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LM 126

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THIS IS A DOUBLE ISSUE—BACK IN FEBRUARY. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

LM 126

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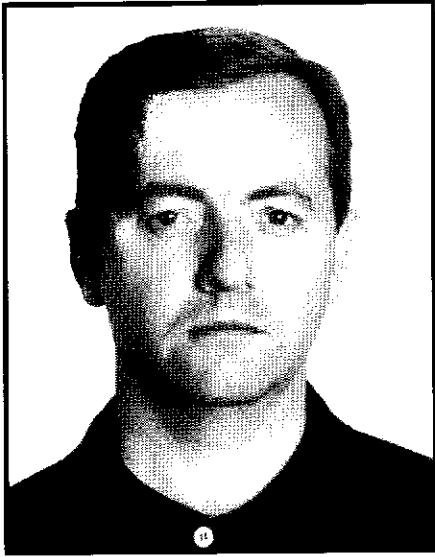
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MICK HUME

Editor

THE NEXT PERSON WHO SAYS THAT the twentieth century has been the worst era in human history should be made to spend the whole of the year 2000 going round on the London Eye, the non-stop big wheel by the Thames. When they are at the top of that visionary machine, looking down on a city that is a living monument to modern civilisation, perhaps they might see things a little more clearly. At the very least, the Jeremiahs will be turning their own stomachs instead of mine.

There have been plenty of setbacks and tragedies over the past century, and there is no shortage of problems left to deal with in the world today. But for all that, the fact is that people now are living longer, healthier and wealthier lives than ever before in human history. And if we were to raise our sights a little, we could be doing a lot better yet.

Before we crucify the twentieth century and dance on its grave, consider this. Life expectancy in Britain is now around 30 years longer than it was a century ago; a boy born today can expect to live till he is nearly 75, a girl till she is past 80. Even in the poorest

IT IS THE BEST TO BE ALIVE.

countries that used to be known as the third world, people who would have died in their forties just half a century ago can now expect to carry on into their sixties.

Look at infant mortality, a constant pre-occupation of those who study and worry about population health. At the opening of the twentieth century, the overall rate of infant mortality in Britain was a frightening 150 deaths per thousand live births. By the time of the Second World War, it was still above 50 infant deaths per thousand births. By 1996, it had fallen to below six.

Back in 1900, in England and Wales, a total of 142 912 babies died in their first year of life. In 1990, the figure was 3390. However paranoid parents might be today about the slightest threat to the safety of our children, we no longer have to worry about smallpox, polio, influenza epidemics or other scourges of childhood that were rampant during the infancy of the century. Life and death remain far from fair, and infant deaths are still relatively more common in poorer families. But the most striking thing is how uncommon they are now in any section of society.

These changes reflect the tremendous advances made in society, science and technology through the century—advances which have transformed the way that we live as well as postponing the day that we die. A lot of attention is currently focused on poverty in Britain, and the widening income gap between the richest and the poorest in society. It is quite right for these studies to use a relative measure of poverty rather than an absolute one; just because nobody starves to death in Britain, that does not make it a classless society. But, as Michael Fitzpatrick examines on page 18 of this issue of *LM*, the fashionable tendency to over-relativise poverty can blind us to the impressive gains in the quality of life that almost everybody in the West has experienced in the modern age.

Even many of those now categorised as poor in British and American social surveys have access to consumer goods and services that were beyond the dreams of the rich a century ago. This is not to deny the continuing problems caused by inequality and inadequate incomes. But anybody who doubts the complete superiority of the modern way of life over its forerunners cannot have watched *1900 House* on TV. Allowed only what would have been available to them a century ago, the 1990s family in the programme struggled to cope with the everyday hardships of life as it was back then. As so often, it was the little things that made the difference; never mind cable television or the internet, the woman forced to play the Victorian housewife found it next to impossible to cope without shampoo and tampons.

Laws and values, too, have been revolutionised over the past hundred years. There is plenty of racial tension in a society like ours. But those who complain that racism is getting worse and worse might like to reflect that, a century ago, words like racism and imperialism were still being used in a positive sense, to define the self-conscious identity of the British elite. Women in Britain were not kept in place by a glass ceiling so much as a concrete lid; they did not have the vote, nor any prospect of equal pay or the right to divorce and legalised abortion. The most celebrated homosexual of the age, Oscar Wilde, was imprisoned rather than knighted (like Elton John) or canonised (like George Michael). Things sure ain't what they used to be, and let us thank humanity for that.

None of this is intended as an excuse for naive optimism. The path of progress certainly has not been, as the Stalinists promised it would be, 'Onwards and onwards and upwards and upwards', or 'Forward ever, backward never'. Yet in our darkest moments today, it is easy enough to spot the

T OF TIMES EVER.

seeds of further positive developments (even if they are genetically modified). The lesson of history, and perhaps of the past century in particular, is that resolute societies can continually discover the capacity to solve problems and turn another corner.

The irony is that, more than at any other time, the barrier to human progress now is the backwardness of humanity. Many of the technological and scientific initiatives already in place could help the twenty-first century to far outstrip the remarkable achievements of the twentieth. All that is lacking is the vision and the will to make it happen.

In contrast to the forward-looking mood

of the past are being put to question in the present.

What, for instance, is the dominant reaction to the impressive way in which life expectancy has been extended? It has encouraged a new wave of alarmist concerns about 'overpopulation'. The growth of the world's population from 1.5 billion at the start of the twentieth century to six billion at its end should surely be a cause for celebration, a testimony to the incremental growth of humanity's capital—especially given that the productivity of the global food industry has grown even faster. Instead, it becomes the pretext for a panic.

Such pessimism now shapes the political agenda. The nostalgia men of the old right spend more time looking over their shoulders than in front of their noses. By comparison, New Labour and its supporters find it easy to look dynamic and positive; thus David Aaronovitch of the *Independent* can have fun laying into the conservative 'cult of miserablism'. Yet in truth New Labour has its own downbeat politics of low expectations, expressed in the language of the precautionary principle and summed up by chancellor Gordon Brown's bizarre obsession with containing economic growth and offsetting a 'boom', for fear that it would lead to 'bust'.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, many identified the primary barrier to human progress as the capitalist free market, and the constraints imposed by the subordination of need to profit. At the century's end, things look a little different. Capitalism may well still be a restrictive system. Yet the pervasive culture of restraint, the over-anxious instinct to hold back, means that we are not even being allowed to test the system's limits.

Some of the most powerful cultural trends of our time, from the belief that people are incompetent therapy-cases to the economic bad habit of under-investment

IN OUR DARKEST MOMENTS TODAY, WE CAN SPOT THE SEEDS OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS (EVEN IF THEY ARE GENETICALLY MODIFIED)

in which humanity entered the twentieth century, the cautious climate of our times is not conducive to boldly going anywhere. The dominant 'isms' of the past century—capitalism and socialism—represented competing claims on, and visions of, the future. Both ideologies have since been exhausted, and replaced in the public mind by a motley collection of new isms—pessimism, cynicism, fatalism—which regard the future largely as a risk to take out insurance against. This is the mood which has led many to view the approach of the year 2000 less as a milestone than a millstone.

The problem goes well beyond a general loss of faith in the future. Even the achieve-

Or how do the great and the good respond to the dramatic increase in the world's wealth over the past century? By spreading doom and gloom about 'over-consumption'—a technical term for the preposterous notion that people in the West have too much of everything. A major United Nations report, published in September, warned that time was running out to save the planet, unless the developed world cut its use of resources—by a mere 90 per cent. The archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, mounted his national pulpit in November to demand that we in Britain must learn to live 'more simply' in the twenty-first century. Bring back the 1900 house!

point to the possibility that we might waste the golden opportunities which are coming society's way.

I did not want to mention the Millennium Dome, but it seems a fitting symbol of the century's end. Awesome on the outside, yet effectively empty within, the Dome is a magnificent technical achievement with a hole where its soul should be. Designed as the stage for an historic celebration, it has become instead the platform for a national carnival of breast-beating.

Enough of this nonsense. To paraphrase a man who built pyramids rather than domes to mark his place in history: look upon our works, ye mighty, and stop weeping. ●

LM Online

WALLABY FREE?

What a weekend for Australia. The Wallabies won the Rugby World Cup in the early hours of Sunday 7 November, and the nation could have woken up from its collective hangover freed from one of the most anti-democratic institutions in the world. But it didn't.

As an anti-monarchy Pom living in Brisbane, I watched gloomily over recent months as it became more and more predictable that Australia would vote 'No' to severing its ties with the queen. The public has little particular attachment to HRH, and for a long time polls have shown that most Australians are in favour of a republic. Fervent monarchists like 74-year old grandmother Gilda Trigarbenvuti, banned from polling booths in Brisbane after turning up to cast her vote in a Union Jack dress (no advertising allowed inside polling stations) are few and far between: one poll even indicated that only one in 10 of those voting 'No' actually wanted the queen to be head of state.



So why did republican Australia not vote for a republic when it had the chance? Quite simply: the voters didn't like the republic on offer. Prime minister John Howard proposed the model of a president chosen by himself and approved of by two thirds of both Houses of Parliament. Not so much throwing off the shackles of an unelected monarch, then, as a backhand way of ushering in a new unelected appointee. Consequently, the No campaign was an unholy alliance between 'direct electionists' (republicans who believe in a president elected by Aus citizens) and the dreary group

Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy. And their message was not 'up with their queen', but 'down with our politicians'.

Their joint advertising slogan 'Vote no to the politicians' republic' said it all. This was a vote against politicians, and there was certainly nothing radical about it. A letter from a *Courier-Mail* newspaper reader sums up the prevailing sentiment: '(It's) a referendum that...gives all Australians a unique opportunity to vote on issues that don't matter a damn. Changes that affect daily life such as the introduction of a GST (VAT) are decided by politicians only. Make this an "I hate politicians and their elitist mates" referendum and vote "No".'

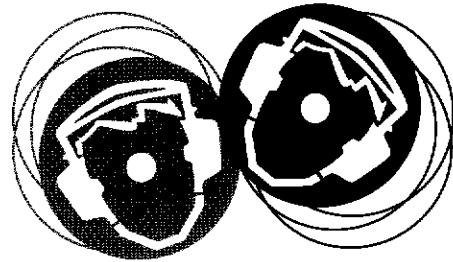
The No vote was not a positive endorsement of the queen's rule. Instead it expressed a more modern anti-democratic sentiment than old-fashioned monarchism. The scorn poured on elected politicians reflects public alienation from the entire system of representative democracy. And as a letter to *The Australian* newspaper said: 'Politicians are in government because voters elected them. If politicians cannot be trusted then voters by definition cannot be trusted.' In emphasising the irrelevance of politics, the campaigners emphasise the irrelevance of their own views and decisions.

But then, do you blame them? Getting rid of the queen—who has never been elected to head either Australia or Britain—is one thing. Replacing her with John Howard's pet politician is another thing entirely. That the Australian government did not see fit to offer people a genuine republic—only a political stitch-up—indicates a certain contempt for the electorate. That the electorate chose an ageing granny with no democratic authority over its own politicians shows just how mutual this feeling is.

Liz Frayn cfrayn@hotmail.com

I WANT MY MP3

The record industry is getting hot under the collar over the latest technology that allows internet users to exchange near-CD quality music over the net. The audio format MP3 allows the compression of files so that they can be reduced to roughly an eleventh of their original size, without any perceptible loss in



sound quality. Music which once took many hours to download can be done in minutes.

Sections of the music distribution industry allege that MP3 encourages piracy and results in loss of revenue. Attempts have been made to outlaw the use of the format altogether, with lawsuits issued against MP3 players such as Diamond Multimedia System's Rio, MP3 search engines and websites containing MP3 material. According to industry figures in Britain, over 30 MP3 sites have been shut down. In the rest of Europe more than 2000 sites have been removed from the net.

The real reason for the industry's attack is that it fears the changing environment of the new technology and losing control of music distribution. For decades the recording industry has been able to lock its talent into

PAGEMASTER: BRENDAN O'NEILL
(brendan@mail.informinc.co.uk)



of the times

'A young boy, probably only 10 years old, came alongside us and started running his finger across his throat. It reminded me of that appalling scene in *Schindler's List* when the women are being herded on to a train, unsure of where they are going, and a little boy does the same gesture. We knew we were not going to die but it horrified me that such a young kid should be involved in that intimidation, even if much of it was tongue in cheek'

Chelsea footballer Frank Leboeuf reflects on the horrors of travelling by coach to Galatasaray's stadium in Turkey

'Of course I know what they are. I've seen them on television' The late Lord Whitelaw, on overhearing his Special Branch minder remark that he wouldn't know what fish fingers were

Thirteen-year old Christopher Beamon was jailed in Texas for writing a Halloween story at school, in which he wrote about shooting his teacher and fellow pupils

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contractual agreements, knowing that artists had to sign up with a distributor. The internet changes this. But if the existing music distribution industry is to be destroyed by progress in technological development, so be it. For too long the big five record companies have held a stranglehold over new artists and their audiences.

If the record industry has its way in wiping out MP3 then it will be a victory for the sectional business interests of record companies over technological innovation. It is symptomatic of these times that new solutions to old problems, such as pushing huge amounts of data through a telephone wire, should be greeted not with celebration, but by demanding criminal sanctions.

Alan Docherty is news editor of Internet Freedom.
<http://www.netfreedom.org>



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The what's NOT on guide

FIGHTING TALK: Hollywood Reporter editor Anita Busch has called the film *Fight Club* 'the kind of product that law-makers should target for being socially irresponsible', while Bill Clinton is threatening to legislate against violence in films. He is backed up by the Beastie Boys (perhaps they're bored with freeing Tibet) and the National Rifle Association (for whom Hollywood is a convenient scapegoat in the wake of the Columbine massacre). British film censors cut violent sections from two of the film's scenes, and replaced Helena Bonham Carter's line 'I want to have your abortion', delivered during a sex scene with Brad Pitt, with the more palatable 'I haven't been fucked like this since grade school'.

CRUCIFIED: A poster featuring Jesus Christ with an orange slice halo and the caption 'Jesus was a vegetarian', promoting People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, has been scrapped in Belfast. The Catholic Church has claimed that the poster was offensive but also inaccurate, since Jesus ate meat at the Passover.

MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CENSOR: John Cleese has revealed that all material relating to train crashes was cut from the BBC's thirtieth anniversary Monty Python night, to avoid causing offence after the recent Paddington crash. He explained that the team 'always specialised in bad taste but there are some jokes you could never do'. Presumably, gently baiting Christians with *The Life of Brian* is as far as he will go.

BLACK MAGIC: The South Carolina Board of Education is just one of several bodies threatening to remove the bestselling Harry Potter books from American schools, on the grounds that they 'have a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect and sheer evil'. One shudders to think what they make of the Brothers Grimm.

● **Compiled by Sandy Starr**

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BUGWATCH

Now the year 2000 is finally upon us, the vast majority of people are confident that the effects of the millennium bug will be minor. In response to this show of extreme non-concern the government has decided to send each and every household a brochure assuring us that not much will go wrong. We know!!!

Perhaps the government fears accusations of complacency, and thinks that it should be seen to be doing something. Or maybe the Y2K bug is one of the 'forces of conservatism' and must therefore be attacked and cajoled on principle—even when it is on its back with its legs waving in the air.

But really New Labour seems to think that the biggest Y2K bug is now in our heads and that our propensity to panic is the main problem. This bizarre second-order panic—their worry is our worrying—is the main justification for constantly restating 'don't get all your money out of the bank, don't hoard food, don't worry about planes falling out of the sky, your toaster will probably not kill you...', and so on.

The assumption seems to be that any news—or even rumours—of Y2K problems will set us off into a survivalist shopping/hoarding frenzy. More likely is that the main effect of news of a worthwhile Y2K hitch would be the welcome relief of media tension—the press has been waiting over two years without even one decent story.

There will, no doubt, be some real Y2K problems on 1 January. Thankfully people's adaptability will ensure these are resolved quickly and efficiently. Nations and corporations that have not obsessed on Y2K preparedness will overall be better off than those that have run off in search of bug-free guarantees. In the meantime, I will join the rest of the public and be relaxed about Y2K. I intend to get very, very relaxed.

Finally a disclaimer. If you haven't made a copy of your valuable computer data and you lose it, don't blame me! Not keeping a backup of your files is asking for it any day of the millenniums.

Mark Beachill is a computer programmer
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'Can you put that in layman's terms, bearing in mind that we are in Preston?' Richard Henriques QC, questioning an expert witness

Bournemouth councillors will inspect the sexually explicit French film *Romance* and report their decision on whether to allow it to be shown in the town's two cinemas—neither of which has any intention of showing it

'I have travelled all over the globe and to me Barnsley is the finest little town in the world' Dickie Bird, professional 'character' and retired cricket umpire

'Salad cream is one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century' Michelin star chef Marco Pierre White (of Leeds)

'He has got grey hair, curly with a grey beard, grey like dressy thing and he does miracles' Natasha (?) describes Tony Blair to the BBC

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TABOOS

Brendan O'Neill investigates what's behind Ireland's unhealthy obsession with paedophile priests

'The child abuse capital of the world'

'The abusers have poisoned and distorted society. The poison goes from generation to generation.' Pdraig O'Morain, social affairs correspondent for the *Irish Times*, sees child abuse as Ireland's national plague. His solution is not only to punish the abusers and treat the abused, but to treat the whole of Irish society. 'We need to understand that it is not only about them, the ones who were abused, but it is also about us, whose institutions and customs have been warped by abuse.'

Combating the emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children has become Ireland's obsession. Since the collapse of the Fianna Fail/Labour Party coalition government in November 1994, following revelations which implicated the Catholic Church, the judiciary and the government in a cover-up involving a paedophile priest, Irish leaders have made battling child abuse their priority. In May, prime minister Bertie Ahern apologised 'on behalf of the state to the victims of childhood abuse, for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain'. His government launched the Commission on Child Abuse, a 'healing forum' for victims to 'tell their story', with a £4 million budget and a mandate to investigate the 'causes, nature and extent of physical and sexual abuse of children in institutions and other places'.

Not so long ago, nobody in Ireland mentioned child abuse—now, politicians and commentators want to talk about nothing else. Television documentaries, like RTE's *States of Fear*, detail the abuse of hundreds of children in state orphanages, while newspapers are full of horror stories about paedophile priests and a nun, Sister Dominic (Nora Wall), who in July became the first woman in Ireland to be convicted of rape. (Wall was acquitted by the Court of Appeal four days later, due to questionable and uncorroborated evidence.) Child abuse has gone from being Ireland's 'dirty little secret' to the topic of dinner party conversation across Dublin 4. But who benefits from this new national sport of hunt the abuser?

Much of the fight against child abuse looks like an attack on the Catholic Church. The Catholic hierarchy has been rocked by a stream of accusations about the physical and sexual abuse of children by priests and nuns—like the allegations in November that a former archbishop of Dublin had a penchant for seducing schoolboys. The church certainly has a lot to answer for, having long used

its power in Ireland to institutionalise repression, stifle dissent and spread guilt and shame. In Galway in the 1950s and 60s, my father was taught by monks who would punch boys who deviated from 'the way', and my mother by nuns who would dig their fingernails into children's heads until they bled. Ireland truly was a 'priest-ridden' country, a stymied, bottled-up society.

New Ireland is bursting out of the straitjacket—'speaking out' and kicking up a stink about past abuses. But far from being a rational critique of Catholic domination, the new crusade against abuse is merely an attack on the church's worst excesses and the behaviour of some priests and nuns. Even worse, the national obsession with child abuse threatens to replace Catholic domination with something just as irrational and superstitious—a new religious fervour, with its own stigmatisation and witch-hunts.

At first glance, Ireland's child abuse figures might appear to justify the obsession. In July, the North-Eastern Health Board reported a 35 percent rise in allegations of child abuse, from 1178 in 1997 to 1598 in 1998. In September it was revealed that there had been a 29 percent rise in allegations of sexual abuse in the Midland Health Board area—a total of 227 allegations involving 240 children. According to Peter Savage, chairman of Louth County Council, 'Unless the root cause is tackled, in 10 years' time we will have a horrendous situation. We are trying to hold back a tide'.

But on closer inspection, things are not so black and white. The headline figures fail to take into account the dramatic fall in substantiation—there may be many more reports of child abuse, but fewer of such allegations can be confirmed. The rate of substantiated cases of sexual abuse has fallen from 57 percent to 31 percent over the past 10 years; in some areas it has fallen to 13 percent, meaning that one in eight alleged cases of sexual abuse is confirmed. Of the 227 allegations of sexual abuse in the midland area which shocked the nation in September, 26 were ruled to be unfounded, 105 inconclusive, 69 were still under investigation, and 27 were confirmed. So in an area which has 65,000 children, there were 27 confirmed incidents of sexual abuse in 1998. This hardly constitutes a 'national plague'.

At a time when the flimsiest of evidence can be used to substantiate abuse in Ireland, the problems of substantiation are striking. The figures suggest that Ireland is not plagued

by serial child abusers and evil priests, but that there is certainly more suspicion and allegation than ever before. As Pat Donnelly of the North-Eastern Health Board admitted, 'I believe it is not that there is more child abuse nowadays, but that there is more reporting of it'. And it appears that it is not only incidents of abuse that are being reported, but also concerns, suspicions and unfounded accusations.

The government has helped to open the floodgates to allegations of abuse. Sensitive to accusations that previous governments tried to 'silence the abused', the current Fianna Fail/Progressive Democrats coalition government has introduced a raft of measures to make it easier for people to 'speak out' about abuse. In January 1999, the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act relaxed Ireland's stringent libel laws by granting immunity to those who report concerns about child abuse—so those who falsely accuse somebody of being an abuser (which can have deadly repercussions in zero-tolerant Ireland) can no longer be sued for slander. Child abuse is the only thing you can speak freely about in censorious Ireland. In May, the government amended the Statute of Limitation laws so that an adult can pursue legal action for abuse they claim to have suffered as a child, however long ago. And in September, the minister of state with responsibility for children, Frank Fahey, issued 'the most powerful guidelines yet' on reporting abuse, emphasising people's 'corporate duty and responsibility' to raise the alarm when they suspect abuse. Kieran McGrath, editor of *Irish Social Worker*, says that the guidelines 'stop just short of enforcing mandatory reporting'.

In a country where you can make wild accusations without being sued, where you can wait until you are 45 before taking action for abuse suffered as a three-year old, and where the government implores you to report anything untoward, it is not surprising that allegations of child abuse have soared. If Ireland is the 'child abuse capital of the world', it is because everybody everywhere is on the lookout for perverted adults and degraded children.

You don't have to be a friend of the abusers or a nervous priest to be chilled by Ireland's obsession with child abuse. The crusaders against abuse have drawn a line between good and evil as rigidly as the church ever did. And anybody who crosses the line is turned into a pariah. In February 1998,



EVERYBODY IS
ON THE LOOKOUT
FOR PERVERTED
ADULTS
AND DEGRADED
CHILDREN

GPs were lambasted when they suggested that strict guidelines on the reporting of abuse might undermine their relationship with patients. The Irish College of General Practitioners reasonably argued that it was unethical for them to betray patients' confidences by reporting everything that hinted of abuse. The *Irish Times* hit back that it was 'simply not acceptable' for doctors to 'take a back seat and let the abuse run its course'. Now GPs feel pressurised to report everything from nappy rash to bruising as potential abuse, seriously undermining

confidentiality between doctor and patient.

In October, the Eastern Health Board reported that it was 'increasingly difficult to recruit social workers', as college graduates fear getting caught up in the child abuse web. Many childcare assistants and social workers employed at Madonna House, which was closed down in 1995 following revelations of abuse, have found it impossible to get jobs. In April, the prestigious sports body Swim Ireland was publicly humiliated after an investigation into two of its trainers—now all sports bodies have to appoint somebody to keep an eye out for abuse and to liaise with the police and the local health board on children at risk. Any health, teaching, training or sports body which does not do its bit in the war against abuse quickly finds itself hauled up before the media and accused by the government of failing in its 'corporate responsibility' to challenge abuse.

Despite the destructive consequences, the crusade against child abuse continues as an attempt to define the new Ireland. As *Journalist* Oliver O'Connor pointed out in an article headlined 'Out with the old state, in with the rule of law': 'The traumas of...child abuse and public health negligence are the uncovering of the failures and hypocrisy of what is now an older generation of leaders. Their revenge and hate are mixed with justice and righteous anger in the opposing sides to the generation that is fighting its last battle: the battle to shape history.' (*Irish Times*, 1 October 1999) New Ireland may not be sure what it stands for or where it is going, but one thing is certain: it is not old Ireland, that backward, priest-ridden, child-abusing country from the past.

Despite the government's promise to bring about a 'child-friendly society', the message to Irish children is clear: don't trust priests, who do nasty things to altar boys; don't trust nuns, who hold down little girls so they can be raped; don't trust sports coaches, who will spy on you in the changing rooms; don't trust teachers, who will keep you behind to abuse you; don't trust your parents, because, even in Ireland, 'most abuse still takes place in the home'. This is where the new religious fervour of 'speaking out' appears even worse than the stifling Catholic repression of old. At least those children holed up in industrial homes and filthy orphanages could leave when they were 16 and get on with their lives. Today's children are being taught a lifelong lesson in distrust, with no release, except to grow into cautious adults well versed in the ways of 'appropriate touch' and 'abuse awareness', in a country with no higher vision than to hunt and humiliate those accused of child abuse.

What was that about 'poisoning and distorting' society? ●

'Let there be respect for the Earth
peace for its people
love in our lives
delight in the good
forgiveness of past wrongs
and from now on a new start.'

This wretched piece of doggerel is what the Christian churches want us to recite as the clock strikes midnight on 31 December. When Christ was asked by what two commandments we should live, he replied that we should love God and love our neighbours as ourselves. While lines 2-6 of the churches' dirge give us a watery rehash of the second commandment, line one drops the love of God altogether, and calls on us instead to respect the Earth. It would now seem that when the churches want to find a common ground, they reach not to heaven and His divine presence, but stoop to Mother Earth, mumbling the pieties of environmentalism.

In substance, Christianity has capitulated to the New Age, while outwardly it preserves the appearance of institutional continuity. Go into any church of any denomination and listen to the Sunday sermon and you will almost certainly hear not an explication of Christian doctrine and its application to life, but a hotchpotch of New Age wisdom which the priest or minister evidently feels will ingratiate him to the congregation. The churches seem to view their own doctrine not as the unshakeable core of their belief, but as a set of coupons which can be traded in for the promise (usually unfulfilled) of a hike in popularity.

Senior Church of England theologians (if that is the right word nowadays) discuss the implications of attributing souls to animals, a concept which flagrantly violates the Judaeo-Christian belief in the uniquely spiritual character of man. When I popped into Canterbury Cathedral some time ago I thought they had already come to a decision on this, as a service for animal rights was in progress. The general disregard for doctrine is evident in Pope John Paul II's appointment of a commission to investigate whether Mary (the Blessed Virgin) should be made co-redemptrix of the human race. If approved, this would mean either that there would be not three but four persons in one God, or that Christ and His mother would jointly hold third place, while all the prayers which refer to 'Our Saviour' would have to be amended to specify which saviour they were referring to, Christ or His mother. This mess is the outcome of the broader strategy by which the Catholic Church has tried to strengthen its position among women and in the third world by playing up its superstitious mariolatry.

'Thank God for sex', church leaders must often reflect. These days there is nothing like a hard line on sex to sustain the illusion of an unyielding attachment to dogma. You could be forgiven for thinking that the Catholic Church came into existence some time around 1966, since its happy-go-lucky religious principles contrast so starkly with its tough stance on abortion and contraception, two tedious subjects on which neither the Bible nor the church fathers had anything much to say. The Church of England is engaged in a long-running battle with a small eccentric group of activists over the church's attitude towards homosexuality. This dispute is likely to run for a long time, since it is such great fun for both sides, puffing up their conceit with the illusion that they are engaged in some great battle of principle. In the meantime, the Catholic hierarchy sends its clergy for counselling with a view to helping them redirect their misspent sexual energies, and the C of E plans to have squads of counsellors available on new year's eve to help people cope with the spiritual trauma of no longer living in the twentieth century. The churches could save themselves a lot of bother if they got rid of their troublesome priests and ministers altogether, and hired professional counsellors to hear confessions, heal the sick, administer the last rites and generally give pastoral care.

In their readiness to ditch any religious principle for a bit of New Age wisdom, we are witnessing not just a shift in emphasis but the abandonment of the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition. This shift reflects not so much the downgrading of God as a degrading of humanity. If Christianity and atheism shared a properly violent hostility towards each other, they did at least occupy the same moral universe. At the centre of that universe was the question of man and his nature. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition only the deity could give moral meaning to man's presence in the world. For atheists, the meaning of man was to be found in man himself.

Christian morality was flawed because while it gave the individual free will and an inner life, it simultaneously took them away by making God the final arbiter of our destiny. With only a qualified free will, the sense of moral responsibility is also qualified. The moral development of the Catholic cannot be very profound if every time he does something wrong he can go to the priest, say he's sorry and start again with a clean slate. In Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular, moral force is experienced as external coercion, rather than the outcome of an inner development through freedom. For the atheist, only freedom can develop the moral sense, while for the Christian, moral authority comes ultimately from without. By denying man his full freedom, Christianity is imperfectly moral in the first place. Only atheism allows for the fully moral man who faces unflinchingly the

NEITHER GOD NOR

Mark Ryan on

consequences of his own actions and the inner turmoil and resolution that brings with it. For the atheist, life is terrible, in the good sense that he alone is answerable for all his actions. This moral solitude deepens the inner spiritual life. Hamlet is the archetype of the moral man who must face life without God; indeed, the whole power of tragedy comes from the absence of any external redeemer who might rescue the subject from the anguish of his decisions.

If Christianity put a limit on man's moral nature, however, New Age religion dispenses with it altogether. To the extent that there is a question of man, it is a purely practical one of waste disposal, of how to minimise the polluting impact of man on his environment—how to respect the Earth. This is symbolised by the Church of England's suggestion to bury the dead in biodegradable cardboard boxes in the forest floor. The New Age is a slave religion in which the only obligation placed on man is to adapt to his environment. Man cannot have a moral dimension because he does not exist as a moral subject independently of his environment.

A moral slave lives a carefree life because all the difficult decisions as to his own existence and destiny are taken out of his hands. His concern is not with affirming his own freedom but with fitting in with what is going on around him. However, because he has no experience of the *terribilità* of freedom he is also a kind of moral monster who can make decisions with the lightest of intentions.

When we look at how the churches have moved towards the New Age, the most immediate symptom is how demoralised Christianity has become over the past 30 years. Christian morality can only express itself through externally imposed concepts of good and evil. But evil seems to be quietly dropping off the Christian agenda altogether. Peace, harmony and happiness is what the churches now offer, known more pithily as

IF CHRISTIANITY PUT
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DISPENSES WITH IT
ALTOGETHER

Nirvana to New Ager. The Church of England has officially rebranded hell as 'a place of non-being', which can be taken to mean it does not exist. If the Catholic Church still officially believes in hell, the devil, and so on, most of its clergy have quietly dropped the subject for fear that it will be off-putting for people. But without good and evil, heaven and hell, Christianity is a morality-free religion. In religious terms, if man is not faced in his life with these choices, then he is no longer a moral being.

As for the moral lightness with which church leaders now tread, there is no better example than the pope's decision to apologise to almost everybody with whom the church has ever had dealings. The apology has become a sign of one's initiation into the rites of the New Age. Any politician, businessman, police chief or religious leader who wants to signal that he is part of the New Order must find something to apologise for, and do it with the maximum of pumped-up emotion. But this sort of apology is wholly immoral. What the apologist is doing is exonerating himself from any responsibility for his own actions.

The pope is in no position to apologise to anybody for the past actions of the Catholic Church. The Crusades, the Inquisition, anti-Semitism, these were all important moments in the history of Catholicism. Just as the moral individual must live with the consequences of his actions, so a moral institution must accept the consequences of its past actions and not brush them all off with a lighthearted apology. The immorality of the pope's apology is revealed by the fact that at the very time that he is preparing to say sorry for anti-Semitism he is determined to push through the canonisation of Eugenio Pacelli, who as Pope Pius XII held the See of Peter during the Second World War. Pacelli was always suspected of harbouring sympathies at least for Hitler's anti-Semitism. Recent revelations suggest, however, that his attitude to the Holocaust itself might have been ambiguous. He made no effort, for example, to obstruct the SS as they rounded up the Jews of Rome for deportation. To canonise such a man while offering apologies for centuries of anti-Semitism would under normal circumstances be unthinkable. New Age morality, however, allows for this sort of thing. Just as New Age man can change his identity from one day to the next, so the New Age institution can erase whatever parts of its history it no longer finds convenient.

Generations of atheists and free thinkers assumed that Christianity would eventually collapse under the pressures of reason and freedom. It is a shocking reflection on our times that instead it is metamorphosing into a form so primitive as to make its earlier contributions to man's spiritual life look rich and profound. A new start indeed.



PHOTO: DAVID COWLARO

how the churches are being brought down to Earth

MAN

'I DON'T BELIEVE IN *THAT* GOD'

Richard Holloway, bishop of Edinburgh, talked to James Panton about chilling out in church

all it "God", call it "cosmic ethic", or call it "nothing". You can't prove the "nothingness" to me any more than I can demonstrate the "beingness" to you. I've just committed myself to the [existence] of meaning as opposed to ultimate unmeaning. With a faith as woolly as this it's not surprising that Richard Holloway, bishop of Edinburgh and primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, has made enemies of fundamentalist African preachers and diehard conservative men of the cloth.

But does the 65-year old deserve his reputation as the most controversial churchman in the UK? His recent book *Godless Morality: keeping religion out of ethics* may not be what you expect from the representatives of God on Earth. Yet Holloway only speaks aloud what the mainstream Anglican Church (of which his is the Scottish branch) is trying not to think.

Much of Holloway's notoriety has come from his rejection of the church's traditional attitudes to people's personal lives. A proponent of gay rights, Holloway doesn't see how young people's 'shagging' around can be dismissed as immoral behaviour, and he does not see what right he has to tell people that they can't smoke hash or look at porn if that's their thing. On the ordination of women and the rights of homosexuals—two of

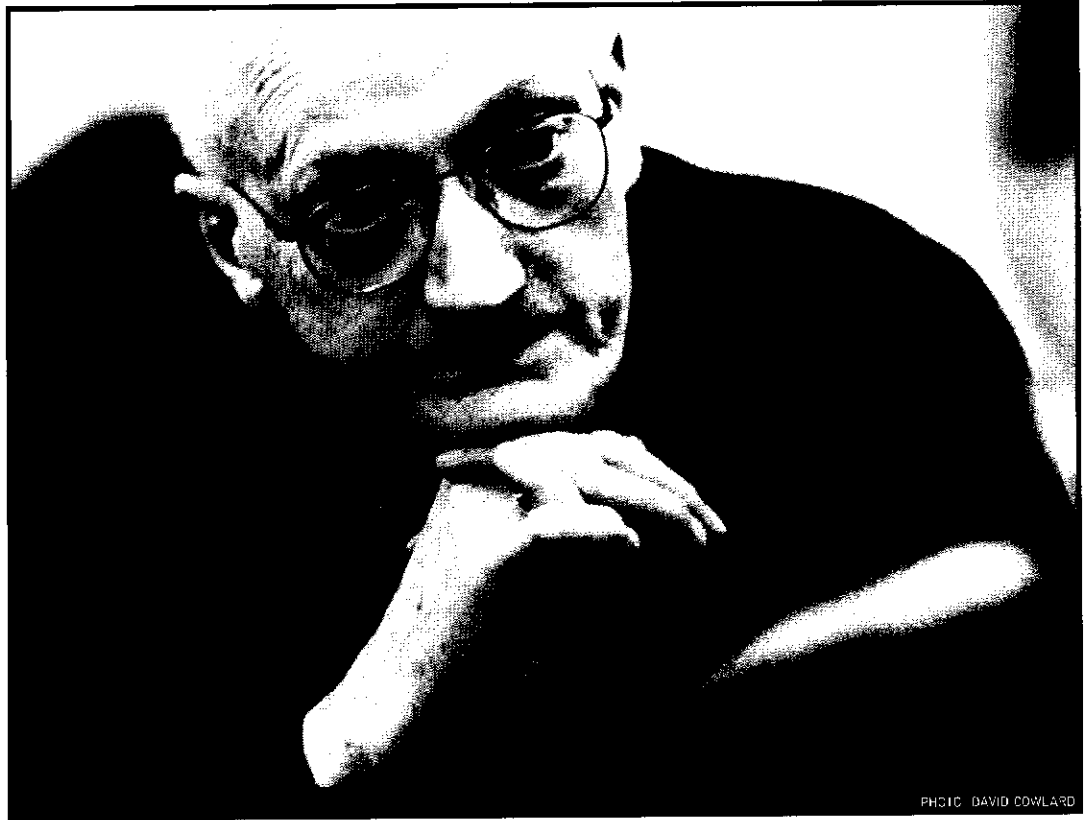


PHOTO: DAVID COWLARD

Holloway's particular bugbears—the Church of England seems unable to maintain its traditional stance, and even Archbishop George Carey can plead nothing stronger than that we all ought to be nice to one another. Holloway says, 'moral leadership is not saying, as far as I'm concerned, who should sleep with who. It's not telling mature

people how to negotiate the complexities of their private lives'. But is that so different to the liberal vagueries now uttered by the mainstream church, discussed by Mark Ryan on page 10?

What worries the traditionalists is that Holloway, unlike Carey, seems willing to take the hands-off approach to personal morality to its logical

conclusion. Not for him the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God who must be obeyed: 'I don't believe in *that* God', says Holloway. 'I don't think that's intrinsic to my way of being a Christian. When Christianity started to develop it inherited a pre-Copernican worldview: heaven "up there", Earth in the middle and hell "down below". But there's been

Vatican on its knees by Dominic Standish

Rather than celebrating the official two-thousandth birthday of Jesus Christ, Pope John Paul II seems likely to spend the festivities apologising.

The Holy See only recently announced the establishment of a joint Jewish/Catholic commission to examine archives relating to the wartime relationship of Pope Pius XII to Hitler, Mussolini and the Holocaust. Come the millennium, the pope will delve further into the history books, and apologise publicly for the killing of Protestants, Jews and others during the medieval Inquisition.

That the pope himself chooses the biggest Christian celebration in 1000 years to apologise for the Inquisition shows just how insecure the

Catholic Church has become. The idea that the Catholic Church has a responsibility to impose its faith on others by any means necessary has been central to a 2000-year tradition. But now, such absolutes are out of date. Catholicism has so little faith in itself that it can only cringe at a legacy of forcing others to believe in its doctrines.

Saying 'sorry' for the Inquisition is apologising for claiming Catholicism to be the one true faith. Isn't that taking the Catholic spirit of self-denial just a little too far? Today's pope is so far away from the spirit of the Inquisition that he recognises alternative roads to salvation, like Judaism and Islam. Even fundamental concepts like heaven and hell are being reviewed. Hell is rarely featured in modern sermons compared

a revolution in our understanding of many things, including the meaning of "up there" and "down there"—what is "up" in a quantum universe?

Sounds like he is on to something. The theological metaphysics of bygone days make no sense of the world at the end of the twentieth century. But haven't atheists been on to that point for quite a while now? Holloway shrugs off the challenge. 'The real danger for believers is not atheism, it's idolatry—making absolute that which isn't.' In Holloway's view, it seems that the fundamentalists of his own faith are more of a problem than the secular heathens. Lucky for his colleagues that Holloway does not believe in hell.

In Holloway's vision, the church should be anything you

THE REAL DANGER IS IDOLATRY

want it to be. 'I despair at the kinds of religious systems that are "systems", because there are no perfect systems—you always have to keep examining the premises', he says. So we can use the metaphors of religion, but we do not need to interpret the texts too literally. Where this all leads, for Holloway, is to a downplaying of the spiritual aspect of religion, and to an

emphasis on how human society behaves. As a result, he ends up sounding more like a sociologist than a representative of God.

In attempting to make its ideology more palatable to modern times, the church is having to ditch more and more of its core principles. And if you follow Holloway's line of argument, God will surely not be far behind. Why spread the word of the Lord, when there are so many other things to give praise for?

'I'm an evangelist about movies, too', enthuses Holloway. 'If I see a good movie, like *The Blair Witch Project* or *Shakespeare in Love*, I tell my friends they must go see it.' But even here, he is keen not to seem too judgemental. 'I'm not telling them they're damned if they don't. It's just that I want to share my excitement with them. The amazing thing about human beings is that we make these extraordinary discoveries about ourselves and the world, there's a depth to us—baboons don't do it—there's some strange kind of Geist in us that makes us interested in our own meaning. To me, that's what it's all about.'

So as a 'Christian', what about the two-thousandth birthday of the Son of God? 'Jesus is one of the great figures of world history. It's worth taking time to remember the birth of this extraordinary man', he says, sounding as if he could be talking about Shakespeare or Che Guevara. 'But the Millennium Dome, I really don't have an opinion on. I don't think I'll be going to the spirit level—is that what it's called? No—I'm not too fussed about that.'

with the past. A leading Roman Catholic magazine, *Civiltà Cattolica*, which is vetted by the Vatican prior to publication, recently declared that the image of hell as a place where souls are tormented by demons in burning flames is misplaced. Hell is no longer even a physical place, but a state of being where those who have chosen to do evil are condemned to isolation from God. It doesn't sound so bad, does it?

There have been numerous statements by priests expressing their embarrassment when mentioning heaven and hell. But what is the point of going to confession and pouring out your sins if there is no fear of hell? Maybe this is one reason why the practice of going to confession has declined so rapidly in recent years. In Italy, 60 percent of Catholics recently stated in a survey that they do not believe in hell. Meanwhile, the percentage of Italians attending Sunday mass dropped from 70 percent during the immediate postwar years to 25 percent by the mid-1980s. Whatever the pope might say in December, it seems that many Italians will have better things to do than listen carefully.

Measuring out our lives with lists

by Alan Hudson

At this time of year it is impossible to avoid lists—best of, worst of, and all the bizarre categories in between. This year, of course, the outbreak of lists has reached epidemic proportions. The arrival of the big year is an opportunity to combine the twin preoccupations of making lists and dividing history up into bite-sized portions—a set of cue cards for the

Lists are absurd because they reduce all human life to a vast common denominator. If it does not appear in a list it probably did not happen and it certainly does not matter. But they can be instructive. The significance lies not in the list itself but in the preoccupation with making them.

When we are bombarded with information, yet there is little sense of purpose or judgement in politics, culture or art, making a list is a comfortable way of making sense of the data smog that we inhabit. You may not understand what's going on around you, and may never be able to say or celebrate in the here and now, but at least you can make a list.

Here are some lists culled from browsing the magazine racks at a Nashville bookstore. How about 'Irish Americans of the century'—including Grace Kelly, John Wayne, William Faulkner and Ronald Reagan. Or my favourite, *Guitar One's* 'Best riffs of the century'—including progression from Segovia to Ozzy Osbourne. What happened to Neil Young's opening riff to *Cinnamon Girl*? But pride of place must go to *Entertainment Weekly's* list of '50 greatest lists'. Step by step, not only the 10 commandments but also *People* magazine's '50 most beautiful people'. No room, however, for 'Great books of the Western world' or anything like it.

Lists, for all their stupidity, do contextualise the priorities and preoccupations of the moment. They are useful for sociologists and other people. The ever-more rapid circulation of lists in ever-diminishing detail is testimony to Andy Warhol's adage that everybody will be famous for 15 minutes. The loss of a sense of significance produces an exaggerated emphasis on the novel. See how quickly last year's film hit replaced the canon of all-time greats, or how often this year's thing features in one of the all-time top of the pops (although The Beatles did beat the new Williams in the recent HMV/Channel 4/Classic FM poll).

Lists are ways in which we mark out our own lives. We might make lists of things to do to avoid doing any of them, but it goes further than this. We define ourselves through lists of things that we like and dislike. What a lot we may have in common with the person that we meet at the party if our favourite film was *Citizen Kane*, we both regard penicillin as the greatest discovery of the century, and our favourite sports figure is Carl Lewis.

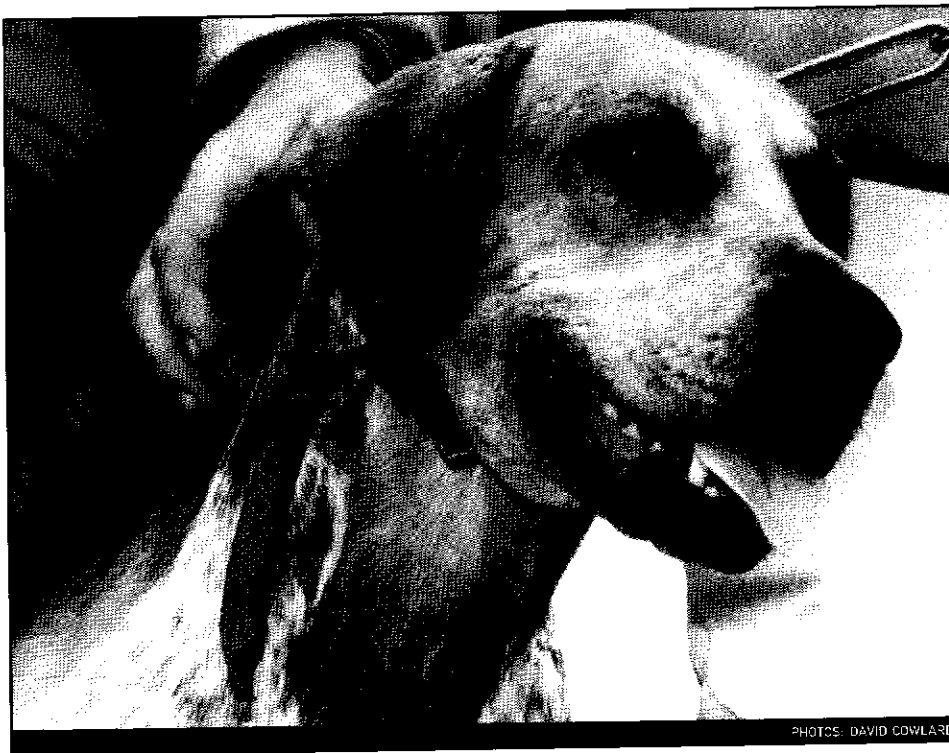
But we know, or should know, that life is more than a computer-dating agency. The list compiler and the list peruser pursue their lives vicariously. Whenever we retreat to a list for anything other than an *ante-memoire* we evade making our own priorities. We capitulate to the homogenisation of taste and the dilution of discrimination. To shape the world in a list rather than a dialogue with our peers is to neglect our own critical faculties. I think your list sucks because....

I don't think I can be allowed to escape the flak, so I offer you two lists. Neither is numbered in any order of importance. They tell you nothing more than a glimpse of the way I look at the world today.

Events that shaped the century:	Symbols and icons of the century:
1 The assassination of Franz Ferdinand	1 Muhammad Ali
2 The Russian Revolution	2 Che Guevara
3 The Wall Street crash	3 The Statue of Liberty
4 The Fall of Singapore or the Suez Crisis	4 (Picasso's) Guernica
5 Pearl Harbour	5 (A Ford Mustang on) Route 66
6 The Battle of Stalingrad	6 Neil Armstrong
7 The end of the Bretton Woods agreement	7 E = MC ²
8 The fall of the Berlin Wall	8 Peace, Bread, Land
9 West Ham United's first FA Cup	9 (Andy Warhol's) Marilyn Monroe
10 My birth	10 Elvis

FOXHUNTING— A BLOODY OUTRAGE OR JUST GOOD SPORT?

Sally Millard, event coordinator, reports on the recent LM hunting debate



PHOTOS: DAVID COWLARD

Of all the things that people could get excited about today, why is it that foxhunting has aroused such passions? If they agreed on nothing else, the speakers at the LM debate all thought that foxhunting was probably not the most significant problem facing us at the turn of the century. But nevertheless, there we all were, thrashing out the issues on a wet Thursday evening in October. So why does foxhunting cause so much concern?

For Richard Ryder, former chairman of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and Mike Huskisson of the League Against Cruel Sports, the demand for a ban on hunting with hounds is a straightforward moral issue. 'Quite simply, in my opinion', as Ryder put it, 'foxhunting is wrong, because it is cruel. To chase and terrify an animal is for most of us an offence. Why should a few people with

double-barrelled names and red coats be allowed to get away with such behaviour, when for the rest of us it would be a criminal offence?'

But for Roger Scruton, philosopher and keen hunter, foxhunting is no more cruel than keeping cats to control the mice population, or terriers to control rats. However, he did recognise that people do not hunt merely in order to control foxes. 'It is because people with double-barrelled names like myself and my neighbour Gerard Collingbourne take pleasure in the activity, and this is offensive to people like Ryder. Other people's pleasures often are. Nevertheless, there is no reason why you should ban something just because people take pleasure in it.'

Mike Huskisson insisted that he was not averse to people enjoying themselves—within limits. 'I've got no problem with people with



Mick Hume, LM editor

red clothes and double-barrelled names having all the fun they like. What we are saying is that we should take the animal out of the hunt.' While hunting hounds are presently trained to hunt down foxes, they could be trained to hunt down anything. 'They could hunt me, follow any scent you care to teach them. Take the animal out of the hunting field, allow people to ride over the fields with hounds, but chasing a man.'

It seemed that the debate about foxhunting was really about whether people should be allowed to take pleasure in things that others are offended by. This is why Mick Hume, LM editor and a self-confessed 'modern man', who does not hunt and has no great passion for the countryside, could argue that he is 'vehemently opposed to the idea of banning hunting'.

For Hume, 'The issue of contention is not the protection of foxes'. It is 'really a statement about people, and what kind of society we want to live in. The most compelling argument in favour of banning hunting with hounds is that hunting has no place in a civilised society. But we have to ask what people really mean when they use the term civilised society.'

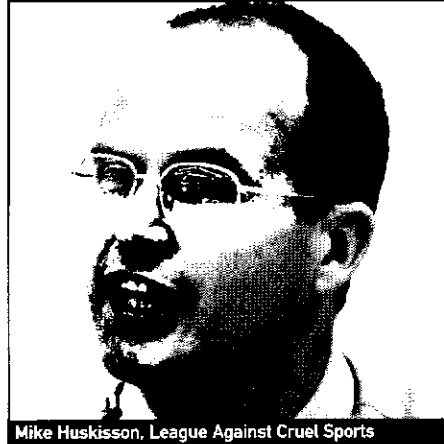
'When the anti-hunt lobby use the term in this context, they actually mean a sanitised society. One in which life has been cleaned up to suit their tastes, with its passions cooled and its pleasures made safe. A sanitised society leads inevitably to an intolerant society, as those in authority seek to stigmatise and maybe punish whatever views or actions they are uncomfortable with, whether that is hunting, smoking or recreational sex.'

Ryder said that he would 'defend the rights of citizens to do anything that does not cause suffering to other people or animals, but there cannot be a civil right to torture, nor can there be a civil right to kill for sport. There is no civil right to abuse children, no civil right to abuse animals. Some people enjoy rape, serial murder. Are you going to argue that these people have a civil right to rape or murder?'

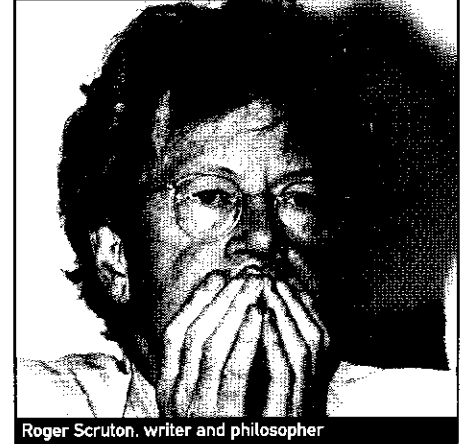
But for Hume, 'A civilised society has to be based on the treatment of individuals as adults with moral autonomy, with the right



Richard Ryder, past chairman of the RSPCA



Mike Huskisson, League Against Cruel Sports



Roger Scruton, writer and philosopher

and respect to judge for themselves the difference between right and wrong'. He agreed that this went with the rider that they do no harm to others, 'so long as we don't stretch meanings to say that it should cause no offence to others. Nobody has the right not to be offended. If hunting offends you, that's life'.

Scruton was at pains to point out the distinction between arguing for a particular morality and imposing it in legislation. 'There are many things that I believe are immoral which I wouldn't want to impose upon people by law. I think that abortion,

argued, 'far from defending the civilised idea of individuals with moral autonomy, many of the arguments against hunting undermine it. Those who compare the way foxes are treated with child abuse reduce us to the moral equivalent of animals. And if we are not being treated like pets, we are being treated like children, as the authorities seek to ban what they disapprove of for our own good, in the way we would take sweets away from naughty toddlers'.

As the discussion developed, it became clear that many in the anti-hunting lobby did indeed see foxes as the moral equivalent of

do not have consciousness, whereas we do. 'When foxes themselves start organising against hunting, then I might join them in that fight.'

Summing up, an outraged Richard Ryder decried the 'speciesism' of his opponents. 'Speciesism is analogous with racism and sexism. Where there is evidence of pain it should carry equal moral concern, whether it is a cat or a human being. Just as we should say that pain matters equally whether it is a black person or a white person, or a man or a woman.' Since he had the last word, none of those present was able to express their evident disquiet at his attempt to equate the experience of women or black people with that of foxes.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Ryder and Huskisson are so keen to see the government legislate to ban hunting with hounds if they see the chasing of foxes across the countryside as morally equivalent to racism. For them, protecting foxes from hounds takes precedent over allowing people to pursue a sport they enjoy. And this is despite the fact that they accept foxes will be killed by other means.

If Huskisson and Ryder are prepared to sacrifice people's freedom to hunt on the basis that foxes need protection, unfortunately some of those in the foxhunting lobby are also prepared to sacrifice freedoms that they don't approve of. For example, the Countryside Alliance takes the position of being against the right to roam.

For Hume, opposing a ban on foxhunting has to be 'part of a broader defence of freedom'. Unlike Scruton, he said, 'I entirely support a woman's right to abortion. A couple of years ago I interviewed Roy Jenkins, who was the home secretary when the Abortion Act became law. He told me, unprompted, that he saw the question of a woman's right to abortion in exactly the same way as he saw the right to hunt—as a question of individual freedom that others should not be allowed to encroach upon. It is a worrying sign of the times that the views of such an establishment figure as Lord Jenkins should now be considered "libertarian nonsense" by the New Labour government and its allies'.

WE ARE THE GUARDIANS OF MORALITY', SAID A MAN FROM THE RSPCA

which is the killing of a human being in its most innocent, unprotected state, is a sin, but I don't think that I have a right to forbid it.'

Huskisson thought otherwise. 'Can we impose our morality on other people? Well I think we can. If the state, if society is not prepared to stand up for defenceless creatures, then what will it stand up for? If we're not prepared to draw the line and say you can't go cockfighting, you can't go dogfighting, where will we set the law? We have to push forward the bounds of legislation to take out foxhunting. It's cruel bullying, its unnecessary.' A man from the RSPCA in the audience spelt out the argument even more bluntly, insisting that they had to prevent people from foxhunting because 'we are the guardians of morality'.

So are we not to be allowed to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong? As Hume

humans. 'Foxhunting does harm others', said Ryder. 'It causes great stress and suffering to foxes, which is quite unnecessary. And if foxes are not part of the moral group, then why not? Some consider humans to be superior to animals, but humans are animals. The weight of scientific evidence is that we suffer exactly, or very similarly to foxes, and they suffer very similarly to us.'

The scientific validity of Ryder's argument was challenged by some of the audience. Helene Guldberg, psychologist (and *LM* co-publisher) argued that while some physiological reactions may be similar in humans and other animals, the actual experience of pain was very different, so that foxes or deer could not be said to 'suffer' in a human sense. For Scruton, 'we are animals, but we are animals with a conscience. We actually make moral judgements'. For Hume, the distinction was straightforward. Animals

LM Mail

DOVER REACTION

Brendan O'Neill ('Dover the top', October 1999) claims that 'anti-racist campaigns' have blown up out of all proportion the violent incidents in Dover involving asylum seekers over the summer. Anti-racist activists in Kent, of whom I am one, have stressed that the incidents in August were hyped up by the media into an hysterically exaggerated silly-season story, although we have pointed out that racism is a very real problem in Dover.

O'Neill says that anti-racists have overstated the importance of 'a chauvinist rant by the local newspaper'. But for a year both the *Dover Express* and the *Folkestone Herald*, under the editorship of Nick Hudson (formerly of the *Sunday Sport*), have printed a steady stream of lying racist filth. They claim that asylum seekers are responsible for a huge local crime wave, and that they run brothels and are driving local prostitutes out of business by 'selling their bodies for the price of a spud'. Hudson has also been on radio and TV peddling the same line. After he referred to asylum seekers as 'human sewage' he was threatened with prosecution for incitement to racial hatred. And the Press Complaints Commission has upheld a complaint against him over a story about a supposed 'riot' by asylum seekers.

O'Neill also indicates that anti-racists have overreacted to the threat of a march by 'a handful of British National Party members'. There have actually been four nationally organised marches by the National Front (not the BNP) in the Dover area; and there has been leafleting and stickering by the NF and the BNP. Fortunately, the fascists are currently so weak and disorganised that they have failed to establish a real presence in Dover. But the local atmosphere is undoubtedly such that the fascists could yet capitalise on it, and make matters a good deal worse.
David Turner, Kent

WOMEN BEHAVING BADLY

Your contribution to the domestic violence debate was very welcome ('Sexy crime statistics', September 1999). However, the true extent of female violence was virtually ignored. There are an equal number of women who perpetrate violence to their partners as there are men who are violent towards their female partners (the levels within gay and lesbian couples are somewhat higher).

Straus and Gelles more than 20 years ago came to the conclusion that there was parity between the sexes in regards engaging in domestic violence. Later, studies in the 1980s purported to show men as the perpetrators. These have now been shown to be distorted,

flawed, simply untrue, or not fully published. Terrie Moffitt (Wisconsin University) has published many works also showing parity between the sexes. In her latest work, she shows that women initiate domestic violence more often than men, and posits why that should be the case.

The important message overlooked in the statistics is the rarity of domestic violence. A Home Office study put it very accurately at 4.2 percent for both sexes. All this nonsense about 'one in four women' is just that, nonsense. I trust you will revisit this question before even more draconian legislation is rushed through, for a problem that does not exist in the neat form politicians would like to believe.

Robert Whiston, chairman, United Kingdom Men's Movement, London

IT DEPENDS

You seem divided on the fundamental issue of whether some things are better than others. Mick Hume's leader pours scorn on 'the epidemic of non-judgemental relativism now plaguing society' (October 1999). But what about aborting female fetuses in order to have more sons? I would expect the readers—and writers—of *LM* to see this as a Bad Thing. Yet Frank Furedi ('Six billion people? Three cheers', October 1999) is scathing of those 'enlightened people' who argue against it. Is moral relativism bad for Britain, but good enough for the third world?

Paul Williams, London

SOLDIERING ON

It's obvious that Peter Ray ('Homodernising the military', November 1999) is the sort of chap who reads *Bravo Two-Zero* under the bedclothes at night. Real soldiers are depressingly ordinary working-class men who smoke too much and tolerate quite amazing amounts of boredom between increasingly infrequent bursts of real danger. In their prejudice against gays, they differ little from their civilian counterparts—Londoners seldom realise that their city is awash with homosexuals simply because it's the only place in Britain where they aren't loathed and persecuted by working-class youth.

The redeeming features of the British squaddie are his consummate professionalism, fatalism and courage. On exercise in Europe and on duty in the Balkans, his superiority over the Continental-style soldier is embarrassing. The current demands to remake the army in a middle-class image (under the guise of 'modernisation') have their roots in the ancient hatreds of the Fabian tendency. Whether we believe that working-class males

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should be deprived of their last respectable form of employment or not, we may live to regret the fact that there will be no Tommies left the next time the bands begin to play.
Cpl Tom Burkard (RPC/TAVR, retired)

SHIT HAPPENS

Nancy Morton's article on the recent *Sensation* controversy in New York ('Multicultural clash', November 1999) did not explain why extreme views on diversity by multiculturalists capture the moral high-ground, over Mayor Giuliani's extreme views on Catholicism. In interviews that painter Chris Ofili gave to the US press, he made clear his indifference as to how people responded to his work. He insisted that the morality of his *Holy Virgin Mary* was personal to him alone. Hence his riposte to Giuliani: that he should not impose his version of Catholicism on anybody else, either.

It is a mistake to imagine that this Warhol-like disinterestedness on Ofili's behalf reveres African culture. Instead, Ofili has invented his own narrative myth about the place. Can you name one African culture that does venerate elephant droppings? Avant-garde art circles in the West have paid much more homage to shit than Africans have ever done. Black American artist David Hammons was using elephant dung in his installations back in the 1970s. Instead of imposing his art on others, Ofili is using it to create a phoney identity or persona to protect his supposedly vulnerable self from commitment to any sort of society, whether Western or African.
Aidan Campbell, London

HITTING THE ROOF

Under pressure from anti-chlorine activists at Greenpeace, the Millennium Dome builders (New Millennium Experience Company) decided not to use PVC in the roof but to replace it with PTFE. As an anti-chlorine move this was insane, and was ridiculed as such in the media in 1998, because four times as much chlorine is used in its production as in producing PVC. Now it emerges that PTFE increases the level of static in the Dome, and the cost of cleaning the roof is over £1 million a year. PVC does not have a static problem. Imagine how many whales could be saved with the extra million!

Roger Bate, director, European Science and Environment Forum, Cambridge

OPINION

Ann Bradley

Shall I be mother?



A report from the Office of National Statistics identifying that the average age of women giving birth has reached 30 provoked a rash of speculation about why women are delaying motherhood. Previously, the highest average age of 29.3 had been recorded during the Second World War, when the reason for late motherhood was connected to the absence of men. Today it seems to be more connected to lifestyle choice.

There are lots of sound reasons why contemporary women might want to delay entering the 'mommy club'. Despite the prevalence of equal opportunities policies, the difficulties of combining motherhood with a profession remain. Many women, ambitious to make an impact in their job,

increased control. But it may also be a symptom of a counter trend—an indication that today's twentysomethings feel increasingly underconfident about their ability to commit to each other and the future. Taking the decision to have a child is the domestic equivalent of deciding to pack in your job, sell your house, give all your savings to charity and embark on a trek to Outer Mongolia. It represents the simultaneous abandonment of what you know and trust and the embrace of a huge unknown.

Ask many thirtysomething *primigravidas* why they are delaying having their first child until their fourth decade and the most likely reply is that they didn't feel ready. Many others will confess to an

instruction and support before they can truly assume responsibility for their progeny. Given the stress on the responsibilities and difficulties of parenting it is hardly surprising that there is a tendency for couples to defer childbearing decisions. The very fact that couples feel they have a choice about whether or not to have a child introduces a relatively new tension: if you have a choice you have to make that choice. To decide to give up the pill or stop using condoms are Big Decisions.

There has been a predictable amount of speculation about what effect older motherhood has on the child and on the mother. The pros of 'greater experience', 'patience' and 'personal stability' have been weighed against the cons of 'exhaustion', 'lack of glamour at the school gate' and the increased generation gap. But there has been little discussion about how delaying parenthood may affect society more generally and whether it may accelerate trends towards the disaggregation of family life.

The transformation of a couple into a 'family' creates a whole new network of interdependencies that can be avoided until the child comes along. Responsibility for a child is not like responsibility for a kitten—you can't surrender a child to the animal sanctuary if you are forced to change the way you live your life. Settling repayment arrangements on a joint mortgage is complicated enough, but nothing compared to custody arrangements. In short: childfree couples have fewer practical commitments to each other; relationships can be more transient, less shaped by obligation.

This is not unequivocally positive or negative. It is hard to decide which is the saddest: a couple who struggle miserably on, resenting each other and their own lives 'for the sake of the children', or a couple who defer having children, not because they don't want kids, but because they never really feel confident about their ability to take on responsibilities that their grandparents would have assumed to be an integral part of adulthood. ●

Childfree relationships can be more transient, less shaped by obligation

feel compelled to put maternity on hold until their career is secure. Developments in modern contraceptive technologies, backed up by abortion services, make it increasingly possible for women to remain childfree until they are ready to shift their focus on to the family.

However, it is not only the privileged professionals who are exerting greater control over their fertility. The trend to delay childbirth has affected the poor, too. Although age at first birth still tends to be inversely related to socioeconomic status, the dependence of many working-class couples on women's jobs has closed down the option of twentysomething motherhood for many poorer women.

Commentators have focused on delayed birth as a sign of women's confidence and

underlying ambivalence about motherhood, claiming it was not so much a positive choice as something that they felt was now or never. In other words, they feared their ovaries were ageing faster than the rest of them.

Until recently it was assumed that motherhood was an inevitable by-product of being a woman. Children happened along later if not sooner. It is not so very long ago that couples who passed several post-marriage years without a child were assumed to have a problem. Now there are fewer pressures to produce—rather couples are counselled to consider carefully the consequences of having a child. Today, far from being seen as a 'natural instinct', parenting is seen as a complicated set of skills, with new parents requiring

IMPOVERISHED POLITICS

Michael Fitzpatrick examines how New Labour has redefined the meaning of poverty and equality

'The class war is over, but the struggle for true equality has just begun.' Tony Blair, 28 September 1999

In his emotional speech to Labour's centenary conference, Tony Blair proclaimed New Labour's commitment to tackling inequalities in British society. Repeating the findings of *Opportunity for All: tackling poverty and social exclusion*, the government's first annual report on poverty, Blair declared that three million children—one in three—were living in poverty in Britain. He endorsed the pledge made earlier to the conference by chancellor Gordon Brown to 'end child poverty within a generation'.

Blair's emphasis on equality—like his homage to Labour's founding father Keir Hardie—went down well with the party faithful. It seemed to some that New Labour was coming home to some traditional socialist concerns. In fact, Blair was careful to put a distinctively New Labour spin on the concept of equality, and others have helped clarify the terms of this redefinition.

'True equality', Blair explained, meant 'equal worth'. For New Labour, equality is not primarily a question of income or resources, more one of parity of esteem. As Brown put it, poverty was 'not just a simple problem of money, to be solved by cash alone', but a state of wider deprivation, expressed above all in 'poverty of expectations'. This approach obscures the material roots of inequality and tries to explain it in cultural and psychological terms.

Just in case there was any misunderstanding, Anthony Giddens, chief theoretician of the Third Way, bluntly explained 'Why the old left is wrong on equality' (*New Statesman*, 25 October). There was, he asserted, 'no future' for traditional left-wing egalitarianism and its redistributionist 'tax and spend' fiscal and welfare policies. Instead, 'modernising social democrats' needed 'to find an approach that allows equality to coexist with pluralism and lifestyle diversity'. Giddens' new egalitarianism means accepting wide differentials in income, but insisting on 'equal respect'. There is a parallel here with the elevation of issues such as 'hate speech' and 'negative images' in relation to women and black people over persistent inequalities in pay levels. New Labour's message to the

poor is: never mind the width of the income gulf—feel the quality of our recognition of your pain.

New Labour's preoccupation with inequality is closely linked to its concept of social exclusion. For Giddens, more equality means greater inclusion: 'all members of society should have civil and political rights, opportunities for involvement in society.' From this perspective people have no claim on the resources of society, but an equal right to participate in civic affairs.

Another sympathetic commentator—David Goodhart, editor of *Prospect*—is more explicit. He argues that if you accept that there is no alternative to the capitalist market, then inequality is inevitable; so, forget about the gap between rich and poor and settle for a bit more fairness ('Don't mind the gap', *Prospect*, August/September). A fair society 'would not be a full meritocracy, but it would have a high degree of status equality and a reasonably fluid social order'. The clarion call to the cause of equality turns out to be little more than a feeble plea for fair play.

Blair's counterposition of his (modern) struggle for equality to the (obsolete) class struggle is revealing. Marx famously insisted that he claimed no credit for discovering the class struggle, which had long been recognised; his distinctive contribution was to recognise the potential of class conflict to overthrow capitalism and inaugurate a higher form of society. As we know, this potential was not realised and, over the past decade, familiar forms of class conflict have come to an end and a fatalistic resignation to market forces has become almost universal.

Despite claims that history itself has come to an end, society has not stood still—indeed, many have experienced change in a more intense way than ever before. But change no longer appears to be the result of conscious human direction—it seems to be the outcome of the random, chaotic actions of diverse, isolated individuals and uncontrollable social (and natural) forces. Change perceived in this way provokes fear rather than any positive sense of anticipation about the future. Blair's crusade for equality may be best understood as a response to the insecurities generated by globalisation and technological innovation. Whereas Marx identified the class struggle as a vehicle of social transformation, New Labour has seized upon the struggle



for equality as a device for holding together a society obsessed with its tendencies towards disintegration.

A recent book by an influential member of the New Labour elite—Charles Leadbeater's *Living on Thin Air: the new economy* ('an extraordinarily interesting thinker'—Tony Blair; 'the agenda for the next Blair revolution'—Peter Mandelson) provides a good illustration of the anxieties driving the crusade for equality. Though he asserts in the preface that 'globalisation is good' and that he is optimistic about its prospects, Leadbeater is troubled that 'inequality has become an acute, chronic and endemic feature of modern society' (what a relief that it's only a metaphorical disease!). He returns to the social pathology arising from the new economy in his gloomy concluding section, 'the future: tense', admitting that 'the measures proposed in this book to tackle rising inequality do not go far enough'.

In fact I could not find any specific measures to tackle inequality in *Living on Thin Air*. However, what Leadbeater expresses is a twofold anxiety that is prevalent among that (majority) section of society that includes the beneficiaries of increasing social polarisation. On the one hand, many fear that, given the insecurity of employment in



PHOTO: MICHAEL WALTER

EXPOSURES OF CHILD POVERTY ARE PORNOGRAPHY FOR THE CHATTERING CLASSES

the 'thin air' economy, they could easily find themselves at the opposite pole. On the other hand, they perceive the poor (the 'underclass', the 'socially excluded') as a threat, no longer in the shape of collective resistance, but in the atomised forms of crime, drug abuse and antisocial behaviour.

There is a striking contrast between the preoccupation of the political elite with growing inequality in society and the indifference of most of the population to this trend. Commentators on a recent American survey revealing increasing disparities in income and wealth over the past 20 years noted the absence of any resulting pressure on the emerging presidential candidates to adopt redistributionist policies—indeed, demands for further cuts in welfare remain popular (see Andrew Sullivan, 'The rich are richer so why aren't the poor revolting?', *Sunday Times*, 19 September). In Britain there is some resentment of 'fat cats', but there is also acclamation for youthful 'internet millionaires'.

One explanation for the lack of popular concern about inequality may be that headlines proclaiming the growing immiseration of Western society do not correspond to people's experience. The statistics of growing impoverishment have been particularly challenged in the USA, where declining unemployment and increasing wages during the 1990s have reversed earlier trends, leading to improvements in the living standards of the poorest sections of society. Right-wing critics of the fashion for defining poverty in relative terms note the high proportions of households designated 'poor' that are equipped with consumer durables—two thirds have air conditioning (Robert Rector, *The Myth of Widespread American Poverty*, Heritage Foundation, 1998). One does not have to accept an absolute definition of poverty as a lack of the resources necessary to ensure physical survival, to recognise that the extreme relativisation of poverty risks making the

concept so diffuse as to become meaningless.

Take the much-repeated statistic that 'one in three' children in Britain is living in poverty. This is derived from setting the threshold of poverty as a household income below half the national average. Yet a moment's reflection is enough to realise that the figure is manifestly absurd. While there is undoubtedly a real problem of child poverty, the notion that this afflicts more than three million children (according to some estimates, up to 4.4 million) bears no relation to the reality of a society in which children appear—at all levels—to be more pampered than at any time in history. It is not surprising that some social policy experts are complaining that by grotesquely inflating the scale of the problem, the pressing needs of a much smaller number of children are neglected.

Such is the elite obsession with child poverty in Britain that the 'one in three' statistic goes unquestioned. Blair's conference speech vignette of a baby born to a lone, unemployed and unsupported mother in a cold, damp bed-and-breakfast, destined to a life of domestic violence, delinquency and drug abuse, was applauded to the echo. In my experience as a GP in one of the most impoverished boroughs in the country, such cases do occur, but they are rare. Television documentaries and newspapers compete for the most authentic revelations about children living in conditions of squalor and degradation. The morbid preoccupation of the New Labour elite with poverty is more revealing of its internal insecurities than a reflection of the real problems of society. As in Victorian England, exposures of child poverty have become a sort of pornography for the chattering classes.

If the government has ruled out reducing inequality by raising the income of the poor, how is it planning to tackle poverty? The key measures announced by Gordon Brown in September are to reduce the burden of tax on working families, the Sure Start programme of initiatives targeted at under-threes, and a children's fund to sponsor charitable, voluntary and community projects. The chancellor also intends to bring forward planned increases in spending on education. Not enough, says Polly Toynbee, the *Guardian's* ultra-Blairista; '£2 billion more a year doesn't touch it':

'We are talking, say £15 billion a year more for intensive individual teaching, genuine therapy, one-to-one attention from the youngest age, breakfast and tea clubs, highest quality activities from birth right through to success, whenever that may be, a monumental programme unthinkable ever before.'

Instead of a 'war on poverty' we are going to get a 'war on the poor', a programme of state intervention in the intimate lives of those designated poor—'one in three', remember. That such an authoritarian project is now not only thinkable but doable is a tribute to New Labour's redefinition of equality. ●

SLASHER CHIC

'One February day in the seventh grade, I was apprehended in the girls' bathroom at school, trying to cut my arm with my Swiss army knife. It is always February in the seventh grade, that terrible border year, that dangerous liminal interlude.'

Caroline Kettlewell's *Skin Game: a cutter's memoir* continues in this whimsical, quasi-poetical fashion, as she spends 178 pages recounting how and why she used to cut herself as a teenager. Kettlewell, according to the book jacket, is 'an intelligent woman with a promising career and a family': not somebody you might expect to court fame through a pathetic tale of adolescent angst. But self-mutilation has found a market—and Kettlewell is not the only one to have cashed in on it.

Looking for a light read on self-mutilation? Try *The Scarred Soul* (1997), *A Bright Red Scream* (1998) or *Cutting the Pain Away* (May 1999). Memoirs and novels about cutting (such as Shelley Stoehr's *Crosses* and Steven Levenkron's *The Luckiest Girl in the World*) are hitting the bookstores in the USA, while young British and Irish novelists like Rebbecca Ray and Lara Harte have taken up the cutting theme to give their angsty books extra authenticity. Although the fascination with slashing is more overt in America than in Britain, all the literature points out that the idea came from over here. 'Until 1996, the public had little familiarity with self-mutilation', points out psychotherapist Steven Levenkron in *Cutting: understanding and overcoming self-mutilation*. 'Then Princess Diana volunteered that she had been a cutter, and articles on the topic began to appear in popular magazines.'

What is behind this new obsession with self-harm? Therapists point to the scale of the problem, and bandy around figures claiming that there are two to three million self-mutilators in the USA; while in Britain, over 22 000 young people a year reach hospital having deliberately hurt themselves. But I blame the therapists themselves.

There is nothing new about the act of self-mutilation. In *Bodies Under Siege: self-mutilation and body modification in culture and psychiatry*—widely regarded as a 'bible' for therapists dealing with self-mutilation—Armando Favazza documents numerous cases of self-injury by seriously mentally ill individuals (often in institutions) which, while gruesome, are not new. Favazza also studies the cultural practices of different societies, where rituals or initiation ceremonies might involve self-mutilation. In Western societies body piercing, tattooing and scarification are the most obvious forms of culturally sanctioned self-injury.

More significantly, there is nothing new about teenagers taking a razor blade to their arms or a lighted cigarette to their legs in a fit of angst, frustration, fury or even curiosity. The nature of teenage angst is such that young people are probably as likely to have a go at self-injury as they are to drink white cider until they throw up. Yet the new school of self-mutilation therapists is trying to turn unremarkable teenage angst into yet another serious teenage disorder.

The kind of self-harm that attracts these therapists is neither fashion nor attempted suicide, but a form of behaviour in which somebody hurts themselves deliberately and fairly regularly, but not fatally. This is understood primarily as a 'coping mechanism'—using physical pain to relieve emotional pain. So the theory goes that a teenager who hurts him or herself is doing so to cope with some deep-rooted emotional trauma.

In some cases, this appears to make a lot of sense. Regularly setting about yourself with a razor blade is obviously not normal behaviour, comparable to piercing your ears or belly button. But there are numerous reasons for teenagers to embark on this kind of non-normal behaviour. The attempt to theorise self-injury as indicative of severe trauma raises some worrying questions.

When a young person undergoes a traumatic experience about which nobody knows, what tends to be assumed? That the person in question has suffered from some form of abuse—usually at the hands of a family member. Most other traumatic experiences would be known about and

Jennie Bristow on self-mutilation: therapy's latest gravy train

talked about. So when an apparently 'normal' young person starts cutting herself, the new self-mutilation theory perceives this automatically as a potential reaction to childhood abuse. And the way this theory of cutting-means-trauma is formulated contains ghosts of the biggest recent scandal of modern psychology: recovered memory therapy.

In Steven Levenkron's teenage novel *The Luckiest Girl in the World*, ice-skating star Katie cuts herself with scissors every time she feels herself dissociating, or 'spacing out'. Cutting brings her back to reality, forcing her to engage with immediate life. After therapy, she finds herself able to confront her dominating mother with the memory she has forced to the back of her mind: that she broke Katie's rib as a child. Lara Harte's *Losing It* has the heroine's elder sister scratching her face and burning her hand, as she copes with the process of remembering how she was raped by a teacher at primary school. In the non-fiction *Cutting the Pain Away*, Carol Nadelson explains the impact of trauma on the victim's memory: 'those who suffer from chronic dissociation in response to a series of events may become seriously forgetful and endure periods of amnesia, blackouts, and a severe inability to function in daily activities.' She then refers to the 1973 case of Sybil Isabel Dorsett who, following childhood abuse at the hands of her mother, apparently 'split' into 16 multiple personalities, embodying 'feelings and emotions

THE CUTTING-MEANS-CHILD-ABUSE THEORY RELIES ON DISCREDITED METHODS

with which the "real" Sybil could not cope'. The book and film about Sybil's life brought the term 'multiple personality disorder' into use.

All of these terms—dissociation, multiple personality disorder, periods of amnesia following traumatic events—formed the basis of recovered memory therapy, which assumed that people could, through therapy, 'recover' forgotten memories of child abuse. Following numerous horrific false allegations of abuse, and cases where patients' lives were ruined through therapy-induced abuse fantasies, recovered memory therapy was officially discredited. Yet some of its assumptions seem to be gradually recycled through new theories, such as those about self-injury.

The concept of 'dissociation' or 'depersonalisation'—referred to in all the literature on self-mutilation—arises from the notion that people store memories of abuse in a distinct place in their mind, which affects them subconsciously. The idea that self-injury is about rescuing yourself from this 'dissociated' state implies that superficial self-mutilation is a result of some form of abuse. And the notion that, through therapy, people can deal directly with their memories, rather than resorting to self-harm, assumes—as recovered memory therapy did—that counselling can take you to the root of your problems by making you deal with past traumas that you might have somehow suppressed.

If the theory about self-injury could be trusted, it would be possible to justify the new focus on self-mutilating adolescents. But given the reliance of the cutting-means-child-abuse theory on past discredited methods, it pays to be sceptical about the newfound fascination with this 'disorder'—and the potential consequences of therapeutic intervention.

It is worth bearing in mind that self-mutilation therapists have a real interest in pushing this to the forefront of public concern and debate. Every self-help book on self-mutilation begins with the assertion that self-harm remains a taboo discussion, which only a handful of

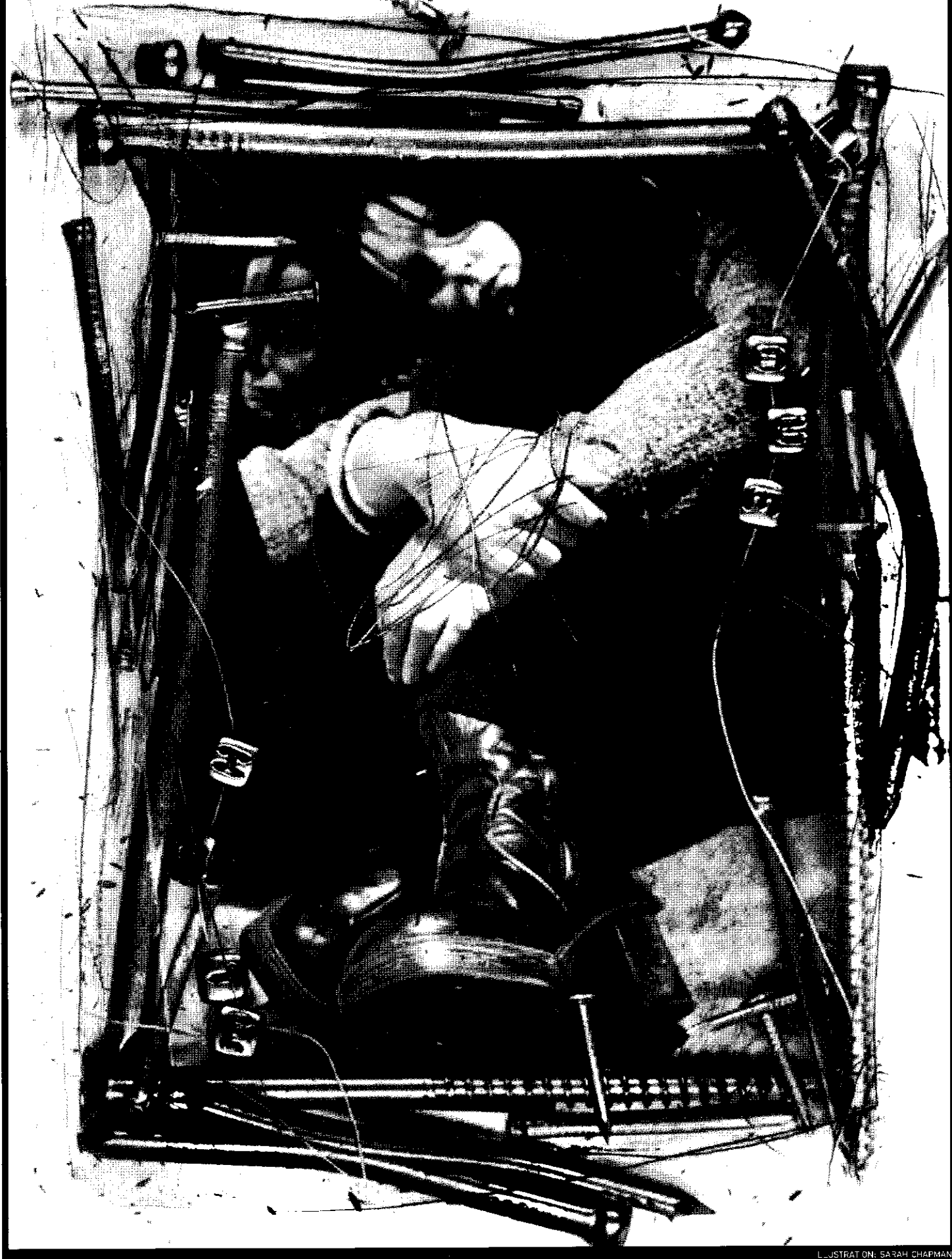


ILLUSTRATION: SARAH CHAPMAN

enlightened therapists (such as themselves) will deal with. This validates the therapists' sense of importance in the world of psychotherapy.

Psychotherapist and author Steven Levenkron best expresses this inflated sense of self-importance. Levenkron made a name for himself in

the late 1970s by treating and writing about patients with eating disorders, and wrote the bestselling teenage novel *The Best Little Girl in the World* about a young dancer developing anorexia. After encountering various harsh and inept doctors, the heroine recovers. ▾

under the therapy of an understanding psychotherapist Sandy Sherman. Two decades later, Sherman reappears in Levenkron's self-injury novel *The Luckiest Girl in the World*, as the only person successfully to treat heroine Katie. Sherman (whose wife tells him 'to watch that therapist-as-white-knight complex') now has white hair and white beard. Levenkron, pictured on the book jacket has, guess what? White hair and a white beard.

So yes, the therapists have their own reasons to push both the scope and the scale of cutting—however distorted the theory behind it might be. This would be bad enough even if it only boosted their egos. But for young people on the receiving end of this therapeutic obsession, the consequences are far worse. It risks pathologising some aspects of teenage life that are not disturbed so much as, well, teenage. And in doing so, growing out of teenage angst into a normal, well-balanced adult becomes increasingly difficult.

When Princess Diana 'came out' about her history of eating disorders and self-mutilation, it summed up a particular mood of the times. Whoever you are, whatever you do, there is increasing pressure upon people to create an identity for themselves through talking about a problem they have. Many Brits sneer at the extent to which, in the USA, you are only somebody if you have a syndrome and a therapist—but we are hardly that far behind. More and more schoolchildren and higher education students are diagnosed with disorders and disabilities ranging from dyslexia to attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, and counsellors now line the corridors of schools and universities. Teenage magazines no longer confine their discussion of angst to the problem pages—features dealing with everything from bulimia to a friend's suicide to bullying form the heart of the magazines, generally written in the first-person, 'it happened to me' format. One magazine even replaced its celebrity question and answer page with 'Celeb Therapy', where famous people could only talk about their problems.

For teenagers, already struggling with the frustration of trying to create a distinct identity for themselves, the emphasis on defining yourself through your problems has a particularly strong impact. Adolescents—particularly middle-class girls—are notoriously wrapped up in themselves anyway, and prone to dwelling on the apparent miseries of their life. 'Dear diary...I'm so depressed'...sound familiar? Because when you have no job, no independent life, and nothing outside of yourself and your equally melodramatic friends, your problems are all you have. And if you have no problems, you are nobody.

Caroline Kettlewell—a self-confessed cutter who was never abused—sums up the mentality of the 12-year old girl brilliantly: 'I knew how I felt, but I couldn't come up with a good enough reason why I should feel that way. I believed unhappiness was something you had to earn through a suitable measure of suffering, the way characters in my favourite books struggled with blindness, polio, Nazis, shipwreck, blizzards...My life—with its 12-year old particulars of tuna sandwiches and math homework...was way too mundane for suffering.' (*Skin Game*, p11) Hence the cutting; which, at least to her, gave a concrete validation of her misery.

Now imagine if, as a teenage girl without a problem, you can create a 'disturbed' identity overnight simply by cutting your arm. It saves having to develop a more conventional disorder, like anorexia or even bulimia, which take more effort and genuine suffering. With cutting, you can land immediately in the camp of potential-abuse-victim who, whether abused or not, deserves 'understanding'. You can be part of an exciting new subculture of teenage angst which is labelled by those who claim to understand it as permanently misunderstood. And because the therapists and self-help books are on hand to slap a disorder label on this outburst of twelveness, you can keep your damaged identity for life, if you want to. You could even write a memoir.

Speaking at a conference on 'Self Harm in Adolescence', organised by the Association for Professionals in Services for Adolescents in October, psychologist Vivien Norris spoke of the danger of 'normalising' cutting too much. Her argument was that, if cutting became too acceptable as a way for young people to deal with their problems, disturbed teenagers would turn to more extreme forms of self-harm. But surely the real problem of 'normalising' self-injury is that young people are presented with the notion that the only way to fit in normally is to be disturbed. That's a pretty tough brief for teenagers.

Cutting up our family

by Sara Stevens

My sister, Emily, is 16. She started cutting her arms up about two years ago. Since then my family has had a barrage of social workers, counsellors and therapists interviewing all of us both as a group and individually to determine the 'cause' of Emily's behaviour.

Emily was sectioned a year ago after being admitted to hospital to have stitches for one of her cuts, and then transferred from the hospital to an adolescent unit. Apparently it was imperative that she did not return home. The rehabilitation programme the adolescent unit offers consists of lots of therapy groups, including 'girls' therapy', 'group therapy', 'individual counselling' and 'music therapy'.

Every week a meeting takes place that all the members of the family are asked to attend. As I no longer live in the same area as my family, I was not available to come to any of these meetings until about six months into Emily's time at the unit. At the meeting I went to, the therapist began by telling me I had a bad relationship with my sister—this was news to me. I asked her what she meant by 'bad' and she said Emily had been angry with me in the past. I had thought that was quite normal between siblings—but in retrospect, it seems that for my relationship with my sister to be deemed good we would both have to be saints.

She went on to ask me if I would be a danger to Emily if she got angry with me (as if anybody would say, 'oh yes, I'd kill her') and what I would do if she ever disagreed with me. Then she asked me loads of questions about my sex life. Had I slept with person X who'd visited the house? What about person Y? Would I have sex with somebody if my sister was in the room?

I was beginning to get really pissed off. Not only was it incredibly intrusive but I couldn't understand the relevance of the questions. Physical abuse was not suspected—if it had been, social services would have taken much more drastic action half a year ago. It was like I was being accused of abuse by association. And these questions were being asked in front of my parents, which was embarrassing at best.

In these meetings it is impossible not to answer because then it seems like you're hiding something horrific, not just guarding your privacy. Saying 'that's none of your business' is blasphemy in therapy sessions. The idea, I was told, in having these questions asked while the whole family was present, was so no 'fibbing' could take place, and having secrets in the family was very dangerous. I would have thought it was the most natural thing in the world not to be able to talk to your dad about some of the things you discussed with your mum, and not to want to tell your parents about things that you would your siblings. And who wants to know about their parents' 'secrets'?

Our therapist's mission, though, was to break down all these natural sensibilities in the hope of exposing the reason for my sister's problems. It was assumed that this reason was related to something stemming from our family situation rather than Emily herself. Now my parents and myself are left feeling guilty for something quite undefined, simply because we are the family of a teenager with problems.

Before this 'therapy' my mum and dad would never have doubted their parenting ability and I would never have entertained the idea that I was a bad sister. But when something like this happens, the family is immediately assumed to be to blame—if not of actual abuse then because of the dynamics they've created in their home. As soon as my sister started cutting herself, the concept of my family as a unit that could be caring, loving and supportive went out of the window. Instead, the idea of the family unit is one of a set-up where abuse of a million kinds can occur and be hidden.

The job of the therapist seems to be exposing us, rather than counselling Emily. Somehow I don't think this is doing anybody any good.

All names have been changed

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WHY AUSCHWITZ HAS BECOME

Many people seem to want us to remember the modern era as the century of the Holocaust. The government has now endorsed the idea of an annual Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain. It seems that the further the Holocaust recedes into history, the bigger news it becomes—and the more removed we are from this terrible tragedy, the more we seem to talk about.

As one whose family was virtually wiped out in Nazi concentration camps, I have mixed feelings about the Holocaust being transformed into a contemporary morality play. I still remember how my father exploded with outrage when he heard a group of scornful Hungarian anti-Semites claim that 'after the war, more Jews came back than went to the camps'. Remembering was important to him, as it is to me. However, today, remembering the Holocaust has been transformed into an official ritual that allows every sanctimonious politician to put their superior moral virtues on public display.

Remembering the Holocaust as the defining moment of the twentieth century also involves a lot of forgetting. The century boasts a formidable record of human creativity. Millions struggled to overcome tyranny, improve their lives and change the world. Sometimes they failed and sometimes they made mistakes. But despite the Holocaust, humanity departs the old century with considerable achievements under its belt. Sadly, we seem to be attracted to the symbol of the Holocaust for the very bad reason that we have lost confidence in the humanist project.

Society today has a very different conception of human behaviour than it did at the beginning of the twentieth century. Important cultural and intellectual voices now suggest that people are not nearly as self-sufficient, capable or resilient as was once believed. Vulnerability is now likely to be seen as the defining feature of the human condition. The victim is no longer simply somebody to be pitied. Instead, victimhood is a prestigious status that many aspire to. The victim has become an object of cultural empathy, serving to affirm the belief that life is subject to forces beyond our control. The newly privileged status of the victim testifies to a shift of emphasis in society's morality. Rather than being judged on one's achievements, one is likely to be defined by what one has suffered.

The model of the individual as a rational actor is in danger of being displaced by a therapeutic framework which insists that human experience is best understood through the prism of emotion. Therapeutic terms like stress, self-esteem and emotional literacy have entered the language, continually highlighting the trauma of simply coping with everyday life. Emotion-based explanations are now used to make sense of problems that might once have been illuminated through socioeconomic or philosophical analysis. A major report on the crisis of the British education system focused on the emotional damage inflicted on poor children by problems in their families and communities, claiming that 'poverty does its worst damage with the emotions of those who live with it'. Academics applying for research grants are far more likely to gain funding for a project on 'unemployment and mental health' than for a proposed study on 'structural unemployment'. It seems that society is far more comfortable in dealing with poverty as a mental health problem than as a social issue. This approach is driven by a widely held assumption that adverse circumstances, even if relatively banal, cause stress, trauma and mental illness.

The shift in emphasis from the social to the therapeutic is particularly striking in deliberations around old social problems such as racism. Whereas in the past critics of racism emphasised the salience of economic inequality, discrimination and violence, today there is a tendency to adopt the therapeutic language of victimisation. A recent study conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation self-consciously sought to win sympathy for victims of racism by playing the therapeutic card, focusing on the 'anger, stress, depression, sleepless nights' they suffered. Here, the idiom of therapy provides a new vocabulary to express an old problem.

So what drives the culture of emotionalism and the consciousness of

The Holocaust is the icon of the new therapeutic history, argues Frank Furedi



THE SYMBOL OF THE CENTURY

vulnerability? It appears that at a time of social fluidity and moral uncertainty, the question of belonging is acutely posed. Throughout the Western world, national identities have become problematic—see the tortuous debates about what it means to be British today, or about what constitute core American values. The rise of regional and ethnic movements suggests that traditional national identities no longer inspire people in the same way.

These disorienting developments have been reinforced by the fragmentation of communities, and the continual transformation of family and gender relations. The net result is to create a powerful sense of uncertainty about the individual's place in the contemporary world, forcing more and more people to ask the question, 'where do I belong?'. The trouble is that there are no longer any obvious answers to that question, at either the collective or individual level.

At a time of unprecedented individuation, the outlook of emotionalism allows people to make sense of their lives. The notion that we are all vulnerable helps provide a focus for shared experience. This community of suffering is the foundation for those rare instances of collective solidarity that can make an impact on people's lives today. Some of the biggest public mobilisations of the past decade have involved displays of mourning for individual victims like Princess Diana, or for those who lost their lives in bigger tragedies like the Dunblane massacre or the Oklahoma bombing.



Indeed, one of the principal features of victim consciousness today is the privileged status it assigns to the past, which is seen as exercising a decisive influence over the present. The way in which history is now rewritten through the language of emotionalism and therapy marks an important shift in the politics of memory.

During the past two centuries, history has been rewritten primarily to demonstrate the greatness of a particular people or culture. Heroic national myths were used, not simply as sentimental celebrations of the past, but to construct a positive vision of the future. Thus the myth of the American frontier promised a manifest destiny for US society, while British, French and German national myths provided optimistic hopes for the future. Today, the rewriting of history is driven by a very different impulse. The manipulation of collective memory makes no grand claims on the future. On the contrary, memory serves as a monument to a people's historic suffering. In a perceptive contribution on this subject, Ian Buruma has drawn attention to the tendency of many minorities 'to define themselves as historic victims'. This reorientation towards an obsession with past suffering provides a form of collective therapy.

The Holocaust has become the icon for the new therapeutic history. The singular brutality of the Final Solution ensures that those who suffered in the concentration camps are regarded with unmatched reverence. So it is not surprising that Jewish identity has recently been

THE OBSESSION WITH PAST SUFFERING PROVIDES A FORM OF COLLECTIVE THERAPY

The community of feeling, where we can share in each other's pain, appears to provide a provisional solution to the question of belonging. The very normalcy of suffering allows everybody to share in each other's pain. That is why victim TV and confessional writing have become so pervasive in popular culture. As well as allowing people to feel together, emotionalism also endows those who have suffered with moral status and a sense of identity. Moreover, it is a form of identity that suits the individuated temper of our times.

The consciousness of suffering allows people facing adversity to make sense of their circumstances by dwelling on what has happened to them in the past. A key factor here is the cultural manipulation of memory. There has been a major controversy in relation to what one side characterises as repressed memory syndrome, and the other as false memory syndrome. From the standpoint of sociology, the most interesting aspect of this debate is the very fact that memory itself has become so politicised through the ascendancy of victim culture.

In one sense there is nothing new about the manipulation of memory. The rewriting of history has produced rich mythologies down the centuries. What is distinct about the contemporary politics of memory is that the stakes have been raised. The erosion of individual and collective identities has fostered an unusual interest in the past.

recast around the Holocaust. It is worth noting that many of the actual survivors of the death camps talked very little about their terrible experience. Their dignified self-containment stands in sharp contrast to their children and grandchildren, the so-called second- and third-generation survivors. In recent years, some promoters of second-generation survivor groups have even criticised their parents for bottling up their emotions and refusing to embrace a victim identity. In line with contemporary trends, Israeli identity has been recast around the Holocaust. Zionism, which traditionally promoted an optimistic, modernist vision of the pioneering new Jew, has in recent decades sought to forge a sense of community around an emotional connection with the Holocaust.

The appeal of the Holocaust as a formidable focus for identity formation has attracted the attention of competing groups of claimants. Gay activists insist that their suffering during the Holocaust should be recognised through the construction of monuments and memorials. Others representing gypsies and disabled people have also demanded that their experience of the Holocaust should be officially recognised. 'Sometimes it is as if everyone wants to compete with the Jewish tragedy', observes Buruma. Certainly the language associated with Holocaust discourse—particularly the image of the traumatised

survivor—has been appropriated by many seeking to stake a claim to the status associated with emotional suffering. For instance, the nineteenth-century Irish potato famine has been reinterpreted as an abusive experience that continues to traumatise people to this day. The emotional power of the Holocaust has been coopted and transferred to other experiences such as the African-American holocaust, the Bosnian holocaust, the Rwandan holocaust or the Kosovo holocaust. In Germany, anti-abortion campaigners hold forth about a holocaust of fetuses, while animal rights activists denounce the holocaust of seals in Canada.

The demand that past wrongs—some of them centuries old—be put right has acquired momentum in recent years. Those who have accorded a privileged status to suffering find such demands difficult to resist. Saying sorry has allowed public figures both to embrace the victim and to share vicariously in the pain. Politicians have been quick to embrace the ritual of the apology. In Australia, the government organised a National Sorry Day in May 1998, exhorting its citizens to

immunising itself from failure. Human behaviour is now commonly represented as the outcome of forces which lie beyond the individual's control. One fatalistic legacy of the cult of vulnerability is a growing tendency to interpret people's behaviour as the inevitable outcome of an earlier experience of victimisation, most commonly childhood abuse. It is now routine for defendants in court to blame their actions on past abuses.

The cult of vulnerability removes the stigma of failure from those who have suffered misfortune. Yet in the process, the human impulse to empathise has been transformed into a voyeuristic impulse to claim a stake in other people's pain. Popular culture has risen to the occasion and provides the public with a steady diet of emotionalism. Empathy has turned into a coercive dogma which demands that we behave according to an ethos, one which we might characterise as 'emotional correctness'. Forms of behaviour which do not conform to the emotionalist worldview can be denounced and even punished.



SAYING SORRY HAS ALLOWED PUBLIC FIGURES BOTH TO EMBRACE THE VICTIM AND TO SHARE VICARIOUSLY IN THE PAIN

express their sorrow for the injustices inflicted on Aboriginal peoples. A month later, the German government apologised for the 1904 massacre of Africans in Namibia. British prime minister Tony Blair has apologised to the Irish for Britain's role in the suffering that people experienced during the potato famine. And the Vatican has apologised for, among other things, the havoc that the Crusades wreaked on the people of the Middle East.

It is not only national minorities and ethnic groups who demand a public memorial to commemorate past suffering. AIDS activists have sought monuments to those who have suffered from the disease. A British advocacy group, Roadpeace, wants a national memorial for those killed on the roads, whom it describes as the 'unnamed' casualties of a century-long war, 'who have died on the roads since the advent of motor traffic'. Victim advocates have devoted a lot of creativity to inventing memorials. The wearing of a ribbon has become a potent symbol of remembrance, appropriated by countless groups seeking recognition for their cause. Candlelit vigils, shrines and roadside memorials are the artefacts of victim culture.

The politicisation of memory has encouraged individuals to re-examine their own lives. Some have literally invented a personal narrative of victimisation. Benjamin Wilkomirski, author of *Fragments*, a harrowing account of a Jewish childhood destroyed by the Holocaust, was recently exposed as a fake. Wilkomirski was actually a Swiss man, Bruno Grosjean, who had invented his Jewishness and his Holocaust experience (see Mark Pendergrast, 'Holocaust hoax?', *LM*, March 1999). There have been cases of individuals who have falsely claimed to be AIDS sufferers in order to claim the status of a victim. The American social scientist Carol Tavris has raised some interesting questions about why so many women find their way into sexual survivor groups. She believes that the 'sexual-abuse-victim story crystallizes many of society's anxieties' and therefore 'draws like a magnet those who feel vulnerable and victimised, and who wish to share in society's sympathy'. Clearly the appeal of the victim story goes beyond those claiming to have suffered sexual abuse. A cry for recognition and the desire to belong often finds its focus in victim identity today.

The significance which society now ascribes to emotionalism represents its disappointment with the promise of modernity. It indicts the failure of humanity to control its destiny, and assumes that powerlessness is the natural state of the individual. This trend is manifested through a cultural mistrust of power, control, masculinity and heroism. It is the antihero, the victim and the survivor who serve as the representative icons of our time. Society has become suspicious of experimentation and is less interested in promoting innovation than in

Probably the most destructive legacy of the cult of vulnerability is its impact on human relations. It has helped foster a climate of mistrust within which family relationships, loving relationships and routine relations at work or in school can all be seen as potentially victimising. Demands to protect people from one another on the grounds that they might be bullies, abusers or stalkers have encouraged the modern state to reorganise itself around the ideology of emotionalism. And at a time when people appear to distrust each other more than officialdom, state institutions have steadily expanded their activity into the private sphere. The growth of litigation in Britain and the USA suggests that differences which were in the past resolved informally are now far more likely to be mediated through the law. The conviction that people are unlikely to be able to cope on their own has encouraged the therapeutic intervention of professionals and of the state.

The elevation of powerlessness into a virtue threatens to alter the relationship between the individual and society. Formal intervention into private life continually limits the scope for the exercise of individual autonomy. Worse still, a society that celebrates powerlessness and insists that people need help and emotional support becomes complicit in lowering the expectations of its citizens. A culture that posits mere survival as a laudable end in itself is guilty of wasting people's creative potential.

To end, let us return to the Holocaust. Probably the single decisive event that sensitised me to look more deeply into the cult of vulnerability was a conversation that I had with my 82-year old Jewish-Hungarian mother. After watching a TV programme about second-generation Holocaust victims, she appeared puzzled by the terminology used. She said that she did not realise that she was a victim. Although she is still haunted by her harrowing experience, she did not see or define herself in terms of victimhood. But what really upset her was the intimation that she must be peculiar because, unlike the people in the programme, her entire life had not been defined by the tragedy of the 1940s. 'Maybe there is something wrong with me', she said. Many professional therapists would probably agree and offer the diagnosis of a sick woman in denial. I prefer to see a human being who has demonstrated an admirable capacity to deal with adversity. ●



To discuss the ideas and issues raised in this article, go to: [http://www.informinc.co.uk/interaction\\$forum/holocaust](http://www.informinc.co.uk/interaction$forum/holocaust)

NARCISSUS' EMPIRE

In the 1990s, wars were not fought for oil—or any other financial interest, explains Linda Ryan. This is what made them so dangerous



UNITED
NATIONS

'When policy was driven by moral motives it was often driven by narcissism. We intervened not only to save others, but to save ourselves, or rather an image of ourselves as defenders of universal values.' Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honour*

The fall of the Berlin Wall 10 years ago ushered in a new age of humanitarian intervention. It was said then that the end of the Cold War would bring an end to the struggle for territory between East and West. The United Nations, long plagued by Cold War rivalries, would at last become the means for advancing genuine human rights. With the old cynicism of Cold Warriors like Henry Kissinger and Andrei Gromyko a thing of the past, it would be possible for a new kind of international relations to prevail: one based on moral principles. The international community would use its military might to further human rights, not imperial theft.

That was the theory. What was the outcome?

The main theatres of humanitarian intervention were:

Iraq, 1991: 180 000 killed by the 'international community' in the Gulf War and 80 percent of the country's infrastructure destroyed, at an estimated cost of \$150 billion.

Somalia, 1993: 4000 killed by UN troops over 12 months; 700 killed on one night, 5 September.

Bosnia, 1993-5: Thousands killed in a bloody civil war, followed by the military occupation of the newly independent state by UN forces.

Rwanda, 1994: Hundreds of thousands killed in fighting between Hutus and Tutsis, followed by the inauguration of a military dictatorship under UN guidance.

Iraq, 1992-9: Some 500 000 dead due to lack of basic foods and medicines under the regime of economic sanctions. Continuing US/British raids have killed more than 200 in 1999 alone—17 in one single raid on 19 July.

Yugoslavia, 1999: 2000 Yugoslav civilians and 600 military personnel killed in NATO bombings that destroyed 44 percent of the country's industry.

The human sacrifice on the altar of humanitarianism has been profound.

In their defence, the humanitarians have claimed that the challenges they faced were profound. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the ethnic nationalism unleashed in the Balkans, Milosevic's 'Greater Serbia', the teenage Somali militias, the Hutu genocide.... The more elevated the humanitarian rhetoric, the lower the enemy is portrayed.

A trade in atrocity stories against the enemy is the hallmark of this curious

a major justification for NATO's bombing campaigns. But the attempt to sell this war as a crusade against genocide, it has been argued, led to an exaggeration of the numbers killed by the Serbs (see page 31).

Vilifying the enemy is a basic precondition of all war propaganda. Once dehumanised in the imagination, the enemy can be killed in fact. But the readiness of self-styled humanitarians to revoke their opponents' membership of the human race is remarkable.

Warning prime minister John Major in 1991 not to fall for the argument for a pause in the bombardment of Iraq, Labour leader Neil Kinnock said, 'to be blunt, the best time to kick someone is when they are down' (*John Major: the autobiography*, p256, see review on page 44). When President George Bush discussed with his chiefs of staff the possibility that the Iraqis might back off, secretary of state Brent Scowcroft protested, 'don't you realise if he pulls out, it will be impossible for us to stay?'. 'We have to have a war', said Bush, who was privately jubilant when

secretary Clare Short, who complained that 'assistance strengthened the evil forces [the refugees, that is] which had brought about the genocide in Rwanda'.

The ruthlessness of humanitarian intervention was indicated by NATO's bombing of refugee convoys in April 1999. When questions were raised about this, NATO attempted to create a smokescreen by pinning the blame on the Serbs. Yet a report in the journal of the US-based International Strategic Studies Association in May presents a very different picture. A transcript of the voice traffic between the initial strike aircraft and the spotter plane EC-130 Hercules AWACS, reads:

Pilot: 'I am keeping 3000 feet. Under me columns of cars, some kind of tractors. What is it? Requesting instructions.'

AWACS: 'Do you see tanks? Repeat, where are the tanks?'

Pilot: 'I see tractors. I suppose the Reds did not camouflage tanks as tractors.'

AWACS: 'What kind of strange convoy is this? What, civilians? Damn, this is all the Serbs doing. Destroy the target.'

Pilot: 'What should I destroy? Tractors? Ordinary cars? Repeat, I do not see any tanks. Request additional instructions.'

AWACS: 'This is a military target, a completely legitimate military target. Destroy the target. Repeat, destroy the target.'

Pilot: 'Okay, copy. Launching.'

Faced with the disparity between the professed humanitarianism and its consequences, one natural response is the charge of hypocrisy. From the outset, critics of intervention saw humanitarianism as a mask for vested interests. 'At the apex is oil', writes *New Left Review's* Peter Gowan of the Allied campaign against Iraq. 'Oil interests could fit easily with the liberal objective of removing Iraq from Kuwait.' (*The Global Gamble*, p158) Protesters chanted 'no blood for oil!'

But it is far from obvious that the military intervention in Iraq secured a greater share of the region's oil wealth. Iraqi oil production has been slashed. The terms of the intermittent 'oil for food' programme are onerous, with \$700 million surpluses from \$2 billion sales in 1995 transferred to Kuwait and the UN as reparations. But the West could have secured a greater profit in Iraqi oil through conventional trade, without the \$150 billion cost of fighting the war, or the £918 million subsequently given in aid to Iraq.

Nor do the subsequent interventions fit the pattern of nineteenth-century imperialism's plundering of native resources. The theatres of war have not been the richest areas of the globe, but the poorest—

THE HUMAN SACRIFICE ON THE ALTAR OF HUMANITARIANISM HAS BEEN PROFOUND

humanitarianism. From the beginning, public relations firms like Hill & Knowlton were employed to invent stories, like the one that Iraqi soldiers had dashed premature Kuwaiti babies on to the floor to steal their incubators. Years after the Gulf War, reporter Maggie O'Kane admitted that 'we, the media, were harnessed like beach donkeys and led through the sand to see what the British and US military wanted us to see'. The American public relations firm Ruder Finn was hired first by the Croatians, then the Bosnian Muslims, and finally by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to foster images of the Serbs as Nazi demons. Ruder Finn targeted American women and Jews with the promotion of stories of Serbian rape or death camps, and various human atrocities. In the liberal American *Nation*, Slavenka Drakulic wrote, 'even if the rapes were used for political propaganda, this could be justified'. In March 1999, UN weapons inspector Richard Butler's report of new Iraqi weapons of mass destruction prompted another round of bombing against Iraq. His second-in-command Scott Ritter claims that Butler was told by US officials 'to sharpen the language in his report to justify the bombing'.

At the end of 1999, controversy broke out over the numbers of ethnic Albanians killed by Serbs during the most recent conflict. The assumption that Serbs were committing genocide against the Kosovo Albanians was

negotiations between the Iraqi foreign minister and James Baker broke down (Bob Woodward, *Washington Post*, 20 June 1999). Two years later, a red-faced President Bill Clinton was fulminating against the Somalis: 'We're not inflicting pain on these fuckers. When people kill us they should be killed in greater numbers. I can't believe we are being pushed around by these two-bit pricks.' (Quoted in George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human*, p214)

In the refugee camps on the Rwandan borders with Zaire in 1996, the full horror of 'humanitarianism' came to a head. The consensus that the Hutus were collectively guilty of a genocide against the Tutsi minority persuaded aid agencies like CARE and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to suspend help to one million Hutu refugees. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and aid agencies cooperated in the forcible repatriation of refugees back to Rwanda, into a civil war and ethnic persecution. UNHCR officials put refugees on to railway carriages in the knowledge that they were going to their deaths. Those who fled instead to the forests were left to be slaughtered by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, in what former CARE head of emergencies described as a 'new low for humanitarian principles'. Among those championing the withdrawal of aid to the unworthy was international development

◀ Somalia, Kosovo. Critics hoping to discover some pecuniary motive beneath the humanitarian rhetoric were forced to speculate about the 'strategic' importance of the Balkans as a route to Caucasian oil deposits, as though Boris Yeltsin's government was not already in the West's pocket.

Still looking for the hidden motive, many critics of intervention pointed to the way that military occupations were undertaken to distract from domestic problems. David Mamet's film *Wag the Dog* portrayed a US president going to war to divert attention from a domestic sex scandal. While it was on release, President Clinton, facing impeachment over his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, ordered the bombing of Iraq. Was this the face that launched a thousand warships? UNSCOM whistle-blower Scott Ritter said, 'you have no choice but to interpret this as "wag the dog"'. Mamet complained that the president had misread the script—it's supposed to be Albania', he joked. But it is not just Clinton's sleaze-ridden presidency that has embraced humanitarian intervention. If anything, 'Teflon' Tony Blair is even more fervent in his promotion of an ethical foreign policy.

The quest for an ulterior motive behind the humanitarian mask stems from an unwillingness to believe that the humanitarians really mean what they say. Somehow it would all make sense if we could find the hidden mineral resources of Kosovo or East Timor. If this new imperialism were a rerun of the nineteenth-century robbery of the 'lesser' nations it would be bad enough. But at least such plunder had given motivations and limits. What is really so destructive about the new policy, though, is not the quest for profit, but the desire for moral renovation, played out on a foreign field. This moral fervour is, like the doctors of MSF, 'sans frontières'—limitless.

The criticism of intervention as narrowly interest-driven or hypocritical not only misses the point. It participates in the same moralism that is driving the interventionist trend. Liberal critics of the Allied offensive against Iraq complained that the United Nations was ignoring the Bosnians because they were Muslims. Black American congressmen like Charles Rangel protested

THIS MORAL FERVOUR IS, LIKE THE DOCTORS OF MSF, 'SANS FRONTIÈRES'—LIMITLESS

that Africa would never get the attention that the Balkans got: the response was Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Trenchant critics of imperialism like John Pilger and Noam Chomsky pointed to the hypocritical way that the West ignored human rights abuses by its Indonesian allies in East Timor—only to be wrongfooted when their own exposures of abuses became propaganda for military intervention. The problem is not hypocrisy, but the clamour for the high moral plane. In such a climate, demands for action against human rights abuses lead inexorably to military intervention, human rights tribunals, and 'democratisation' programmes.

At the core of the humanitarian agenda is an impulse to moral renovation on the part of Western elites. As Michael Ignatieff says, this is a drive 'to save ourselves, or rather an image of ourselves as defenders of universal values'. 'This is not a battle for NATO, this is not a battle for territory', insisted Tony Blair at the Stenkovec refugee camp in May 1999. 'This is a battle for humanity.' Foreswearing territorial ambition is now second nature in all such interventions. Disinterested foreign policy operates on a higher moral plane than old-fashioned realpolitik, and that is what makes it so deadly. In self-styled crusades of good against evil, without the geopolitical constraints of the Cold War, anything can happen.

Early in the Bosnia crisis, UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali was moved to complain that the Security Council 'is becoming more like the General Assembly: it is making demands that it knows cannot be implemented' (quoted from his book, *Unvanquished*, p42). Increasingly, the permanent members of the Security Council were striking propagandistic poses rather than delivering practical policies. The purpose of foreign policy was shifting from one of geopolitical gain to an inwardly directed moral renovation.

Prime minister John Howard announced Australia's leading role in the East Timorese intervention 'as being able to do something that probably no other country could do...because we occupy that special place. We are a European, Western civilisation with strong links to America, but we are here in Asia....We spent too much time fretting about whether we were in Asia, or part of Asia, or whatever' (*Agence France Press*, 22 September 1999). Howard hopes that doing the 'right thing' in East Timor will

solve Australia's Asian identity crisis, while in Portugal the national daily *Diario de Noticias* editorialises that 'for the sake of our past, present and future, we cannot fail now'. Military action is a means to invest Western elites with a sense of moral purpose that is lacking in the domestic sphere.

Western leaders organise photocalls in refugee camps and among troops regularly. John Major remembered his talk to the troops in Iraq as 'pure theatre' (*The Autobiography*, p297), while Boutros Boutros-Ghali spied on Bill Clinton trying 'to learn Aristide's secret of electrifying the crowd' at his inauguration as president of Haiti, which 'the White House wanted to make an American victory celebration' (*Unvanquished*, p219).

In her speech on children and war on 26 April 1999, Clare Short talked of 'the challenge to all of us—governments, NGOs, international institutions alike', that 'we must ensure that the evils of ethnic cleansing bring no rewards...we look after refugees...[and] we have a clear moral duty'. Listening carefully, it is clear that the subject of the speech is not child soldiers, but 'we', we who carry moral duties and fight evil. In the process of delineating this moral cause, Short is defining the new elite that will carry it. The NGOs and international institutions through the promotion of the humanitarian agenda, the old guard of interest-driven foreign office mandarins is being replaced by the new elite of disinterested aid workers and human rights activists.

Throughout the 1980s, Western elites crippled their own core institutions and allegiances in a struggle to limit public demands upon the system, demobilising popular movements on left and right. Today when those elites struggle to create even a minimal consensus, the appeal of humanitarian action abroad is that it is a realm in which higher, disinterested motivations can be projected, with no danger of domestic repercussions. As Tony Blair said at Stenkovec, 'Milosevic shall be defeated so these people can again become symbols of hope, humanity and peace'. Turning real people into symbols of Western largesse is the point of humanitarian intervention. The drive to build this empire is the narcissism of the elite.



WHO BURIED THE EVIDENCE?

Mick Hume audits the creative accountancy of the Holocaust industry

Serbs “burning bodies” in rush to hide war crimes evidence’, announced the *Observer’s* front page splash on 6 June 1999. The article reported that, having lost the war over Kosovo, Serb forces were trying desperately to destroy the evidence of their atrocities before the war crimes investigators arrived: ‘Three separate sources identified the Trepca mine... as the site where the Serbs have been burning at least 100 bodies a day for the past two months’—making at least 6000 bodies in all.

At the time, the *Observer’s* three sources seemed less than impeccable: a 38-year old ethnic Albanian who had seen nothing himself, but had heard stories about the mine from other refugees; an elderly man from near Trepca who had reportedly spoken to his daughter by satellite phone for three minutes; and a source ‘close to the command of the Kosovo Liberation Army in Macedonia’, whom the paper conceded ‘must be treated with caution’. Yet this dubious-sounding mixture of hearsay and spin was considered enough to justify full front-page treatment.

Trepca was one of the first sites to be investigated by NATO forces after the war’s end. Four months later, in October 1999, the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague had to admit that its intensive investigations into the mine had turned up no evidence of any bodies; not 6000, not even six, but none at all.

In August, Spanish forensic experts who had gone to Kosovo to help investigate massacres poured scorn on the official estimates of how many ethnic Albanians had been killed. One reportedly told the newspaper *El País* that they had been told ‘to prepare ourselves to perform more than 2000 autopsies. We only found 187 cadavers and now we are going to return [to Spain]’. Another said, ‘I have been reading the data from the UN. They began with 44 000 deaths. Then they lowered it to 22 000. And now they are going with 11 000. I look forward to seeing what the final count will really be’. For this forensic scientist, the search for mass graves had turned into ‘a semantic pirouette by the war propaganda machines, because we did not find one—not one—mass grave’. A private US analytical group which has studied reports from the FBI and other police agencies working in Kosovo even suggests that the final death toll might be in the hundreds, not thousands (see John Laughland, ‘The massacres that never were’, *Spectator*, 30 October 1999; Jon Swain, ‘Lost

in the Kosovo numbers game’, *Sunday Times*, 31 October 1999).

During the war, the message from NATO governments and media spokesmen was a little different, as they went all-out to justify their intervention by accusing the Serbs of Nazi-style genocide in Kosovo. British government ministers appearing at the daily press briefings seemed hardly able to open their mouths without mentioning the ‘G’ word. During one brief morning

Up to 100,000 young men killed in Kosovo, says US

As half a million Kosovans flee their homes in terror from Milosevic, a haunting echo of another war 60 years ago

FLIGHT FROM GENOCIDE

Kosovo deaths ‘crime against humanity’

session on 28 March, the ridiculous defence secretary George (now Lord) Robertson told reporters that NATO was facing ‘a regime which is intent on genocide’; that the sole purpose of the air strikes was ‘to stop the genocidal violence’ and the ‘ethnic extermination’; that the air war would continue until ‘the genocidal attacking stops’; that NATO was united in its determination ‘to stop this ethnic cleansing extermination policy’; and that Serbian commanders should look to their consciences and refuse to obey ‘these genocidal orders’.

The NATO-friendly media went further still, explicitly comparing the conflict in Kosovo to the Holocaust. On 29 March the *Sun* bluntly headlined its Kosovo spread ‘NAZIS 1999—Serb cruelty has chilling echoes of the Holocaust’. When the horror stories about burning bodies in Trepca mine broke in June, the *Mirror* had no hesitation in putting this site on a par with the Nazi death camps. ‘Trepca—the name will live alongside those of Belsen, Auschwitz and Treblinka’, the paper claimed: ‘It will be etched in the memories of those whose loved ones met a bestial end in true Nazi Final Solution fashion.’

To back up that kind of rhetoric, the authorities hinted at frightening estimates of the death toll in Kosovo. On 18 April David Scheffer, the US ambassador for war

crimes, told US television that up to 100 000 young ethnic Albanian men may have been killed by the Serbs. A month later, on 16 May, US defence secretary William Cohen told CBS that ‘we’ve now seen about 100 000 military-aged men missing. They may have been murdered’. Or, as it turns out, most of them may not.

Of course, Serbs did commit atrocities in Kosovo, and there were many tragic deaths. But, as some of us argued at the time, to try to compare such a bloody but unexceptional civil war with the Nazi annihilation of the Jews is a serious mistake. Even if the current scaled-down claim of 11 000 deaths turned

out to be true, to call that a Nazi-style genocide is akin to equating a motorway accident with a major earthquake. In political terms, such a comparison risks both distorting what is happening in the Balkans

today, and rewriting the history of the Holocaust itself by diminishing the scale of that unique horror (see ‘Genocide: what’s in a word?’, *LM*, May 1999).

If presented with a blank sheet of paper intelligent journalists would normally conclude that nothing had been written on it—not that somebody had scrawled all over it and then carefully erased it. And yet, when confronted by unsubstantiated atrocity stories in Kosovo, too many seemed prepared to assume that they must be true, and to see the lack of evidence merely as proof that witnesses were terrified to come forward and that the Serbs were destroying the evidence.

The Nazification of the Serbs, a process which has gathered pace through the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s, ensured that most of NATO’s mud stuck. Many journalists were prepared to report stories like the Trepca body-burning as good coin, not because they were stupid or part of some grand conspiracy, but because they accepted that the Serbs were Nazis and, as such, were capable of anything. Nazifying the Serbs became an excuse for ignorance. Anybody who questioned the official line risked being branded an apologist for genocide or, as New Labour minister Clare Short told *Woman’s Hour* on 20 April, ‘the equivalent to the people who appeased Hitler’.

Online

For more articles and links on Kosovo, visit the updated *LM Online* Kosovo website at <http://www.informinc.co.uk/LM/documentary/kosovo.html>

ARE YOU WHO

Novelist Tim Parks talked to Claire Fox about the problem of over-literal, non-literary criticism

'He's a misogynist.' So a friend summed up the novelist Tim Parks. She could not even bring herself to read *Destiny*, Parks' latest book. 'Once he used the terms "totty" and "shag wagon" in *Europa*, I couldn't read on.'

Parks' 1997 Booker-nominated novel *Europa* was referred to by feminist publisher Carmen Callil as 'an atrocious piece of penis waving'. Despite wryly admitting that this statement was good for sales, Parks pleads not guilty, and claims he was 'appalled at being presented so negatively'. So where did the label come from?

Some critics, it seems, take Parks' stories rather too literally. The tendency to give an over-literal reading of fiction is one of the most irritating habits of contemporary criticism. Driven by a political agenda rather than a literary one, it betrays an acute failure of the imagination as much as it shows critics' lack of artistic appreciation. Authors find themselves pilloried for their attitudes while the story itself is conveniently ignored.

As Parks told me at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in the summer, once he starts working on a novel about relationships, 'I want to forget all the problems of the political attitudes of women to men and vice versa'. In *Europa*, for example, he was most interested in 'the idea of the coach trip across Europe, put together with that particular love story of obsessive disappointment that protracts itself beyond any possible, reasonable point'. He is aware that using incorrect language 'is what did *Europa* down'—but that language showed a group of fictional male lecturers talking about their female students in sexist terms, for a particular purpose in the novel. 'The interesting thing to me was how and why the major character used that language. He, unlike the other people who were using those terms, was so desperate to separate himself from an agonising experience that he was determined to present as meaningless and cheap every form of engagement with women—precisely because for him, with his ex-lover, it had not been meaningless and cheap.'

The over-literalism with which many critics now approach literature confuses the voice of a novel's narrator with that of its author. That narrator and author are not one and the same thing is a standard point of literary style. But those reading Parks often forget this; especially as he tends to write in the first person, and his writing is often about what he describes as 'a very intense feeling of disappointment on one side or another'. In his books, 'a lot of the opinions that get expressed tend to be generalising, as a way of saying this is not my fault but something between women and men'. We all know that feeling: I have often bitterly reflected that 'all men are bastards'. This emotional response, which Parks captures through his characters, is not the same as a reasoned argument. But 'the careless reader', says Parks, 'often imagines that what I'm doing here is ranting against women'.

Ironically for a supposed woman-hater, Parks has also found himself in trouble for understanding women too well. In his second novel *Loving Roger*, the first-person voice is that of a young woman who has killed her boyfriend. At first 'this was a very difficult thing to sell', because Parks the author was not a woman. When it was published, some people were so convinced by the female voice that they suggested

the book had been published under a female author's pseudonym.

Critics and publishers seem to have more trouble with grasping the distinction between author and narrator recently, as the vogue for confessional writing has taken off. In this genre, which has effortlessly shifted from non-fiction to fiction, it is deemed inappropriate for authors to assume the mantle of protagonists whose experiences they have not shared. Parks tells a revealing anecdote about his first experience of this. *Leo's Fire*, a novel he wrote years ago, was an arson story set in Boston and narrated in the first person by a young black man. It was a runner-up in the BBC Book Prize and taken on by a very reputable agent in London. But 'when they found out I wasn't black, they dropped it very rapidly'. Many publishers expressed an interest, 'but a lot of people wanted to know who I was and if I was black'. The book was never published. Then he wrote a book in the first person by a white woman. 'The agency dropped me. I suppose they were thinking, "who the fuck is this guy?"'

The current obsession with finding the 'authentic' authorial voice in

'WE'RE TALKING
ABOUT NOVELS HERE,
NOT POLITICAL TRACTS'

literature underestimates the imaginative powers of both writer and reader. Obviously, says Parks, 'one's work does tend to be autobiographical, because it's about the way you think and feel about life in general. Then you find metaphors for that'. But people who demand that the author is the same sex/colour as the narrator 'forget that art is a performance'. Authenticity is not generated by which voice you assume but 'by the whole complexity of the work, and the extent to which it generates recognition in the reader'. This can apply as much to 'a mythological story about the gods or a children's fable' as to a realistic novel. He cynically—although perhaps correctly—suggests that 'obviously there are people who have a vested interest in suggesting that only this or that person can do that'.

Parks also draws out a certain hypocrisy in the way only selected literary voices are queried. He admits that *Loving Roger* 'was a very anti-male book in a way', but this was never criticised as it did not challenge the new orthodoxy. 'If you think of what Jeanette Winterson got away with in some of her books, with a totally negative portrayal of men in general—and it was very deliberate.' In *Sexing the Cherry*, men as a gender are described by Winterson 'in authorial third person' as appalling. 'I thought, if I'd done that about women they would have crucified me. But I wouldn't have dreamed of doing that.'

The response to Parks' work, which conflates author with narrator for political reasons, is mirrored in the way political opinion is increasingly conflated with literary judgement. Art is judged less for its

YOU WRITE?

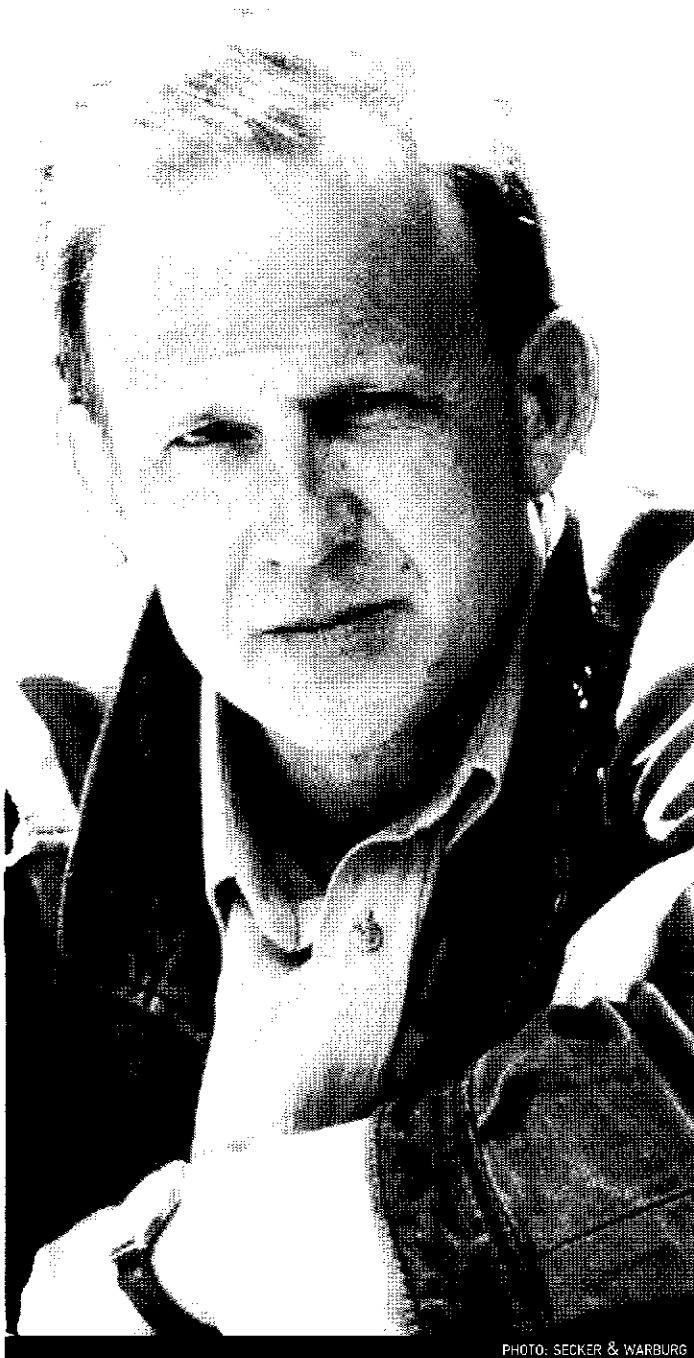


PHOTO: SECKER & WARBURG

style and content than its message. But to judge any work of art as falling short of some societal ideal is ridiculous. As Parks points out, 'we're talking about novels here, not political tracts'. He was amazed by a woman he had recently met who declared that as a socialist 'she liked to read books of socialist orientation'. With that attitude 'you may as well not read at all'. He muses about how many wonderful novels you would miss if you boycotted writers solely because of their political views.

Some authors, under pressure to fit their fiction into a politically clean package, are beginning to slip into easy ready-made formulas. Parks finds it 'pernicious' that there are those writers who have taken to 'crusading against some obvious evil like genocide, or multinationals selling the wrong milk to infants'. While this may give the novelists a feeling of moral purpose, by allowing them 'to vent a lot of anger' and feel they are 'telling the truth about the world', he feels they are spelling out the obvious—'saying what most people have already cottoned on to anyway'. Pandering to a worthy agenda can lead to a real failure of creativity. As Parks points out, it is these works of fiction 'that are primarily selling views' in which one most reacts against any ideas one finds personally 'distasteful', because 'there's nothing else in the novel, nothing artistic, to recommend it'.

Art, when used to attack easy political targets, becomes two-dimensional and over-simplistic: even pantomimical. Parks recalls attending a recent poetry reading which 'was not only shit, it was unworthy of having been written or spoken in any form. It had a sort of adolescent and facile demolition of certain conventional truths—of Christianity, poking fun at Jesus, and so on and so forth'. Because people do not take this kind of work seriously, 'they don't actually feel challenged by your work at all. I hate all that stuff'.

The world Parks—and indeed any good novelist—reflects in his novels is complex, and not easily understood in black and white terms. There are rarely obvious baddies. But too frequently, contemporary fiction reads like a morality play, where it is only too clear whom the reader should hate and love, and where motives are ironed out smoothly into such categories as evil and good. Some writers, Parks tells me, are all too ready to fill our world with stereotypical villains and are 'avoiding the deeper issues of truth such as what you actually feel about people around you'.

'One of the things that has happened with contemporary fiction, with the likes of Iain Banks and Ian McEwan, is that there are a lot of very evil people and terrible things in their books, as if all the awful things that happen in the contemporary world only happen because of these terribly evil people.' Such an approach, he argues, has more in common with the tabloid press than literature. Take *Felicity's Journey*, 'that atrocious book where the writer tries to represent the modern problem by having this guy who seduces young girls and kills them. Straight out of the newspapers'.

In calling for writers and readers 'to wake up to the fact that life is difficult, complex, joyful, layered', Parks may not ensure popularity among the new critics. But at least he will continue to write good books.

Tim Parks' latest novel *Destiny* is published by Secker & Warburg; read the review at <http://www.culturewars.org.uk>

Culture Wars

'IT IS GIVEN TO MAN TO BE THAT

The Renaissance was not so much a rebirth as a new age of human life, says Alan Hudson

There are two reproductions of Renaissance paintings on the wall of my study: *The Expulsion (of Adam and Eve)* by Masaccio, and *The Allegory of Good Government* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Together these pictures sum up the spirit of the Renaissance: the discovery and pain of the self, and the acting out of human endeavour.

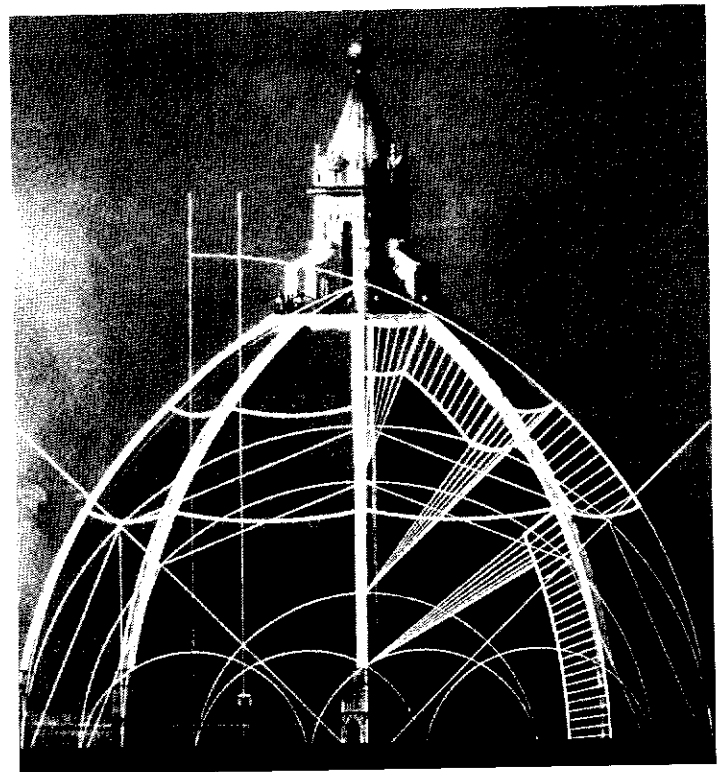
The development of the self through achievement in the public sphere is the core of the Renaissance experience. Andrew Graham-Dixon's BBC blockbuster (see below for details) captures how the Renaissance involved a new relationship between public space, public pride and public duty. For Renaissance man, the public space opens up the inner space, the inwardness, of humanity through its exploration of the world.

In a sense, the Renaissance was not a rebirth at all, and certainly not a mere revival of classical learning. It was a new development in human life. As with any social developments there is a relationship between change and continuity, and the task is to establish the mediations between the two. So it is possible to make a case for a twelfth-century renaissance—a period in which the ecclesiastical glories of Western Christendom were much in evidence, and there was the re-establishment of a more integrated and substantial trading system. But this takes place without a real sense of discontinuity with the medieval world order.

There are sufficient examples of earlier masterpieces, and the continued significance of classical and Christian philosophy, iconography and language, to try to make the case that the Renaissance did not happen at all. In this reading the Renaissance is a convenient fiction probably invented by the great Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt, who represented the Italian city states as the first secular cities, awakened from the mystical trance of the Middle Ages. Burckhardt is undoubtedly one-sided in his presentation of Renaissance Florence as all sweetness and light. But while there is a dark side to the Florentine spirit, this is as modern as the harmony and elegance of Florentine humanism.

Renaissance man embarked upon a journey of discovery and contestation, which enabled humanity to push back the limits and transform what we are. Even while aware of his own isolation and contingency, he believed in his own project and was aware that a fundamental shift in human affairs was taking place through his own activity. The Florentine humanist Pico della Mirandola epitomised this spirit in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Pico defines man as *homo faber*: man as his own maker. He separated man from the natural world and the great chain of being of the medieval world picture. He notes that 'man is an animal of diverse, multiform, and destructible nature... it is given to (man) to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills'. Pico concludes triumphantly that 'It is ignoble.... To give birth to nothing from ourselves'. The imposition of our selves on the world is what makes us human. This is the real meaning of the term Renaissance.

Renaissance Florence was shaped by only a handful of men. But this does not matter—they did it. Graham-Dixon makes this point vividly in relationship to the achievements of Brunelleschi and Donatello in the early years of the Quattrocento. Men such as these grasped the nettle and transformed their world. This is well worth remembering in a time when human capacity is being put to question.



IF ONE WORK AND ONE MA
RENAISSANCE, IT IS THE D

We now have, at least potentially, an almost infinitely greater capacity to determine our own circumstance in a world that we understand much, much better than did the giants of the Quattrocento. Yet we no longer see ourselves as our Renaissance forbears did: as the crown of creation, with the world a measure of ourselves. Our worldview is not defined by the need to push back the limits and discover new things, but by a sense that risk should be avoided and contestation eschewed.

The self-determination of Renaissance man is an important point to grasp, not least because contemporary interpretation and reanalysis insists that the narrative of Pico, Donatello, Leonardo and the others is just one possible story among many. In so doing, these interpreters implicitly apologise for their own narrow and impoverished sense of possibilities. In one sense, the contemporary preoccupation with chance and contingency is pertinent. To the Greeks and Romans chance meant fate—the will of the gods of which we were as flies to wanton boys. But while the Renaissance conception of *fortuna* was one in which a strong

WHICH HE WILLS' Lost for words

by Sandy Starr

man made his own destiny through seizing opportunities and decisive action, the contemporary understanding of chance tends to see a lottery of parallel universes through which we wander.

The Renaissance was an accident. But it was an accident waiting to happen, and one which humanity was ready to make sense of and flourish through. When you come out of the railway station in central Florence, cross the road to the Church of Santa Maria Novella. Go up to the nave and you will be faced with the piercing beauty of Masaccio's crucifixion of Christ. In the world defined by the gaze of the dying Christ, you are part of a world which is marked by the pain of mortality but etched in the frame of human possibility.

This is the time when the measure of man became man. The Renaissance presents itself to us as an aesthetic experience, but the urgency and quality of artistic production itself derives from a qualitative shift in the human imagination. It is the ability to illustrate this which should be the marker for our own judgement of how the Renaissance is presented. By this criterion the National Gallery's exhibition on Florence in the 1470s is a failure: but not for the reasons usually cited. The problem is the arbitrary nature of the context.

The 1470s was the period when the Medici consolidated their power and undermined the republic. But except for a passing reference to the Pazzi conspiracy (much better explained in *Hannibal* by Thomas Harris) even this is not explained. Why the 1470s, and not the succeeding period of Savonarola's rule culminating in the Bonfire of the Vanities? Why not the 1490s and the High Renaissance, or better still the springtime of the Florentine Renaissance earlier in the century? The discovery of perspective, the growth of self-perception and the increasing use of the vernacular seem to me a more appropriate vocabulary through which to understand the Renaissance.

UP THE SPIRIT OF THE AND THE MAN BRUNELLESCHI

The centrepiece of the exhibition is the plans for Brunelleschi's unsurpassable dome, for the cathedral Church of Santa Maria del Fiore. So magical is this building that the cathedral itself is known simply as Il Duomo. If one work and one man sum up the spirit of the Renaissance, it is the dome and the man Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi, credited with the discovery of perspective, was a stubborn individual who persuaded an incredulous gathering of Florentine city fathers that a huge dome could be built without internal support. It would be a glorious symbol of Florentine excellence and he could build it in record time. Brunelleschi's dome is a miracle of engineering and harmony, and soars over and defines the city which worships it. This is what the Renaissance is all about.

Renaissance, a six-part series, started on BBC2 in November. The exhibition *Renaissance Florence: the art of the 1470s* is at the National Gallery until 16 January 2000. *The Art of Invention: Leonardo and Renaissance engineers* is at the Science Museum until 24 April 2000

Star Wars Episode 1 became the first film ever to be projected digitally, without the inconvenience of celluloid. While this reveals exciting possibilities about the future of film it also serves as a tragic reminder that our repository of films is incomplete, damaged, and continues to deteriorate.

So the British Film Institute should be commended for compiling a selection of the earliest filmed versions of Shakespeare's plays on a new video, *Silent Shakespeare*. Beginning with the first ever Shakespeare film, *King John* (1899), the video offers a selection of soundless films that are rapidly becoming too fragile even to project. We might expect these films to seem quaint or naive; instead they are vivid and modern.

How can a silent film director do justice to a playwright whose work, more than any other, rests upon the importance of language? In exploring the new medium of film, early directors were forced to find a visual analogue for Shakespeare's metaphors. Perhaps the finest example of this can be seen in Percy Stow's 1908 film of *The Tempest*, which exploits film trickery to show Ariel flitting in and out of being, and to show a raging storm framed within Prospero's island residence. The central ambiguity of *The Tempest*, as to whether Prospero is manipulating events or imagining them, is preserved perfectly here: he could be looking out at the tempest, or the tempest could be his own conceit, isolated before him.

Although we are now accustomed to sound in film, the pioneers of cinema considered sound a threat to the medium, which would transform the subtleties of montage into the banality of filmed plays. Leonid Andreyev's *First Letter on Theatre* of 1911, perhaps the most prescient document of the century with regard to cinema, predicted technical developments such as colour film, but could not conceive of sound as one of them. 'A cinema Shakespeare', said Andreyev, 'after abandoning the inconvenience of words', would develop a film vocabulary 'as expressive as speech'.

I would never bemoan the existence of sound film, but the absence of sound certainly engendered creativity in early cinema and allowed the medium to develop independently. The opulence of Kenneth Branagh's recent film of *Hamlet*, or even the visceral horror of Roman Polanski's classic *Macbeth*, create a tautology. They exist in addition to the carefully crafted language of the plays, language written to compensate for the limitations of dramatic representation. Since these plays are so well written, it is easy to use Shakespeare's language as a crutch, relying upon it without infusing it with the talent necessary to bring it to life.

The director of a silent film is denied the easy option, as are those great directors like Akira Kurosawa, who have brought Shakespeare to life in languages other than English. The absence of sound and the advantage of montage, in combination, mirror the theatre's combined advantage of language and limitation of the stage. The creative dialogue between a sixteenth-century playwright and an early twentieth-century film director yields remarkable results.

Silent Shakespeare is available to *LM* readers at the discounted price of £12.99 (rrp £15.99). Phone the British Film Institute on (020) 7957 8957. For credit card sales, phone (020) 7957 8960

Strictly for the birds

Tony Gilland questions the assumption that modern agriculture is threatening farmland birds

Among the arguments marshalled against genetically modified (GM) crops, a major concern is for the welfare of farmland birds. Dr Brian Johnson, English Nature's GMOs adviser, claims that 'the environmentally untested introduction of GMOs could be the final blow for such species as the skylark, corn bunting and the linnet'. Even the government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Robert May, has publicly expressed concerns about 'the degree to which this technology will accelerate existing trends in the countryside which impoverish it'. Monitoring the impact upon wildlife is one of the principal aims of the GM farm-scale crop trials currently under way; and environment minister Michael Meacher announced in November that there would be no 'unrestricted cultivation of GM crops' in Britain until these trials are complete in 2002.

Conservation groups claim that modern pesticides have been so effective in removing weeds and insects in farmers' fields that many birds are being starved of their food supply. GM crops, they argue, might usher in yet more effective farming practices and make the situation worse. Data from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) shows that tree sparrows have declined by 87 percent, grey partridges by 78 percent, corn buntings by 74 percent and reed buntings, turtle doves, skylarks and yellowhammers all by 60 percent or more during the period 1972 to 1996. These species form part of the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions' (DETR's) new index of 20 more common 'farmland species' which have fallen from a base value of 100 in 1970 to a value of 69 in 1997.

As the plight of birds has already played a major role in determining the future of GM crops, it is worth taking a closer look at the assumption that intensified farming has caused their decline.

Attention has focused on correlations made between the decline in a number of species of birds, which began around the mid-1970s, and changes in certain agricultural practices since that time. This work seems to indicate that new agricultural practices have had a negative impact on birds that live predominantly on farmland (specialists), while other species (generalists) have coped with the changes rather well. But conducting the field experiments necessary to prove how specific factors impact on particular birds is difficult and expensive, and there are many hypotheses to be tested. BTO experts acknowledge that they 'remain ignorant of the precise causes of the majority of farmland bird declines' (Baillie et al, *Farmland Bird Declines: patterns, processes and prospects*, 1997). Even on the hypothesis that pesticides

reduce available food supplies, many ornithologists accept that 'the only species for which such an effect has been demonstrated beyond doubt is the grey partridge'.

Yet in response to the question 'can we be sure that the bird declines in the United Kingdom are caused by agricultural intensification?', four leading ornithologists recently argued that 'most of the evidence is by association, but in sum total it is damning'. They cited annual BTO censuses for 42 species of breeding birds, which show that 13 species of farmland specialists—such as the skylark and corn bunting—declined by an average of 30 percent between 1968 and 1995. Meanwhile, 29 species of habitat generalists—like the carrion crow and the wren—have increased by an average of 23 percent.



Apparently, generalists are more able to adapt to change and to nest and feed elsewhere, while those whose ecological requirements are more specific—and used to be well-suited to farmland—are suffering the consequences of agricultural change (Krebs et al, 'The second silent spring?', *Nature*, 12 August 1999).

This argument is highly plausible. Birds found on and around farmland are living in a habitat heavily shaped by human activities, so one would expect changes in these activities to have an impact. But these correlations and indexes hide a lot of important contextual information. There are many more bird species to be found on farmland than the so-called specialists. As Krebs et al point out, the 29 generalists found on farmland

'have increased by an average of 23 percent'. So even though 75 percent of UK land is used for farming and the specialists are thought to have declined by around 30 percent, our countryside is certainly not becoming devoid of birdlife.

Despite intensification of farming, not all the specialists are declining. For six of the 20 'farmland species' included in the DETR index (goldfinch, greenfinch, woodpigeon, whitethroat, jackdaw and stock dove), BTO data shows an increase in population, four by more than 50 percent. This suggests that the relationship between intensification and bird populations is not as straightforward as some might have us believe. Dr Dick Potts, director general of the Game Conservancy Trust, is convinced that agricultural changes are the primary cause for the decline of six to eight species, but for others 'the jury is still out'. According to Potts, 'people have been too hasty altogether to blame farming, which in recent years has improved in many ways', while other plausible factors have received less attention. And even if some species have declined as a result of intensified agricultural practices, the real question remains, 'so what?'

This was the response of Michael Lancaster, a retired scientist who describes himself as an 'amateur ornithologist' and a 'loyal member of the BTO for the past 30 years'. He has become increasingly concerned about the misleading impression being created by the use of panic-laden statistics, and argues that too much emphasis is placed upon the category 'farmland' in relation to birds. The skylark, he points out, is naturally a species of steppe which has taken advantage of farmland while it can. If it is now retreating from a less favourable habitat which it once expanded into, 'so what?'. There are currently thought to be over a million pairs of skylark breeding in Britain despite their decline. And according to the BTO, 'after a severe population decline between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the population has remained relatively stable' (Crick et al, *Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside: their conservation status (1972-1996)*, 1998). So while BTO data might show a striking 60 percent decline from 1972 to 1996, over the past 10-15 years its data presumably shows relatively little change.

Dr Tim Sharrock, managing editor of *British Birds* and coordinator of the BTO's first *Bird Breeding Atlas* in the early 1970s, is similarly sanguine. Prompted by mass media coverage of 'the latest doom-and-gloom story', Sharrock wrote an editorial for the September issue of the journal entitled 'Panic ye not', which counselled against looking for 'the one simple answer'. Tim Sharrock and Michael Lancaster seem to share a philosophy that change, whether due to 'natural' effects

LEAP-FROGGING OVER SCIENCE

or man's impact, is to be expected and should be no cause for alarm. As Sharrock explains, 'these birds are only here because of the inefficiencies of past agricultural methods'. He adds that 'as some species decline, others increase and take their place'. Indeed, a recent BTO report found that 'the number of species showing long-term trends of declining population size approximately equalled the number showing increases' (Crick et al, 1998).

Lord Derek Barber is even more critical of the way the current debate about birdlife has been shaped. Lord Barber, who was the chair of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) from 1976 to 1981, and chair of the Countryside Commission from 1980 to 1990, argues that 'everything as far as the RSPB is concerned is always in grave danger. Bodies like the RSPB and Worldwide Fund for Nature cry wolf at every opportunity. They tend to go for exaggerating all the time and they tend in due course to believe their own exaggeration'.

So what if bird populations are changing? None of the 'farmland species' hitting the headlines as a result of press statements released by conservation organisations is endangered. And while conservationists might point to the government's Biodiversity Action Plans, and its commitment to 'halt or reverse' the declines of many of these species, others might ask why these commitments were made in the first instance.

Corn bunting, grey partridge, tree sparrow and skylark are all birds which have featured in many alarmist press statements, and for which there are Biodiversity Action Plans. Corn buntings breed in their millions in Spain and Turkey and are thought to be currently enjoying a population increase in these preferred locations, where the climate is warmer and drier. Skylarks and tree sparrows breed in their millions around the world, and even the grey partridge, which is less numerous, is not listed as a 'globally threatened' species. More than 1100 of the world's 10 000 identified bird species have been listed as 'globally threatened'. Yet only 24 of these 1100 species breed in Europe, and only a handful in the UK (*Globally Threatened Birds In Europe*, Council of Europe, 1996). This shows the need for some perspective: why should these birds be of any real concern to the British public and its government?

When everything is taken into account, it seems that this discussion has very little to do with birds. Rather, it has become one more way to raise broader concerns about modern farming, and particularly GM crops. Whatever the problems or potential with new agricultural technologies, getting into a flap about birds will not help move this debate forward. ●

Bill Durodié deconstructs the transatlantic concern over deformed frogs' legs

Is humanity threatened by the existence of five-legged frogs? Do pesticides cause deformities that could spell danger for human health? Some environmental activists think so: and now the scientific establishments of America and Europe have responded to their concerns.

Two reports published this year, by the US National Research Council (NRC) and the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (CSTEE), looked into the reasons behind a supposed rise in limb abnormalities found in various frog species—including supernumerary (extra), deformed and missing legs. Such widespread deformities as these have been reported in the scientific literature for years. But recent speculation has raised the possibility of a correlation with ozone depletion, and/or increased use of chemicals by industry and agriculture.

One view has centred on the belief that some pesticides can mimic the effect of retinoids, which occur naturally in frogs and other vertebrates, and act as essential signalling molecules for limb development. Fears have been raised that whatever had been harming the frogs could potentially harm other wildlife and humans too, as retinoids interact with steroid hormone-like receptors and include some of the most powerful known human teratogens (substances which can cause birth defects). If proven, this idea would enhance influential theories surrounding so-called 'endocrine disrupting chemicals' (EDCs)—known in the popular media as 'gender-benders' and the primary focus of the two reports. These theories focus on the danger that chemicals could interfere with the 'endocrine system'—a complex of processes in which fundamental bodily functions are kept in check through the action of an appropriate balance of hormones—and thus disrupt the natural hormones responsible for homeostasis, reproduction, development and/or behaviour.

Yet the official reports reveal little evidence of any risk to human health coming from endocrine disrupters caused by pesticides. They recognise that the major human intake of endocrine disrupters actually comes from naturally occurring oestrogens found in foods, like peas, beans and celery. This is several orders of magnitude higher than the exposure to EDCs due to pesticides: a point which appears to be studiously ignored by the

environmental campaigners. Oestrogen flavonoids in food are found to represent 102 micrograms per day, while daily ingestion of environmental organochlorine oestrogens released by human activity account for a mere 0.0000025 micrograms.

The original intention of CSTEE's work was 'to finally produce a report that covers human health and environmental effects of EDCs'. But the final product placed a far greater emphasis upon wildlife, 'due to the fact that it is where the greatest impact is felt'. In other words, unable to come up with sufficient evidence for effects upon humans, the committee decided to play this down.



rather than highlight the absence of risk. At the official level, the goalposts seem to have shifted. Meanwhile, the NRC report has been criticised for producing a 'vacillating conclusion', as its attempts to 'achieve a consensus document' from a 'balance of views' have simply produced a 400+ page fudge calling for even more research.

Among the many case studies examined, both documents repeated the concerns over the mystery of frogs' leg deformities and their possible association with chemical contaminants. But between the release of the CSTEE and the NRC reports, two articles by American researchers published in *Science* magazine expressly refuted simplistic correlations between these widespread abnormalities and man-made environmental toxicants. In the first study, morphological (shape) analysis of some 400 frog specimens collected from 12 localities indicated no

◀ continued from page 37

possible link to the expected action of retinoic acid, suggesting that the misshapen or extra limbs were more consistent with a physical, rather than chemical, effect. The second study showed conclusively that frogs grown from tadpoles kept under laboratory conditions with a microscopic parasitic flatworm developed abnormalities, while a control group did not. These trematode parasites, derived from a species of aquatic snail, would burrow into the tadpoles' limb buds, physically rearranging them and causing abnormal limb development.

The idea that pesticides were behind an epidemic of deformity was now described by one of the scientists involved in the study as 'dead in the water'. By autumn 1999 Gail Charnley, president of the prestigious US-based Society for Risk Analysis, had independently described the endocrine disruption hypothesis as 'a theory based on anecdotes', and compared it to 'a conclusion looking for data', before going on to criticise Congress for acting ahead of the scientific

THE ENDOCRINE DISRUPTION HYPOTHESIS IS 'A THEORY BASED ON ANECDOTES'

process by proposing a multimillion-dollar screening programme to investigate the supposed hormone-disrupting effects of up to 15 000 industrial chemicals.

Clearly simplistic associational evidence, rather grandly described by some as 'ecoepidemiology', is insufficient to rigorously explain biological and chemical processes best revealed through objective analysis of causal mechanisms and metabolic pathways. Yet rather than accepting the evidence, environmental campaigners—and even one of the scientists whose research refuted their claims—have shamelessly shifted

the terms of the debate. They now argue that a species weakened by parasites may be more susceptible to the effects of climate change or the use of chemicals. They are also asking why there would appear to be an increase in the number of trematode-carrying water snails in the ponds and lakes investigated. Apparently they believe that this may be associated with an increase in the prevalence of organochlorine EDCs in the environment released due to human activity.

Despite the fact that none of their specific evidence has yet to stack up, by asserting a general need to act on a precautionary basis, such activists are running rings around a nervous establishment desperate to legitimise itself in the eyes of consumers. While frogs' legs and snails may be off the menu for now, the wider endocrine disrupting chemicals saga looks set to run and run.

Bill Durodié is a research student at the London School of Economics and author of *Poisonous Dummies: European risk regulation after BSE*, available to buy from LM. Phone (020) 7269 9224 for details

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SECOND OPINION

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick

A great leap forward?



In the dog days of the Thatcher regime many observers noted the curious way in which the government took up both the rhetoric and the authoritarian style of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. This was particularly striking in the sphere of health, where the Tories promulgated goals and targets in terms similar to the 'five-year plans' of the 1930s. When the health minister appointed a surgeon who had excelled in reducing his waiting list to head a national campaign, echoes of the heroic Stakhanov were inescapable.

In an even more bizarre twist of historical fate, Tony Blair seems to have taken up the mantle of Chairman Mao Zedong, the erstwhile leader of Chinese communism. This identification came to the fore in his monumentally self-important party conference speech in September. It is increasingly apparent as he pursues the long march of modernisation against the forces of conservatism in British society. The NHS appears to have been singled out to experience the full impact of Chairman Tony's cultural revolution.

A government reshuffle has strengthened the Blairite vanguard, placing Alan Milburn as minister of health and giving Yvette Cooper responsibility for public health. These are youthful cadres, steeled in the purges of loony left deviationists, and lacking any prior ideological or political allegiance. They are totally loyal to the great helmsman and fully committed to whatever policy emerges from the focus groups and think tanks supervised by the fervent capitalist roaders at New Labour's Millbank Tower headquarters.

True to the Chairman's slogan '20 years in a day', the great leap forward against the forces of conservatism in health is proceeding at a suitably hectic pace. In the tradition of ritual denunciation of the enemies of the revolution, the running dogs of reaction in the British Medical Association have been publicly abused. Having scarcely adjusted to last year's forced collectivisation in primary care groups, GP leaders pleaded in vain for some

respite from the revolutionary process.

Meanwhile, just as ministers due for a reshuffle become the victims of hostile 'off-the-record' briefings from the prime minister's press secretary, doctors suddenly find the media full of disparaging stories about their crimes and misdemeanours. When they are not (allegedly) murdering their patients and forging their wills, they are either summarily removing them from their lists (because they are mentally ill, need expensive drugs, or are just difficult) or fraudulently keeping them on their lists for years after they have moved away, died or emigrated. The medical profession has not yet been despatched for systematic retraining in Tony-Blair-thought, though recent proposals for 'revalidation' seem likely to require the level of political correctness among practising doctors that is now expected in medical schools.

Chairman Tony says that a great leap forward starts from two legs. Thus the New Labour programme combines populist gestures from the health minister and public health initiatives in which the masses are expected to play a full part. The key ministerial measures are NHS Direct—a 24-hour, nurse-led telephone advice service—and walk-in health centres, where people can get instant access to medical assessment and treatment. Though some experts fear that these concessions to consumer pressure will increase overall demand on the health service and destabilise the gatekeeping role of GPs, the Chairman says 'the customer is always right'.

The red guards forcing the pace of the cultural revolution are to be found in the healthy living centres and health action zones, the cutting edge of New Labour's new public health campaign. These initiatives aim to re-educate the masses in the simple virtues of the peasant way of life, promoting hard work, plain food, parenting classes and lectures in Tony-Blair-thought. Bicycles and wide-brimmed hats are not mandatory, but are encouraged as a healthy lifestyle choice. It is expected that

the Chairman's 'smart but informal' dress code of shirtsleeves and sensible trousers will become standard among health service workers.

Frank Dobson, Milburn's recent predecessor and now running for mayor in London, left three legacies to the health service. The first was his rationing of Viagra when he set a performance standard for the nation in frequency of sexual intercourse, for which he will be forever remembered as Frank 'once a week' Dobson. The second was the bill for the great generic drug rip-off, in which the drug companies got around a deal to reduce the price of branded drugs by discreetly fixing the prices of cheaper 'generic' drugs. Doctors are already being asked to change their prescribing habits to help finance this fraudulent public subsidy of drug company profiteering.

The third was the great waiting list initiative, a propaganda exercise worthy of any Stalinist dictator. The government's success in meeting its waiting list target is reminiscent of the apocryphal Soviet boot factory that was rewarded for exceeding its quota by 100 percent: the boots were counted in single units, not pairs—but all the boots produced were for the left foot. British consultants soon discovered a similar scam: they could cut their waiting lists by proportionately increasing the period of time before patients received their first outpatient appointment and got on the waiting list. The net effect is, in one sense, zero—the duration of the wait is unchanged. More importantly, the effect of introducing this sort of vacuous performance indicator is to spread a corrosive cynicism through the health service that is more damaging to the morale of the NHS than the 'cuts' of the past ever were.

The notorious outcomes of Chairman Mao's great leap forward in China were famine and millions of tons of useless pig iron. Chairman Tony may yet find his campaign for a second term weighed down by the damage caused by his ill-advised cultural revolution in the health service. ●

Does yes really mean yes?

In America, argues Tessa Mayes, almost anything can be labelled a sex crime

A 37-year old man was charged with sexual assault and sexual contact by his landlady in New Jersey last year. One night she bought some beers, and alleged that the man ejaculated over her underwear when she was not able to give consent, because she was drunk. He alleges that she encouraged him to get drunk and be sexually intimate. There were, of course, no witnesses.

Under the 1997 amendment to the sexual assault and sexual contact statutes in New Jersey, a person can be convicted if 'the victim is one he or she knew or should have known was physically helpless, mentally defective or mentally incapacitated' (New Jersey statutes 2C: 14-2). The judge stated in court that American juries are now more likely to convict on this basis. Although intercourse was not proven, the man was imprisoned for eight months. Under laws introduced after the rape and murder of a young girl in New Jersey by a sex offender, popularly known as 'Megan's Laws', most US states require anybody convicted of a sex crime (not just rape or other physical assaults, but anything deemed to flout the loosely worded sexual contact laws) to register as a sex offender for the rest of their lives.

Originally the sexual assault and contact laws relating to a victim's mental state referred to gang rapes of mentally disabled people. Now they are being used to convict any individual where another non-mentally disabled individual feels they were unable to give consent. This means that the court will base its decisions, which can convict a man for up to 10-20 years if found guilty on this basis of sexual assault (less for sexual contact), purely on the subjective testimony of a victim. According to the man's attorney Stanton Peele, 'Under the old laws this situation would never be seen as a crime but as a drunken situation involving two consenting adults. If the logic of this case is followed through, in the future we could find that even when women consent by saying "yes" they could still plead that they were psychologically coerced in some way, and innocent perpetrators could be convicted as a result'.

No doubt plenty of women regret getting drunk with a man. Even in cases involving physical violence, at least there is some basis for introducing evidence involving violence and proof of non-consent. Yet for less violent crimes in ambiguous circumstances, it is easy to see how a woman's regret of getting pissed the night before can turn into a justification for labelling a man as a 'sex offender'. And while the woman can plead mental incapacitation (due to alcohol), the man cannot claim that he was too drunk to know whether she consented or not.



HENRI MATISSE, NUDE STUDY IN BLUE, c.1899-1900

A 10-YEAR OLD BOY WAS HANDCUFFED AND SHACKLED

The courts seem to be increasingly willing to see adults as psychologically incapable of making decisions about their ability to consent to sexual acts. Yet at the same time, they seem to be investing children with the psychological maturity of adults, and punishing them accordingly.

An 11-year old boy was charged with incest under the Colorado state sexual contact laws on 21 October 1999. A neighbour observed the boy fondling his five-year old sister's genitals and reported it to the authorities. Now the boy faces a trial and up to two years in the juvenile justice system. The boy—who says all he did was help his sister take a pee—was presented to the court handcuffed and shackled as if he were a mentally deranged serial rapist.

What used to be called a game of 'doctors and nurses' between children is being redefined by US prosecutors as a violent crime. While adults are aware that certain sexual activities are socially unacceptable, this does not mean that children have the same understanding of what appear to be identical sexual behaviours. It is assumed that the boy (who was 10 at the time) must have been aware of the law on sex crimes and is being held responsible for his actions. Yet as Arnold Wegher, the boy's defence attorney, commented: 'I don't really believe my client understands what's going on.'

Some lawyers have condoned the decision by Colorado prosecutors, saying that the law can do much to identify children who need treatment by the state. As Howard Davidson, director of the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law, says, 'Courts need to take cases of alleged juvenile sex offenders very seriously, because this is the time when we probably do the most good in terms of treatment intervention'. It is hard to see how this boy will be helped through carrying the label of sex offender for life: would not a scolding from his mum or dad have been a more constructive 'treatment'? But the courts' contempt for the rights of parents is plain here. As the courts waded in at the first opportunity, the boys' parents were denied the chance to educate and discipline their own son.

Adopting a 'zero tolerance' attitude to sex crimes seems justifiable in the face of horrific and brutal sex attacks on defenceless people. But new laws justified on the basis of how a victim felt, whatever the age of the perpetrator or the proof against him, shows just how far justice is being jettisoned in the name of what looks like an endless war on sex crimes. Defendants are finding themselves behind bars because of somebody else's regret, revenge and upset. It's criminal, really.

AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN WASHINGTON

Helen Scarls

The hate debate



The 1990s has acquired the status of the 'decade of hate'. Crimes such as the murder of Matthew Shepard in a brutal anti-gay lynching in Wyoming, the dragging to death of James Byrd junior by so-called white supremacists in Texas, the Columbine school shootings and the 4 July weekend shootings of members of religious minorities in Illinois and Indiana are cited as recent evidence of this trend.

But a more accurate description of the 1990s would be the less-catchy 'decade of war against hate'.

Hate crimes legislation began in earnest at the state and federal level after 1990. Now, talk about hate crimes is everywhere. A recent survey of the national press noted that the term 'hate crime' was used more than 7000 times in the first six

months of 1999, in contrast with 1000 mentions throughout 1990 and a meagre 11 mentions in 1985. It has become de rigueur for 'right-thinking' politicians to declare a war on hate at every opportunity.

Throughout 1999 President Clinton tried repeatedly to beef up federal hate crimes legislation. Republican presidential hopeful John McCain uses campaign speeches to denounce the 'hate' that is poisoning America. And New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani regularly denounces hate as a vicious evil. Apparently it was his opposition to hatred that caused him to attempt to shut down the Britart exhibition *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Celebrities have also signed up for the war against hate. Viewers of the ABC network are treated to commercial-time homilies from soap stars like Dr Elizabeth Corday from *ER*, who sanctimoniously informs us that if we tell prejudiced jokes in front of our children we are teaching

them to hate and damaging them for life. Yet the war against hate is not driven by an escalation of bigotry and prejudice in the USA. The FBI has been mandated to collect statistics on hate crimes since 1990, and currently records between 8000 and 9000 hate crimes per year. There is little evidence of this figure increasing. Spectacular murders may grab the headlines, but those who talk of the escalation of hate crimes cite the same four or five incidents as evidence. In 1997 only eight of the 8000 recorded hate crimes were murders. That can hardly be called an epidemic in a country that has one of the highest murder rates in the world. And as the prominent gay writer Andrew Sullivan argues in the *New Republic*, despite all the discussion about anti-gay hate crimes generated by

different way of life'. And right on cue, when Aaron James McKinney was found guilty of murdering Matthew Shepard, gay rights activists repeated the mantra that the verdict 'sent a message that these crimes won't be tolerated'.

A recent study by James B Jacobs and Kimberley Potter points out that, despite the demands for more hate crimes legislation, there have been few convictions under existing hate crimes laws. The killers of James Byrd and Matthew Shepard were convicted of old-fashioned murder. Jacobs and Potter conclude that the primary purpose of hate crimes legislation is to send messages to a society where identity politics has come to dominate the political landscape. These laws reassure the victims of bigotry that their suffering has been recognised, and tell the rest of us that our politicians are morally correct in their concern for society's victims.

The apparent concern with hatred is unlikely to do anything to reduce the real divisions that exist within American society. If anything, it will make matters worse. Hate crimes legislation has become a battleground, on which society's victims fight to ensure that their particular suffering is recognised and their persecutors given special punishment by the courts. As the law is expanded to include new protected victims like homosexuals, disabled people or people on low incomes, it is hard to see where the whole thing will end.

The trial of Matthew Shepard's murderer gave an ominous indication of where it is leading. Aaron James McKinney's lawyers argued that he should be acquitted because he too was a victim who deserved special recognition. They argued that McKinney was sexually abused as a child, had developed a profound fear of homosexuality and was sent into a 'gay panic' when he encountered Shepard, rendering him not responsible for his actions. The judge kicked out this defence, and McKinney was found guilty of kidnapping and second-degree murder and locked up for life. But when a bigot can present himself as a victim of others' hatred, what kind of 'message' does this send? ●

Hate law will make divisions worse

the murder of Matthew Shepard, 'the chance of a gay American meeting the same fate... is about one in a million'.

So what is the war against hate really about? Calls for more stringent legislation on hate crimes are always prefaced by the need to 'send a message' to society. So when the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 was discussed in Congress, the Senate Judiciary Committee stressed that the bill would send an 'important signal to victimised groups everywhere that the US government is concerned about this kind of crime'. In a speech earlier in 1999, President Clinton urged Congress to strengthen existing hate crimes laws by stressing that 'America will not be able to be a force for good abroad unless we are good at home. When somebody dies in a horrible incident in America or when we see slaughter or ethnic cleansing abroad, we should remember that we defeat these things by teaching and by practising a

different way of life'. And right on cue, when Aaron James McKinney was found guilty of murdering Matthew Shepard, gay rights activists repeated the mantra that the verdict 'sent a message that these crimes won't be tolerated'.

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Smoking students out



Martin Ball of the smokers' rights group FOREST laments the intolerance of Britain's universities

In my youth, I certainly bought into the image of university as the gateway to independence, the time to break free and forge my own way in life. College was a place where it was possible—indeed obligatory—to open your mind, reject dogma, and experience a new understanding of the world around us. I welcomed no longer having to live by other people's rules, and being able to make my own life choices.

Yet the desire of today's students to rid themselves of the 'hand of nanny' is threatened by university authorities which are striving to replace parents as paternalist watchdogs. Nowhere is this threat more pressing than in the designs of campus fag-fascists to coerce students, and staff, into giving up smoking.

A survey by the smokers' rights group FOREST has revealed that, far from embracing social and cultural diversity, British universities are at the forefront of attempts to stamp out smoking in 'public' buildings. Of the 91 universities featured in the survey, every single one imposes severe restrictions on where it is permissible to light up—and 27 universities ban it completely. A few extend prohibition to university-owned vehicles (although so far they stop short of attempts by local councils to ban smoking in private cars if used on official business, or if parked in a council car park).

While smokers have not yet been banned from lighting up outdoors, the unspoken message is that they should refrain from creating a bad public image at entrances and, if possible, indulge their habit surreptitiously. Where staff are permitted to smoke in their own offices they must keep the door shut and draw the blinds. Free advice and help on cessation is ever present, although it sometimes seems a less-than-voluntary option.

Exeter University alone exhibited a modicum of sanity. 'There is a need...to act reasonably towards smokers', it declares, 'which means that people who wish to smoke should, where this is practically possible, have a place where they are able to do so'. Compared to other universities this is progressive stuff—but it is just an indication of how hostile the others are.

It is the determination to enforce strict anti-smoking rules that is most striking. Luton University even raises the prospect of the ultimate sanction. According to its student handbook, the no smoking rule is 'rigorously enforced' and 'students who break this rule may be required to terminate their course of study'. The suggestion that smoking is a sufficient crime to justify expulsion indicates the extent to which the anti-smoker agenda has created a climate of false priorities.

Why single out academia for criticism, when it is simply mirroring the wider community? Quite simply because we expect better of our centres of learning. Universities

should not slavishly enforce the obsessive fashions of our age.

This may be a romantic view and an unrealistic expectation of the modern monoliths universities have developed into, but they market themselves as enlightened communities promoting a vibrant diversity, and cannot expect to get away with duping us as to their true ethos.

Dr Bill Thompson of the University of Reading strikes at the very heart of the matter when he explains how 'the draconian anti-smoking policies in most universities today belie two of their most cherished values. Far from being liberal, enlightened institutions, the way most measures are introduced—without any warning, discussion or debate—demonstrates that universities are run by autocratic regimes. Their administrations do not tolerate democracy, let alone dissent'.

Even at establishments that make available a small number of designated smoking areas, you will often find that they are for staff and not the disenfranchised student. So, despite stated goals of equality of access, it is clear that students are in the second rank of a two-tier system. Such social exclusion is compounded by the prevalence among smokers of women and those in the lower socioeconomic groups. That's enough of a political correctness minefield to give any recruitment officer palpitations.

The universal justification for introducing a smoking ban is the fraudulent claim that exposure to other people's smoke poses a serious health risk to the non-smoker. Yet this rotten science is repeatedly exposed for being just that. Last year the World Health Organisation was forced to confess that its figures linking 'passive smoking' and lung cancer were not 'statistically significant'; and the Health and Safety Executive recently admitted that 'passive smoking' claims would be 'very difficult to prove given the state of the scientific evidence'.

Sadly, the willingness of universities to accept uncritically that 'passive smoking' is an absolute and fixed truth says more about them than a thousand research assessments ever could do. Imposing lifestyle prohibitions on the basis of bogus science is both unethical and immoral. It is the kind of sloppy thinking that would be thrown out if a student presented it for marking.

The fact that our leading centres of learning are so ready to engage in social persecution makes a mockery of their claim to be enlightened enclaves defending individual liberty. Universities may preach tolerance and diversity, but they practise prejudice and discrimination.

Martin Ball is campaigns director of the Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco

READING

BETWEEN THE LINES

John Gillott welcomes the latest blast from the 'science wars'

THE CASE FOR INTELLECTUAL SNOBBERY

**PROMETHEUS BEDEVILED: SCIENCE AND THE
CONTRADICTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**

Norman Levitt. Rutgers University Press, \$32 hbk

NORMAN LEVITT CAN STAKE A GOOD CLAIM TO starting what became known as the 'science wars', with a broad attack on modern social constructionist critics of science in *Higher Superstition: the academic left and its quarrels with science* (1994, with Paul Gross). That book inspired American physicist Alan Sokal to play his famous hoax on the editors of the constructionist journal *Social Text*, which generated another round in the conflict and also brought it to the attention of a much wider audience around the world.

Refreshingly, the combative thrust of *Higher Superstition* is, if anything, accentuated in Levitt's latest offering; as he puts it in the introduction: 'whatever faults this book turns out to have, a "Mr Nice Guy stance" shall not be among them.' In his view, environmentalist writings on the nature of science are often based on the 'conceit that the natural order partakes of the divine, and can be communioned with only through the renunciation of human cleverness'. Homeopathy is 'the "science" of pretending that nothing is something'. And proposals for the 'democratisation' of science usually turn out to be aimed at anointing 'popular enthusiasm or even quasi-religious dogma' with the cultural authority of the scientific.



Levitt is also critical of the growing influence of social constructionists within institutions that govern science and science education, and is ready to lay down a challenge to his colleagues: 'A blunt fact about the situation is that in order to disperse wrongheadedness, we shall have to clear away the wrongheaded. This is the sort of thing that academic discourse goes to great lengths to avoid saying plainly, but in this case it desperately needs to be said plainly. A substantial fraction of the people who have assumed authority over the philosophy, policy and practice of science education are thoroughly unfitted for their positions, notwithstanding the prestige of some of the organisations that have endorsed their credentials.'

Higher Superstition catalogued the absurdities of social constructionist writings on a range of science-related subjects. In part this book updates some of the material and themes developed there, but on the whole it takes these as a given in order to move on to a set of questions and problems which were discussed only tangentially in the earlier work. Central to these is the question, why is it that science is so integral to the functioning of modern society, and yet estranged from

LEVITT / ... THE WAY THE CONTEMPORARY ATTACK ON OLD FORMS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HIERARCHY OFTEN SLIPS INTO AN ATTACK ON ALL FORMS OF HIERARCHY—RESULTING IN A BELITTLING OF KNOWLEDGE

it at the same time? The result is a very stimulating and challenging read.

Levitt describes himself as 'a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture'. More so than some who would call themselves Conservatives with a capital C, he takes his cultural conservatism seriously. When it comes to science—which he regards as the pre-eminent achievement of modern culture—he believes in standards and elitism: 'science is an elitist calling, and it draws upon abilities that are manifest in only a small segment of the population.' The notion that talent is universally and equally distributed is, he suggests, 'a benign dictum for nursery school, but not likely to be of much use in developing the next generation of quantum field theorists'. The central theme of *Prometheus Bedeviled* is that contemporary democracy finds it virtually impossible to live with this fact. Indeed, Levitt fears that society would rather live by the philosophy of the nursery school: 'in our present situation, intellectual snobbery is not the major affliction of our culture. Much more dangerous is the prevalent anti-snobbery that scoffs at intellectual distinction and at the hard work and deferral of immediate gratification that are so important in achieving it.'

What Levitt highlights well is the way in which the contemporary attack on old forms of social and cultural hierarchy often slips into an attack on all forms of hierarchy, including the hard sciences, resulting in a belittling of knowledge and hostility to strongly held beliefs. Indeed, he argues that it is almost certainly no accident that the 'withering of social hierarchy has been accompanied by the derogation of hierarchy in the realm of ideas, opinions and thought'. As a self-confessed leftist, not to say anarchist, Levitt adds that 'recognition of this fact is inherently dispiriting, but without such a recognition it will be impossible to even begin the process of learning what to do about it'.

So what does Levitt think we should do about it? Unfortunately, just as the contemporary attack on old forms of social hierarchy is 'accompanied by the derogation of hierarchy in the realm of ideas, opinions and thought', so Levitt's small c conservatism infects his views on the full range of cultural questions, which these days means much of politics. While he argues in principle that elitism need not mean that only a small minority can understand scientific ideas, and that a robust and confident populace need have no problem with acknowledging the role of scientific expertise in any case, these propositions are increasingly bracketed off as he moves towards solutions. Evidently dispirited, and somewhat shamefaced, he winds up tentatively proposing a body of scientific experts be created, weakly analogous to the Federal Reserve Board, with institutional authority to declare on matters of scientific fact. He hopes that out of sheer business self-interest, if nothing

else, the plutocracy will 'do the right thing for the wrong reason' and support science in this way.

This appeal to the elite has a certain rational foundation—it would be business suicide to reject science, and for this reason, if no other, science will continue to advance. But if the aim is to maximise the potential of scientific advance in all areas, including contentious ones such as biotechnology, as well as to outline a strategy for generating a culture that is receptive to science and appreciative of expertise, it is a non-starter. The trends identified by Levitt have been given social weight, indeed it would be more accurate to say they are now defined by, an acute crisis of confidence within the elites of society, in response to which governments are increasingly looking to the very social constructionists Levitt criticises to advise on science policy and science literacy programmes. Such 'wrongheads' should be challenged at the institutional level, but the only way to generate a culture appreciative of science is for scientists to step outside of a narrow dialogue with the elite, and work on a broader front at the political and cultural level. ●

OH NO!

JOHN MAJOR: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

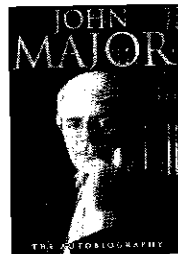
John Major, HarperCollins, £25 hbk

Review by Linda Ryan

JUST WHEN YOU HAD FORGOTTEN THE CRIPPLING shame of living in a country ruled by John Major, back he comes to remind us all. Ex-Tory prime minister Major's book is unfortunately overshadowed by his own personality, or rather lack of one. In a nod to his image, Major quotes the artist Camille Pissarro: 'never forget to make the proper use of the whole dazzling range of greys.'

At every turn Major's moral cowardice is compelling. At dinner with Rupert Murdoch before the 1997 election, he declines even to ask for News International's support. He was first elected a councillor in Lambeth, the beneficiary of Enoch Powell's race hatred, quietly distancing himself from Powellism after the event. Despite being heir to Margaret Thatcher he had many criticisms of her policies, wisely choosing not to air them. His stands are generally made in private, like the determination to resign over 'Black Wednesday' (his sister talked him out of it).

In the recent TV documentary based on this book, the most damning thing said—apart from Norman Lamont's charge that Major hid in the toilet for two hours on Black Wednesday while the pound was going down the pan—was Charles Moore's complaint: that you could admire Major for having gone all the way to the top from modest roots, but not for endlessly complaining about how difficult it was when he



MAJOR IS A THIN PERSONALITY, AS EASILY FLATTERED BY WEALTHY OR CULTURED MEN AS HE IS HURT BY CRITICISM, WITH A CAPACITY FOR DRAWING OUT THE PEDANTICALLY OBVIOUS

got there. Consequently, the memoirs, but more so the series, are overburdened with the dull tale of Tory splits and backbiting. Major is a thin personality, as easily flattered by wealthy or cultured men as he is hurt by criticism, with a capacity for drawing out the pedantically obvious.

Having never challenged Thatcher's legacy, Major was in the peculiar position of being a prisoner of it while he was revising it. The endless splits dogged him for the simple reason that the right had never accepted that they had lost, and still claimed ownership of the Tory Party, while his own 'caring Conservatism' had never earned support. Nonetheless, the compelling lesson is that it was Major's government more than Thatcher's that foreshadowed the current Blair administration.

Both Blair and Major are beneficiaries of the Thatcher defeat of organised labour, but it was Major who set out the basics of government in an age when political opposition was no more. Major's policy initiatives of citizens' charters, charter marks, league tables, and so on were—rightly—seen as a joke at the time (the traffic cones hotline is quietly forgotten here). But these have been carried over into the current administration, as have the consultative boards and lay-panels of non-government experts drawn from business.

Major's turn to reform public service was an attempt to keep up the pressure on vested interests that had been applied by Thatcher's privatisation strategy. Without necessarily privatising, Major recast the relationship between the people and the government in market terms, as customers and providers. It had the effect of creating ever-more bureaucracy with regulators, ombudsmen and tables substituting for real market forces.

When Major tried to soothe his party by facing down the European Union, he insisted on sovereign control over traditional areas of government like immigration and foreign policy in the Maastricht Treaty negotiations. But his concessions on giving the European Court powers to regulate markets and the European parliament to investigate corruption were telling: these were precisely the most up-to-date areas of state regulation, being initiated by his own government.

Like a Soviet-style bureaucracy, this new army of auditors tended to paralyse and corrode, as effort was put to fulfilling the letter of the charter rather than its substance. But at least one group of people was very impressed: the policy wonks in the New Labour think tanks like Demos and the Institute for Public Policy Research were peculiarly taken with auditing and other forms of apolitical 'governance'. The whole rigmarole of regulatory and consultative bodies was fed into the think tanks, worked up and repackaged as New Labour policy. Oh yes. ●

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

HUMANITY: A MORAL HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Jonathan Glover. Jonathan Cape. £18.99 hbk

Review by James Panton

IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH century, Immanuel Kant recognised a serious moral problem: there was nothing to stop men disobeying the rules of morality if these were no more than externally imposed dictates from God. His solution was to found the Categorical Moral Law upon the universal reason of mankind. A hundred years on, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God and the death of the moral law. With their demise, he predicted that morality would perish. Now, on the eve of a new millennium, Oxford moral philosopher Jonathan Glover looks back upon the past hundred years—from the First World War and the rise of Nazism, through Stalin and Pol Pot, to Saddam Hussein, Rwanda and the Balkan conflict—and is dismayed that Nietzsche's prediction seems to ring true.

Glover's *Humanity* is an attempt to answer the moral problem raised by Nietzsche: how can we maintain a workable morality in the absence of an external moral law? He recognises two core components of any human ethic: respect for others, and sympathy (which we might better understand as 'empathy'). The existence of these 'moral resources' gives him hope that morality can be maintained even in the absence of external imperatives. However, he believes these resources are fragile, as can be seen from the 'inhuman catastrophes' which have blighted this century. We must learn from recent history how it is that these moral resources can be weakened and lost, in order that we can strengthen them for the future.

Glover isolates two psychological tendencies in human beings which serve to weaken our moral resources in certain societal conditions. Firstly, 'tribalism': the tendency for the moral resources to be 'stubbornly limited and local'. Weight is given to the interests of those within one's community, but there is a moral indifference towards those outside. When social conditions are right, such as in Yugoslavia after the death of the 'Leviathan' Tito, or when Saddam Hussein waged war on Kuwait, such tribalism allows atrocities to be committed by one group upon another by superseding the normal moral responses which value the dignity of other human beings and which cause us to be sympathetic towards their plight.

Second: 'belief.' This, says Glover, is a hangover from the Enlightenment, a false faith in the idea that society can be improved upon by the rational organisation of humanity. For example, Glover states, 'The obvious message from the history of Stalinism is the importance of avoiding grandiose utopian projects. But another



message is as important. It comes from the role of ideology in Stalinism. We have seen how, for instance, tribalism makes atrocities possible by overwhelming the moral resources. Among such psychological dispositions, belief is at least as dangerous as tribalism'. Glover sees the culmination of these psychological tendencies in the Nazi project, when belief in the possibility of reorganising society met with the tribalism of one social group against another.

Glover's method, a moral-psychological reconstruction of twentieth-century atrocities, is at times an interesting study of how the normal moral intuitions of people can be perverted by circumstances. Though he tries to make sense of eruptions of historical barbarity, this approach leaves us with no more than a description. Glover interprets particular social crises as consequences of failures in morality. This leads him to deride the very human subjectivity that most deserves celebration.

Glover provides no answer to Nietzsche. He perfectly expresses the general pessimism with which contemporary society is infected. At least Nietzsche believed in the ability of humankind to transform itself. For Glover, it is this very belief that we must be at pains to avoid. ●

READ ON READ ON READ ON READ ON

THE LIFE OF THE AUTOMOBILE

Ilya Ehrenburg. Serpent's Tail. £12.99 pbk

Review by Austin Williams

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1929, THIS BOOK HAS BEEN revived from near oblivion and discounted for the readers of one national newspaper as a commentary on our times. You can see why. Given the current concerns about the motor car, this book must seem like manna from heaven. Tales of pioneering driving recklessness mingle with stories of international finance, business intrigue and economic conflict. A risky mix. As the blurb says, 'The Life of the Automobile uncannily predicts the rise and fall of our romance with the car'. Fortunately, it does no such thing.

It is hardly surprising, unless you have the modern-day anti-car predisposition, that a book at the dawn of the mass car age is not really down on the motor car. The book is, in fact, not an anguished warning of the folly of the car, but rather an expressionistic critique of the anarchy of the market in the interwar years, using the car as a figurative device. Given that the book was written on the eve of Stalin's first five-year plan, some rhetoric is only to be expected.

The real enjoyment of the book is that it develops a patchwork of stories dramatising real historical characters in pseudo-historical tableaux. Oil barons, manufacturing executives, factory workers and their families rub shoulders in an exciting range of speculative circumstances, to give a unique insight into the mood of

the times. Ehrenburg has no qualms about putting words in people's mouths to create a 'real' history.

A certain anti-car bias is prevalent, but understandable; written as it was in a country whose car production was virtually non-existent, and for whom mass car production represented 'the West'. Nevertheless, if you read the book without preconceptions, the tales are as gripping as a new set of radials. ●

Austin Williams is director of the Transport Research Group

REBEL YELL: A CENTURY OF UNDERGROUND CLASSICS

Kevin Williamson (ed). Canongate. free. pbk

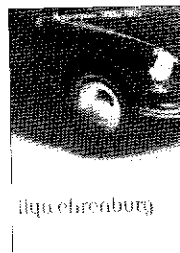
Review by Sandy Starr

WHAT DO HOWARD MARKS, LEON TROTSKY and Thomas Pynchon have in common? They have all been selected by Kevin Williamson, editor of Canongate's Rebel Inc series, for inclusion in his compilation of 'underground classics' *Rebel Yell*. If the connection between these authors is tenuous, there is nonetheless some superb writing on offer here. Much of it showcases the ability of countercultural literature to shock, amuse and move the reader on an immediate and visceral level. What is questionable is not the quality of these pieces, but the editor's opinion of them, and his purpose in assembling them between the same covers.

In his introduction, Williamson makes it clear that his sampler is intended as a response to *The Test of Time: what makes a classic a classic?*, published by Waterstone's. Mocking the notion of a literary canon, he argues that a classic book is 'any book that I think's a classic and that's about it'. He explains that his criteria for selecting Rebel Inc books is that they 'deal with the non-mainstream, counterculture, underground, subversive, sexy, psychoactive, revolutionary, blissed-out, angry, contemplative, fucked-up, nihilistic, violent, internationalist, anti-war, peace-loving, extremist, surrealist, individualist, socialistic, outsider perspectives'.

All of which is fine if it means that Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* is going to remain in print. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that these works are 'classics' to compare with Shakespeare, Dickens or Joyce. Their appeal is immeasurably more narrow than that of the traditional canon, since they concern themselves almost exclusively with rebellion, despondence and occasional black humour. By using every iconoclast from Jack London to Charles Bukowski for the purpose of canon-bashing, Williamson does them a disservice, while the canon remains intact. ●

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13 January 2000, 6.30-8pm

The trouble with men

The evaluation of masculinity has undergone a profound shift. Manly virtues have become masculine vices. What does this crisis of masculinity mean for men and for women?

Thursday

20 January 2000, 6.30-8pm

The emotional self

We have heard Tony Blair's voice quake with feeling, seen Peter Mandelson cry—even Will Carling has confessed publicly to being in therapy. How have we become so in touch with our emotions, and what are the consequences?

Wednesday

26 January 2000, 6.30-8pm

The future of faith

The churches are empty, religious leaders are trying to modernise. But as organised religion declines, there is a rise in individual spiritualism. What is the future of faith?



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