Corte" tend to be dead ends (lots of those), follow the Calles and Sotoportegos and you should eventually find where you are going. This helped, but the endless frustration of going around in circles, dead-end upon dead-end, felt like a rite of passage.

What draws us to Venice is the city's beauty. Getting lost doesn't matter so much when every corner you turn is an empty square waiting to be discovered, a canal with gondolas drifting along algae-green water.

There is a lot of talk about Venice's doomed fate as a sinking city. Every year we are inundated with pictures of tourists knee high in water traversing Piazza San Marco. It's an easy narrative to spin, but Venetians are keen to point out that it's not exactly true. Some parts of the city are slowly becoming more vulnerable to rising tides, but most of the city remains above water throughout the year. It is built on sand – but built to cope with flooding. There is a reason why there are no paintings on the ground floor of the Academia. It is in the middle of a lagoon, after all.

Major flooding can be destructive. The mosaics of San Marco suffered "20 years of damage" in the last November floods, the local authorities claimed. And there are frequent debates over how to manage this – do you remove the mosaics altogether, to be preserved in a museum for posterity? Or do you accept their fate – is this what is supposed to happen to them?

The images of tourists wading through San Marco paint a far more dramatic picture – worthy of Veronese – than is actually the case. Venice will be around for a long time to come, and hopefully much longer.

Go there early in the year when it is quiet. Nothing can beat coming out of Scuola di San Rocco and seeking refuge from the cold in a bacari with an aperol spritz. The Tintorettos are pretty impressive too. ■

WHERE TO EAT

Ristorante Gran Canal
Popular with tourists, but fantastic if the weather is nice. Book a table on the terrace for the best views.

Harry's Dolci bar and restaurant
This place looks over the Giudecca Canal - also comes with a great terrace.

Vecia Cavana
A restaurant in a renovated old boathouse. Serves traditional Venetian recipes.

WHAT TO DRINK

il Mercante Venezia
I'm reliably informed that il Mercante - located in front of the Basilica dei Frari - serves the best negroni in Venice.

Osteria al Squero
Located right in the South of the main island, this bar is slightly off the beaten track. Perfect for a quiet drink.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Pensione Accademia
This hotel is pretty central, but not overly touristy, and reasonably priced.

La Residencia
Near Piazza del San Marco, and just a short distance from Riva degli Sciavoni, this hotel is conveniently located but also quite cheap.

Ca Maria Adele
This is a more expensive option - and is fitted with a very grand interior.

WHAT TO SEE

The Jewish Ghetto
Perfect for a stroll, and plenty of bars and cafés to drop into along the way.

Palazzo Fortuny
One of Venice's many Palazzo's - this one has plenty of different exhibitions on throughout the year.

Gallerie dell'Accademia
You can't go to Venice and not see the city's best gallery. Drop in during a stroll through the Dorsoduro area.

Michelin starred spin-off restaurants – As good as the originals?

Spin-off restaurants are more than just a cynical branding exercise

by *Bruce Palling*

In the past, famous chefs rarely found it necessary to venture outside their own restaurants but these days it is the exception to the rule if they don't. It is all to do with branding and attracting diners from beyond their immediate catchment area. With the arrival of Japanese customers in the Sixties, it was soon all the rage for three-star chefs to open branches in Tokyo but now they tend to be in Las Vegas or within other Casino Complexes in Macao, Singapore and Melbourne.

The idea of restaurant spin-offs began in Paris in 1987 with two-star Michel Rostang's Bistrot d'à côté Flaubert. Arguably, Gavvers in Lower Sloane St was an earlier example of this trend in London as it was the diffusion restaurant of Le Gavroche when it moved from that destination to Mayfair in the early Eighties. Alain Ducasse of Monaco and Daniel Boulud in New York are now international brands with a dozen or more establishments throughout the globe.

On a recent trip to Paris, I tried three restaurants owned by three-star chefs – each of them with different objectives. The oldest was La Dame de Pic, a one star controlled by Anne-Sophie Pic from Maison Pic in Valence.

She is the third generation of her family to acquire the ultimate Michelin accolade in her restaurant south of Lyon. Her style is to cook with extreme delicacy, often using non-French herbs and spices with inspired results. A recent meal there was a master class in subtlety. La Dame de Pic opened in 2012 in Les Halles, just north of the Louvre and currently has a Michelin star. Anne-Sofie Pic describes it as an appetiser for her main restaurant with a number of her signature dishes. The food itself was certainly worthy of its Michelin star – a consommé of berlingots ravioli stuffed with smoked Brillat-Savarin cheese, Provencal asparagus both raw and roasted and red mullet with razor clams and shitake mushrooms with a potato cake.

Yannick Alléno is the only chef to possess two three-star restaurants in France – Ledoyen in Paris and Le 1947 in Courchevel. He championed "Terroir Parisien" – a celebration of the best produce in and around Paris, but more recently he celebrated complex sauces made from the produce they adorned.

> "With their reasonable price points, they offer a somewhat more relaxed and affordable option than is to be found in their culinary temples.

His latest dishes rely on more classic combinations of the very best ingredients allowed to speak for themselves. Ledoyen is one of the most romantic restaurants in France, located in a nineteenth century classical mansion surrounded by a garden at the end of the Champs-Élysées, walking distance from the Crillon and opposite the Grand Palais.

Located in the Seventh Arrondissement inside a new development offering casual dining, Allénothèque also stands out because of its superb wine cellars in the basement, which can be purchased or drunk on the premises for a small supplement.

Yannick doesn't consider this to be a second restaurant, a term which he disapproves. "This is just for pleasure – it is normal to have a more accessible address but I prefer not to call them second restaurants – it is like saying you have a second child you don't love as much as the first one or that it is a lesser place." When I went for Sunday lunch, it was packed, with simple offerings of perfectly prepared and presented dishes of steamed red mullet, roast lamb with rice or a truffled celeriac cake with layers of ham.

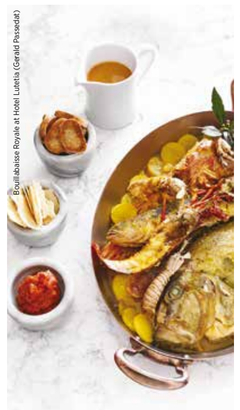
Less than five minutes away on foot, within the recently renovated Hotel Lutetia, Marseille's Gérald Passedat of Le Petit Nice has opened his first restaurant outside Provence – a simple seafood bistro again with modest prices.

Considered the greatest seafood chef in France, the bistro offers a more straightforward fish stew, but each and every component is perfectly cooked so that they also express their own distinctive flavours. Sardines are likewise beautifully presented on slices of toast slathered with "tomato butter". The standout dish though was the octopus fisherman's pie, covered in mash potato with a dusting of pimento powder, priced at a reasonable €29. None of these places are particularly expensive, so the majority of diners are not the usual customers for three-star Michelin establishments. Except perhaps for publicity shots, none of this trio of chefs would ever be found in the kitchens of these restaurants, yet each of them manages to express their culinary style and values. With their reasonable price points, they offer a somewhat more relaxed and affordable option than is to be found in their culinary temples. ■

La Dame de Pic (20 Rue du Louvre, Paris 1, anne-sophie-pic.com) - **set menu from: €59**
Brasserie Lutetia 45 (Blvd Raspail, Paris 6, hotellutetia.com) - **main dish and dessert: €40**
Allénothèque (57 rue de Grenelle Paris 7, allenotheque.fr) - **three course lunch from: €41**


Berlingots ravioli at La Dame de Pic


Brasserie Lutetia


Bouillabaisse Royale at Hotel Lutetia (Gerald Passedat)

VARIETY is the spice of Italian wine

by *Guy Chatfield*

The Italian peninsula is a complex place. Descending from the Alpine north to the Mediterranean south, you encounter a rich variety of people who - while not ethnically diverse in any great way - display confusing and contrasting characteristics.

As with people, so with wine.

I always thought the fact that sums Italy up the most succinctly is that Sangiovese, Italy's most widely planted grape has seventy one synonyms – all regional expressions of, for all intents and purposes, exactly the same grape.

Within this bamboozling array of different names you will find complex and beautiful Brunello di Montalcino, the rustic Puttanella and the obscure Patrimonio. Of course, what really put Sangiovese on the map was Tuscany's Chianti; the red cherry and plumminess that grabbed the attention of wine drinkers in the 1960's and 70's with its memorable wicker encapsulated bottles and value for money "gluggability".

For that reason, Italian wine is sometimes seen as being straightforward and easily accessible, providing "every day drinking". But take a bit of care to look properly and you can find extraordinary complexity and choice on multiple levels.

That is what has engaged me the most over my time in the wine trade. In a vaguely masochistic way, I love that whenever you get cocky enough to think that you are beginning to crack it in knowing about Italian wine, it delivers a surprise that blows you to pieces, levelling any arrogance in a second. The consolation is that you can drink your sorrows away while learning your lesson in humility.

My odyssey into Italian wine started fifteen years ago in an attempt to spout knowledgeably at an interview. I didn't get the job, most probably due to the fact that although I tried to convey my "understanding" of the aristocracy of Piedmontese Barolo and Amarone in the Veneto in the north, it was blatantly apparent to the prospective employer that I was really just winging it.

It inspired me to study more, moving from the accessible Montepulciano d'Abruzzos from Marche on the eastern seaboard to the highly cultured middle child of Tuscan Brunello di Montalcino, the "peasant" Primitivos of Puglia and Sicilian Nero d'Avola. And that's just a few of the reds.

What has piqued my curiosity recently has been the stylistic differences that the Italian south can offer, especially the sweet or dessert, wine.

Some of Italy's best dessert wines come from the Mediterranean island Pantelleria, a volcanic outcrop one hundred and eighty kilometres south-west of Sicily and just sixty clicks east of Tunisia.

Italy, in my humble opinion, delivers the best "bang for your buck" one can find in the wine world. The full portfolio of tastes is available there, from crisp light white Fianos to silky, powerful Negroamaros.

Don't just take my word for it. Explore Italian wine and begin a romance. You might find - like me - that you're still enamoured many years later. ■

CULTURE DIGEST

The best of Europe's art and culture

Degas á l'Opera, Musée d'Orsay

24th September – 19th October

One of Impressionism's founding fathers, Degas spent nearly fifty years in and around the Paris Opera, the inspiration for some of his finest work. This retrospective, the first to focus solely on the painter's relationship with the theatre, is the perfect snapshot of Belle Epoque France.


Photo: Paris Tavitian, Museum of Cycladic Art

Picasso and Antiquity, Museum of Cycladic Art

until 20th October

Paring some of the Spanish artist's lesser known ceramic work with pieces from Aegean antiquity, this novel exhibition traces a little-known thread from the islands of the ancient Mediterranean to one of the greatest painters of the 20th century.

Venice Biennale

until 24th November

Never shy of controversy, this year's Biennale has doubled down on the political, with exhibits on everything from Brazilian transgender rights to ecological catastrophe. Perhaps most striking is Austrian artist Christoph Buchel's installation of the fishing boat which sank near Lampedusa in 2015, with 800 migrants on board, which has prompted fierce debate from all sides.

Beirut, Münchenbryggeriet, Stockholm

30th September

Zach Condon's beloved world music ensemble continue their European tour, back on form after 2018's *Gallipoli*. Balkan folk, chamber pop, French chanson - if Wes Anderson made music, it would sound like this.

Luxury – From the Assyrians to Alexander the Great, CaixaForum, Madrid

until 12th January

With 200 objects donated by the British Museum, this exhibition, which covers the period from 900 and 300 BC, brings together a broad collection of treasures from four of the ancient world's largest empires. A remarkable insight into both the technical skill of the era's artisans and craftsmen, and the role that luxury played then, as now, in projecting power and identity across the known world.

Octoberfest, Munich

21st September – 6th October

Octoberfest needs little introduction. With 6 million guests expected – and 7 million litres of beer to be drunk – Munich's annual beer festival remains a Bavarian cultural highlight, complete with brass bands, lederhosen and the riflemen's parade.

Warsaw Design Week 2019

1st – 6th October

Warsaw Design Week brings together hundreds of events from the world of interior design, architecture and craftmanship, scattered around the Polish capital. The biggest event of its type in Eastern Europe, the week features exhibitions, workshops, panel discussions on all things design, as well as more social evening events.

Café Budapest Contemporary Art Festival

4th – 20th October

This two-week event, which takes place in more than 40 venues throughout Budapest, brings together a number of individual festivals, including ArtMarket Budapest, into one citywide event. Focused this year on the work of Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, expect everything from Shakespeare to the circus, world music to metal work.

Bauhaus – #ItsAllDesign, DesignMuseum Danmark

until 1st December

One of a number of exhibitions celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus movement, the exhibition explores all aspects of this design school's activities and how contemporary design builds on the heritage of Bauhaus. Featuring work by Marianne Brandt, Marcel Breuer, Lyonel Feininger, Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, the show represents the first comprehensive overview of the movement and how it continues to impact us today.

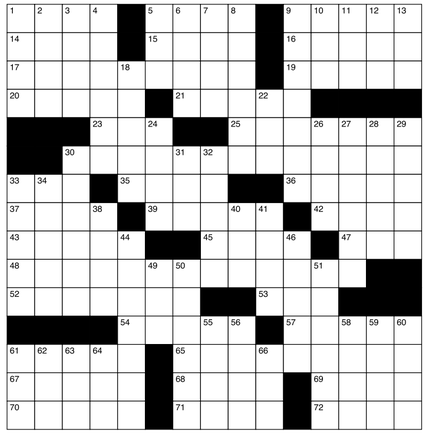

Photo: ČTK / Roman Vondroušd

The Steadfast: Kafka to the Velvet Revolution

until 6th October

In celebration of the 30 years since the Velvet Revolution, this exhibition is a new view of Czech art from 1918 to 1989. It features 30 classic writers and visual artists, exploring their verses, diary notes, quotes and interviews.

crossword & sudoku



ACROSS
1. First part of a play
5. Pound pickup
9. Wood shop tool
14. Outside, as a chance
15. Bruins' home
16. Blanched
17. Bonheur
19. Bell's invention
20. Univac's predecessor
21. "He _____ got a clue"
23. Successor to JFK
25. Highest points
30. Rich offer
33. 151, to Claudius
35. Deliberate slight
36. Shooter's aiming aid
37. Twelve months
39. To the ship's left
42. "Scat!"
43. Alfa ___
45. Cleaning agents
47. 2010 Aaron Sorkin film (abbr.)
48. Not effectively
52. Scold severely
53. Korean car
54. Namesakes of a Chaplin
57. Marsh of mysteries
61. Japanese knife
65. "Bravo!"
67. Falco and McClurg
68. Oklahoma city
69. Portuguese man _____ (venomous jellyfish)
70. English weight
71. ____ bunnies
72. Hoops great Archibald

DOWN
1. Arthur of tennis
2. "Braveheart" group
3. Sioux shelter (var.)
4. Gazelle relative
5. Son of a ___
6. Banda ___ (2004 tsunami site)
7. Rick's love in "Casablanca"
8. New Providence Island resort
9. Business trip aids
10. Volcanic output
11. Even if, poetically
12. Queen of the coop
13. Chemical ending
18. Long-range weapons, briefly
22. 'Fresh Air' airer
24. Napoleonic victory site
26. Gray, to Gaston
27. Fourscore
28. Repercussions
29. Author Anya
30. Capital of Niger
31. Slangy agreement
32. Greek weights
33. Actor ___ Ritchard of Broadway's "Peter Pan"
34. Helmsley or Mitchell
38. Get a new mortgage for, briefly
40. "The Catcher in the _____"
41. Medium-distance run
44. In vain
46. Police trap
49. Japanese Prime Minister Hirobumi
50. Hornswoggled
51. "The Blue ___"
55. Indigenous Japanese people
56. Biol. and phys.
58. Defunct electronics brand
59. _____ the start (present from the beginning)
60. Fairy-tale fiend
61. Fathom
62. Vow phrase
63. "The Delta of Venus" writer
64. Sun Yat-___
66. NYC time zone, in summer

				3	5			
		6		8			9	
4		3			1			5
	9			6		2		
3	6	4				1		
5			1				8	
9			2	1			7	
8	2					5		
			9			8		

							6	
3	6				9	5		4
8				1			9	3
1		5						
				6				
6		8			3	2		
	9	6	8					1
5			1			6		
		7	6	3		8	2	

ECR PARTY

LEADING EUROPE'S CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

PROJECT MAJA

THE CONSERVATIVE

THE LIBERTY SUMMIT

FAITH & FREEDOM INITIATIVE

BLUE GREEN INITIATIVE

EDMUND BURKE AWARD

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

BUSINESS FORUM

ecrparty.eu | @ECRparty