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ARTS & LITERATURE

Philosophy Based Reading Material

Article 1

The Malleus Maleficarum is a manual for hunting witches that would serve as guidance for 15th century witch trials.

Scot's The Discovery is a thrilling exposé of both the folk magic practised by witches and the "learned" magic found in grimoires, particularly those attributed to Solomon. Weyer had included, as an appendix to *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, a direct translation of a Solomonic grimoire which listed the names and ranks of various demons, and how a magician might go about conjuring and commanding them as, supposedly, could Solomon.

Scot "Englished" much of this appendix for his book, concluding scathingly: "He that can be persuaded that these things are true ... may soon be brought to believe that the moon is made of green cheese."

Though by no means an atheist – nobody was, at least not openly, in the 1500s - Scot was certainly a smarmy sceptic, and The Discovery shares the exasperated horror of Richard Dawkin's The God Delusion (2006) at the excesses of superstition and belief. Joined by George Gifford's A discourse of the Subtill Practices of Deuilles by Witches and Sorcerers by which Men are and Haue Bin Greatly Deluded (1587) and Henry Howard's A Defensive Against the Poison of Supposed Prophesies (1583), Scot's treatise seemed to ride the crest of a new wave of scepticism concerning the whole project of magic in general.

Surely the genie was out of the bottle (or demon out of the brazen bowl, as the Solomonic grimoires would describe it). Now that occult beliefs had been so thoroughly exposed and ridiculed, how could they possibly survive?

King James and the witches

In 1597, King James VI of Scotland, who would inherit the English throne in 1603, published an extraordinary treatise: *Daemonologie*. The book was not, as the name might suggest, a grimoire-like guide to the conjuration of demons, but rather a serious study of demonic power and the harm it could inflict. King James did not accept the suggestion that any man, even if he was as wise as Solomon, could seriously practise magic without risk to his soul. Nor did he believe, as the smarmy sceptics did, that there was no real threat whatsoever.

James was an angry Christian, a man who believed, sincerely, in the power of the occult and felt duty-bound to protect his people from it in all its forms. He had nothing but contempt for the likes of Scot, whom he regarded, in much the same way as a modern Christian fundamentalist might regard an unbeliever, as a dangerous mocker who did the Devil's work for him by dismissing the real threat that magic posed.

Even worse, Scot and his fellows had inadvertently introduced into printed English, for the first time, the detail of dangerous grimoire magic which had formerly reached only limited circulation. While it is a myth that James ordered copies of The Discovery to be burned, extracts from the text were indeed consigned to the fire during the witch trials of the 17th century, when sections were found, freed from their original sceptical context, in the documents of those accused of witchcraft.

Article 2

Written in around 1588, Doctor Faustus drew on Scot's The Discovery in its representation of magic, yet discarded its dismissive tone. Faustus succeeds in summoning the demon Mephistopheles, and signs away his soul in a contract written with his own blood in return for 24 years of power. After wasting his time on petty vengeances, greed and lust, Faustus is finally sent to hell.

Rumour circulated that an extra devil had been seen on stage during the play, a fact which the Puritan William Prynne would gleefully repeat as proof of the evils of theatre in his *Histriomastix*, 1632. Magicians who both did and did not achieve their hoped-for Solomonic command of occult forces would populate the English stage for decades.

Scot and the sceptics had indeed laid bare the detail of occult belief, and their work was highly influential, but it had precisely the opposite of their desired effect. Advances in technology, accessible English translations and an entertainment industry hungry for a good story had conspired to democratise magic. The process they unwittingly began continues today on TikTok and elsewhere.

Solomon on trial

It's a strange truth that grimoire magic is more widely available in 2021 than ever before, and that it is the internet which has popularised exactly the same material that was hidden in a handful of libraries for the first few hundred years of its presence in Europe.

With the debate about the ethics of Solomonic magic underway on Twitch, I hardly dare imagine Scot's horror, much less King James's, to hear phrases like "pro-demon rights" from a young person describing themselves as a "demonolater" and "magic is the scientific study of conversations with spiritual beings" from a self-professed "Solomonic mage".

The latter has done a good job of persuading the Twitch stream that commanding demons is not inherently disrespectful, though a poorly-judged comparison between the authority of the magician and that of the policeman sparks momentary indignation in the chat.
Nevertheless, the debate is civil and ends with discussions of new online editions of the rare grimoires. It seems the magical incarnation of King Solomon will live to exorcise another day, and I can't say I'm surprised. The historical inability of sceptical dismissals and technological advances to do anything other than encourage belief in magic has persuaded me that the fundamentalists are right in one respect: speak of the devil and he shall appear – and that goes for TikTok too.

✍ Article 3

On April 16 1872, a group of men sat drinking in the Barley Mow pub near Wellington in Somerset in the UK's south-west. A gust of wind in the chimney dislodged four onions with paper attached to them with pins. On each piece of paper, a name was written. This turned out to be an instance of 19th-century magic. The onions were placed there by a "wizard", who hoped that as the vegetables shrivelled in the smoke, the people whose names were attached to them would also diminish and suffer harm.
One onion has ended up in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. The person named on it is Joseph Hoyland Fox, a local temperance campaigner who had been trying to close the Barley Mow in 1871 to combat the evils of alcohol. The landlord, Samuel Porter, had a local reputation as a "wizard" and none doubted he was engaged in a magical campaign against those trying to damage his business.
E.B. Tylor, who wrote Primitive Culture, a foundational work of 19th-century anthropology, lived in Wellington. The onion came to him and thence to the Pitt Rivers Museum of which he was curator from 1883. Tylor was shocked by the onions, which he himself saw as magical. Tylor's intellectual history regarded human development as moving from magic to religion to science, each more rational and institutionally based than its predecessor. To find evidence of magic on his doorstep in the supposedly rational, scientific Britain of the late 19th century ran totally counter to such an idea.
Rumours of the death of magic have frequently been exaggerated. For tens of thousands of years – in all parts of the inhabited world – magic has been practised and has coexisted with religion and science, sometimes happily, at other times uneasily. Magic, religion and science form a triple helix running through human culture. While the histories of science and religion have been consistently explored, that of magic has not. Any element of human life so pervasive and long-lasting must have an important role to play, requiring more thought and research than it has often received.
What is magic?
A crucial question is, "What is magic?" My definition emphasises human participation in the universe. To be human is to be connected, and the universe is also open to influence from human actions and will. Science encourages us to stand back from the universe, understanding it in a detached, objective and abstract manner, while religion sees human connections to the cosmos through a single god or many gods who direct the universe.
Magic, religion and science have their own strengths and weaknesses. It is not a question of choosing between them – science allows us to understand the world in order to influence and change it. Religion, meanwhile, derives from a sense of transcendence and wonder. Magic sees us as immersed in forces and flows of energy influencing our psychological states and well-being, just as we can influence these flows and forces.
Magic is embedded in local cultures and modes of being – there is no one magic, but a vast variety, as can be seen in the briefest survey (for more detail see my recent book). Tales of shamanism on the Eurasian steppe, for example, involve people transforming into animals or travelling to the spirit world to counteract disease, death and dispossession.
In many places, ancestors influence the living – including in many African and Chinese cultures. A Bronze Age tomb in China reveals complex forms of divination with the dead answering the living. Fu Hao, buried in the tomb shown below, asked her ancestors about success in war and the outcomes of pregnancies, but then was questioned by her descendants about their future after death.
British royalty employed magicians: Queen Elizabeth I asked Dr John Dee, a well-known "conjuror" – and probable model for Prospero in Shakespeare's Tempest – to find the most propitious date for her coronation and supported his attempts at alchemy.
In the following century, Isaac Newton spent considerable effort on alchemy and Biblical prophecy. He was described by the economist John Maynard Keynes as not the first of the Age of Reason, but the last of the magicians. In the mind of Newton – and in his work – magic, science and religion were entangled, each being a tool for examining the deepest secrets of the universe.

Many across the world still believe in magic, which does not make it "true" in some scientific sense, but indicates its continuing power. We are entering an age of change and crisis, brought about by the depredations of the ecology of the planet, human inequality and suffering. We need all the intellectual and cultural tools at our disposal. Magic encourages a sense of kinship with the universe. With kinship comes care and responsibility, raising the possibility that understanding magic, one of the oldest of human practices, can give us new and urgent insights today. We have recently seen a spate of books defending the Enlightenment, the period of efflorescence in 18th-century Europe that helped shape the modern world. At the vanguard has been the Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, who titled his most recent monument to scientific progress Enlightenment Now. The book earned Bill Gates's endorsement but was widely criticised by historians since it was not an assessment of the Enlightenment at all, but a compilation of data showing us why life was now better than ever.

Other advocates have been more subtle, stressing that what set the Enlightenment apart from preceding eras was less its confidence in reason per se, than its focus on the secular (as opposed to the sacred) as the space in which happiness ought to be pursued and quite possibly achieved.

Readers might wonder: who could be against this? But Pinker and his allies are pushing back on a tendency to see in the overweening self-confidence of the Enlightenment a blueprint for the horrors of the 20th century. The view is not without merit. The Enlightenment may have given us a new way to think about rights, but it also gave us the atom bomb.

Article 4

As Tooze has repeatedly noted, 'polycrisis' did not drop out of the blue. In the discussion paper 'What Is a Global Polycrisis?' (2022) from the Cascade Institute, Scott Janzwood and Thomas Homer-Dixon locate its origins in the book *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium* (1999) by Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern. They trace its history of use in studies of sustainable transition and in studies of the European Union. A key moment often pointed out is the 2018 speech by the former president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, but he had already made an attempt at a definition in an earlier speech in 2016, when he explained how various security threats not only coincide with but also feed each other, 'creating a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of our people'.

The term has emerged from relative obscurity to wild popularity, but it is crucial to note that the meanings of the word diverge. There is 'a' polycrisis and 'the' polycrisis. That is, on the one hand, people are trying to find a clear working definition of a polycrisis, to define its key characteristics, in order to forge a research concept with which to examine a diverse range of concatenations of events. With this meaning of the word in mind, there can be *multiple* polycrises: for example, the combination of the financial and the food-system crises around 2008-09, or the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, a hunger crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in more recent years.

On the other hand, 'polycrisis' is understood not as a common noun but as a proper noun, denoting this particular stage of world history. There is *only one* polycrisis: this historical epoch, when humanity has created a world interconnected and interdependent to an unprecedented degree, combining vast material wealth with radical inequality and teetering on the threshold of ecological collapse. It is a truly novel phase of history, different from anything in the track record of our species.

This diversity of meanings has prompted some people to question the usefulness of the word. Some have doubted whether it is even a proper concept or more a fancy way of saying that a lot of things are going on. In his article for Vox online earlier this year, the US political journalist Daniel Drezner notes how, to some, it sounds like 'a confusing and redundant neologism' and quotes the historian Niall Ferguson's quip at Davos that it is 'just history happening'. The background assumption seems to be that, in order for a word to be worthy, its meaning must be clear and distinct. But this misses a crucial thing about how words work. They are always wanton, impossible to rein in. In order to elucidate this, let us first take a brief detour through wider conceptual history.

For heuristic purposes, let us here distinguish *words* and *concepts*. The word 'nature' is a classic example. As Raymond Williams noted in his essay 'Ideas of Nature' (1980), there are more or less distinct concepts of nature in Western intellectual traditions beyond the terminological unity: nature as the inner essence of a being, nature as the ordered cosmos, nature as the nonhuman world – and, later, the terrestrial world including humans.

However, there are common connotations between these meanings (eg, totality, originality, unity, essentiality). These common threads facilitate moving from one conceptual realm to another, to engage in *struggles of definition*. Thus, for example, ideas about morality and sexuality – about the 'inner nature' of humans – have

been legitimised by referencing to the 'outer' nonhuman nature or the claimed normative order of the cosmos. In modern times, 'freedom' is a prime example of a word with a diverse and contested conceptual landscape. So, sometimes struggles of definition are waged around old words.

Words are wanton: no conceptualisation is immune to cooptation for radically different uses

At other times, new words become foci of struggle. In the UN report *Our Common Future* (1987), the word 'sustainability' was conceptualised as referring to the ecological underpinnings of human development: future human welfare can be safeguarded only by taking care of the ecological systems that are the foundation of welfare. But the meanings diverged quickly, and sustainability was reconceptualised around three dimensions or 'pillars' – economic, social and environmental – sometimes with the addition of a fourth one: say, cultural.

The key question is whether the aim should be a balance of these dimensions, or should the correct image resemble a wedding cake, with ecological sustainability forming the foundation. An added complication is that, originally, the notion of pillars of sustainability emerged because civil society movements from developing countries wanted to highlight the necessity of securing welfare for the millions of people who lack it. But, recently, the notion of balance between the dimensions has been used to criticise environmental policies. Economic growth is just as important as avoiding disastrous climate change or widespread ecosystem degradation, for example.

Words are wanton, as I said. However much care is taken to define them, no conceptualisation is immune to cooptation for radically different uses. Only by understanding these shifts and tensions can we make sense of the discussions around us and take part in them in a meaningful way. We have to understand how the meanings move, and to which uses words are put.

With 'polycrisis', we are again in a situation of conceptual struggle. A conceptual divergence into 'a' polycrisis and 'the' polycrisis has taken place, and the word is being defined for different kinds of uses. There is no shared social sphere within which a common conceptual framing can be agreed upon – this would be possible among a limited scientific community, but not as a word explodes into the public realm. A good recent example of this is how the word 'Anthropocene', a relatively obscure stratigraphical term, burst on to the scene and gained a menagerie of meanings as it was being employed by environmental researchers, artists, humanists, journalists etc. The stratigraphers continue their conceptually restricted discussion and are frustrated at the unruly discussion elsewhere.

But with 'polycrisis', even locally shared conceptualisations seem to be lacking at this stage, which inevitably results in a lot of talking past each other. Meaningful discussion – and meaningful disagreements – about the word is hard without such shared meanings. I have approached this with the heuristic triad *word-concept-conception*. The *word* may be common to all, but the meanings given to it, the *concepts*, form more or less distinct realms. Within a shared conceptual realm, ferocious debates about the substance of the matter, the *conceptions*, can still take place – as any researcher knows. But people are still basically talking about the same thing. If the conceptual realms in use differ, meaningful discussion and disagreement becomes harder or even impossible. *People are using different tools for different uses but debating as if they are using the same ones.*

If we understand *the* polycrisis as a description of our specific era with its existential problems, we can agree and disagree about the details. We can debate about the possibility to 'decouple' economic growth from environmental impact, about the tension between 'green growth' and a transformative change of societies. We can argue about the potential to predict and to plan for future changes. Overall, the discussion is about *this* stage in history, about us and those coming after us, about the situation we have inherited.

This, clearly, is a proper noun. There is nothing 'just' about it, in any sense of the word

It is a whole other game to see *a* polycrisis as a technical concept with which to analyse and understand more specific concatenations of events, some of them with significant environmental dimensions, others with none.

✍ Article 5

If a child does not respond to the suggestive gesture, it is separated from the others and treated as a lunatic. *– from §30 of The Blue and Brown Books (1958)*

This, I'm sure you can imagine, is an approximation of the experience some of my learners have had in education their whole lives. They have been excluded, ostracised, medicalised, humiliated and abandoned – in short, unacknowledged. And yet, still they come to my class and try to learn. My learners are living, breathing testaments to the truth that it is only through vulnerability that one can ever come to know anything at all. Furthermore, it is only by reciprocating this attitude – by acknowledging their humanity – that education can take place. If I am to get through to them, I must acknowledge that it is a *them* I am getting through to, with all the history, struggle, suffering and joy that that entails. And once I have acknowledged their humanity, I find in their eyes my own humanity, my own vulnerability as the teacher.

Suddenly, in that moment of jeopardy, I find that my words are somehow not enough – they are not doing what I want them to, what I expected them to. I see that I too am a human being, alone in myself, reaching out with what sounds, symbols and gestures I can muster in order to make a connection. And the human being who is the subject of my attempt, whether they can spell or not, is no less capable than I of judging, acknowledging or rejecting another. My frustration with the learner – particularly in so far as I assert power in response to it – is thus really a projection of my own fear of rejection. In the pedagogical instant, then, what is at stake is not (merely) whether the learner can make themselves understood to me, but whether I can make myself understood to them. We make a mutual step towards communication: towards knowledge of each other. If this fails, what is at stake is our co-intelligibility: our relationship. My methods are thrown back onto me as an ethical problem: as a political problem. Here we might think of the words of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968):

The *raison d'être* of libertarian education [as opposed to the banking model] lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students.This drive towards reconciliation is the animus of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and the radical heart of its pedagogy.

But wait a moment. Didn't we say that the point of the example of the deviant pupil was that he did not have the same natural reactions as us? That teaching him was like trying to teach a cat? Doesn't Wittgenstein argue that natural reactions are impenetrable bedrock? Doesn't he say that meaning is specific to different forms of life, different cultures? Is Wittgenstein not the prophet of incommensurability? Of relativism? Of 'postmodernism'?

This indeed is how he is often received today, 70 years after the publication of *Philosophical Investigations*. But that is not my reading. I believe we should read the sections on the deviant pupil not as saying that the possibility of teaching is predetermined, but that the solution to whether or not an individual can be taught won't be found in the philosopher's armchair: it will be found in the classroom. Successful teaching (or translation, or cross-cultural communication, or self-knowledge) is not impossible, but it is not a given either. It takes attempts; it takes dialogue. And we cannot give any criteria for its success beyond the testimony of the human beings for whom it is a meaningful practice. Moreover, the barriers to its success that do exist are not metaphysical: they are political. They implicate the teacher and their society as much as they implicate the learner. Success will require the teacher to confront their own failure to communicate: their own teachability. In this sense, Wittgenstein might be said to lead us from the armchair of the sceptic to the doorstep of Freire.

My vowelless learner wrote a sentence for me the other day. He didn't want to show me at first. It didn't contain any vowels, but it was readable. I read it out loud to him. His face lit up in a way I have never seen before. This was perhaps one of the first times he'd ever used writing to make himself understood. He seemed to relax and become available. When I repeated the sounds he had missed, he was able to rewrite the sentence to include the vowels.

The next lesson, he was back to missing the vowels. We make no claim to finality. The learner's education is an ongoing project. In this, he shares with Wittgenstein a conviction that understanding – of a concept, of ourselves, of each other – is the undertaking of a whole life.

✍ Article 6

Imata raun paiga? ('What is she doing?') – my husband's grandmother, Digna, asks him. The 'she' Digna is referring to is me. What I am doing is rather simple: I am wrapping my four-month-old son in a baby sling, his face toward my chest, in a calm, reassuring embrace. But my husband's grandmother, who has raised 12 children in a small village in the Ecuadorian Amazon, does not think of this mundane gesture as being anything normal.

'Why is she wrapping the baby like that?' she insists, with genuine surprise. 'This way the baby is trapped! How is he even able to see around?' Squished inside the wrap, my son immediately starts crying, as if confirming his great-grandmother's opinion. I bounce him up and down, in the hope of soothing his cries. I turn to Digna and say: 'This way he is not overstimulated, he sleeps better.' Digna, who has since passed away, is a wise, dignified woman. She simply smiles and nods, saying: 'I see.' I keep bouncing up and down, walking back and forth across the thatched house, until my son eventually snoozes and I can breathe again.

The relief of being able to breathe again: that's perhaps a feeling familiar to most new parents. Like many other people I know, I also almost lost my mind after the birth of my first child. It's hard to tell how the madness began: whether it started with the kind and persistent breastfeeding advice of the midwives at the baby-friendly hospital where I gave birth, or with a torn copy of Penelope Leach's parenting bestseller, *Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five*, first published in 1977, confidently handed to me by a friend who assured me it contained all I needed to know about childcare. Or maybe it was just in the air, everywhere around me, around

us: the daunting feeling that the way I behaved – even my smallest, most mundane gestures – would have far-reaching consequences for my child's future psychological wellbeing. I was certainly not the only parent to feel this way.

People, however, started rebelling. They did so quietly, without making a fuss, but consistently enough for me to realise that something was going on. For instance, I would leave my baby with his dad to take a short bath in the river and, upon my return, my son would no longer be there. 'Oh, the neighbour took him for a walk,' my husband would nonchalantly say, lying in the hammock. Trying desperately not to immediately rush to the neighbours' house, I would spend the following hours frenetically walking up and down in our yard, pacing and turning at any sudden noise in the hope that the neighbours had finally returned with my son. I was never able to wait patiently for their return, so I often ended up engaging in frantic searches across the village to find my baby, under the perplexed stares of other neighbours. I usually came back home emptyhanded, depressed and exhausted. 'Stop chasing people! He will be fine,' my husband would tell me affectionately, giving me the perfect pretext to transform my anxiety into anger for his fastidiously serene and irresponsible attitude. At the end, my son always came back perfectly healthy and cheerful. He was definitely OK. I was not.

On another occasion, a close friend of ours who was about to return to her house in the provincial capital (a good seven hours from our village) came to say goodbye. She took my son in her arms. She then told me: 'Give him to me. I will bring him to my house, and you can have a bit of rest.' Unsure whether she was serious or not, I simply giggled in response. She smiled and left the house with my son. I watched her walking away with him and I hesitated a few minutes. I did not want to look crazy: surely she was not taking away my five-month-old son? I begged my husband to go to fetch our baby just in case she really wanted to take him away. When we finally found them, she was already sitting in the canoe, holding my son in her lap. 'Oh, you want him back?' she asked me with a mischievous laugh. To this day I am not sure whether she would have really taken him or whether she was just teasing me.

As an anthropologist, I admit, I should have known better. Scholars who work on parenting and childrearing have consistently shown that, outside populations defined as WEIRD (white, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic), children are taken care of by multiple people, not solely their mothers. The dyad of the mother-child relationship upon which so much of psychological theory rests reflects a standard Western view of the family as a nuclear unit – where parents (and, more specifically, mothers) are in charge of most childcare. In most places in the world, relationships with grandparents, siblings and peers are as important as the ones with the parents. As a new mother, however, it was difficult to appreciate this reality, especially when people were not merely claiming my son as their own but also clearly showing to me that what they thought was important for a child's proper development differed quite dramatically from my own beliefs.

This became clear one day when Leticia, my husband's aunt, came to visit us. Leticia had in the past affectionately joked about how caring and loving I was toward my son, and how amazed she was at the time and attention I devoted to him. As we were sitting together in our thatched house, Leticia took my son in her arms and started playfully talking with him. She tenderly touched his nose and laughed. 'Oh poor little baby,' she exclaimed suddenly. 'Poor little baby, what will you do if your mother dies?' She kissed him on the cheek. 'You will be an orphan! Alone and sad!' she laughed cheerfully. She then turned around so that I was no longer in my son's sight. 'Look! There is no more mama! She is gone, dead! What will you do, my dear?' She kissed him again and laughed softly.

In her landmark book on Inuit child socialisation, *Inuit Morality Play* (1998), the anthropologist Jean Briggs describes how Inuit adults ask children very similar questions. 'Want to come to live with me?' asks an unrelated woman to a toddler whose parents she is briefly visiting. Briggs argues that this kind of difficult teasing – which might sound inappropriate, even offensive to a Euro-American – helps young children think about matters of extreme emotional complexity, such as death, jealousy and loneliness. She describes at great length how, for the Inuit she worked with, this kind of teasing 'cause[s] thought'. Likewise, I also often hear my family engaging in this kind of teasing with older children: this was, however, the first time I had become the target of it. For if Leticia's teasing was intended to 'cause thought', my son was certainly not the only person she was encouraging to think.

To let children face the world re-orients their attention towards sociality, toward others

Hers was not just an admonishment on the perils of a too-exclusive attachment, a reminder of the eternal fluctuations of life and death. It was also an invitation for me, as a mother, to take a step back and let my son encounter and be held by others, lest he be 'alone and sad'. In a place like a Runa village, where cooperation, work and mutual help are so important for living a good life, Leticia seemed to be telling me, my son truly needed to be with other people beyond his mother. Leticia's episode made me think about Digna's puzzlement at the way I carried my baby.

Despite the calm, respectful response Digna gave me at the time I was wrapping my son, she must have thought I was crazy. What could the concept of sensorial overstimulation have meant to her? Runa children are carried around in a sling with their faces toward the outside, all the time, everywhere, from dawn to night, under the rain and the sun, in the garden and in the forest, at parties that go on for hours where they fall asleep to the sounds of drums, *cumbia* music, and the excited yells of dancers. When Digna carried my son, she did so the way all Runa women do: either on her back, or on her hip. Digna made sure he could turn his face to the outside world. 'This way he can see everything,' she said to me.

I started from the assumption that my child needed to be protected from the world, his face safely turned toward his mother; she thought that a child needs to be turned toward other people, toward the world, because he belongs to it. Overstimulation, for Digna, was just the necessary work a baby has to do to become a participant in a thriving, exciting social life. To let children face the world re-orients their attention towards sociality, toward others.

In one of their papers, the psychologists Barbara Rogoff, Rebeca Mejía-Arauz and Maricela Correa-Chávez beautifully describe how Mexican Mayan children pay more attention to their surroundings and to other people's actions compared with Euro-American children. They explain the difference with the fact that Mayan children, unlike their Euro-American counterparts, are expected to actively take part in community life from early on. The practice of paying attention to social interactions, this encouragement to turn toward the community, seems to start, at least among the Runa, well before babies can speak or help at home. It starts, as Digna put it, by literally turning their faces toward the world.

Article 7

In Thomas Hardy's The Woodlanders (1887), the trees sing.

Sometimes the sound is like a Gregorian chant, a threnody from the rustling leaves, the creaking boughs, the undulations of limbs heavy with leaves, swaying in the wind that rushes through the woods of Dorset's Little Hintock. At other times, it is a low moan, a cry of pain, voiced as if in sympathy with the tragic plight of the characters who wander through these woods, searching for something lost or never quite possessed – for a Hardyian character is always driven by a restive compulsion to move.

Even in stillness, Hardy limns the minute transformations of the body – of human limbs cicatriced with tree wounds, or the trunk of one of the forest's oldest inhabitants – pulsing with life, desire, will.

These sylvan protagonists – English oaks, crab-apples, silver birches, willows, blackthorns, hazel trees, ash-trees, and elms – come into life with a sigh, an audible exhalation sounding from deep inside the trunk.

The vocabulary of trees

The Woodlanders tells the story of a small community who live and work in the forest. They are woodcutters and spar-makers, fruit-pickers and timber dealers, busily industrious under the tree canopy that makes a second sky. Human labour keeps time with the seasons in Little Hintock, the fictive hamlet that Hardy maps onto the topography of Dorset in the south of England: felling timber in the autumn and winter; pressing apples for cider in the spring and summer. Hardy's tragic hero, Giles Winterborne, is continually evoked by the traces of labour that cling to his skin, hair and clothes: apple pips and pomace, the vestiges of pulpy matter on his hands.

The bodies of the novel's characters are expressive, not so much of their individual personality as their contact with the forest. Their flesh is imprinted with a history of woodwork unique to each. The skin is an index of mishaps with elms, boles, rubbings of bark and brushings of twig. These afflictions become the means through which the body is known, to the self and to others. Mnemonic aches and resisting joints are evocative of the past.

One of Hardy's great themes, and an element of his aesthetic accomplishment that astonishes us still, is his unsettling of the individual, understood as sovereign, private and unified. Hardy understands the self as constituted by and continuous with both human and non-human others.

In The Woodlanders, the pliancy and impressible feeling of consciousness cannot be uncoupled from the botanic. We can see this – and hear it too – in the vocabulary of trees, which structures characters' speech patterns and ways of thinking and being. Desires and passions are formed by the sculpting hand of the natural environment. At times, the words characters speak to one another are felled like wood: in many of the novel's climactic scenes, speech is painfully constrained, an inadequacy that is camouflaged by physical activity.

Winterbourne suffers most acutely from this linguistic affliction. He finds his words cleaved "into two pieces". They respond not to his conscious intentions, but instead, for instance, to the arc of his arm in the act of woodcutting. In this way, language is an effect of the body's primacy: like an echo, it continually reasserts the fact of embodiment.

In an epoch of environmental catastrophe, The Woodlanders carries a new and startling urgency. The cumulative effect of the pervasiveness of trees is to imply something about our notions of selfhood, something that philosopher Dalia Nassar and plant scientist Margaret Barbour have described as the lesson trees can teach us about embodiment and boundedness, of "our rootedness, relationality, dialogue, and responsiveness".

✍ Article 8

Triggered Literature by John Sutherland review – a cautious approach

The academic treads a little too carefully in his wry but passionless history of books deemed harmful to a reader's state of mind

Books have always been rude and tendentious and apt to make people mad. Deploy a sense of perspective and our own times, in which Roald Dahl is rewritten and Charles Dickens is excommunicated, don't seem special at all. In 1925, to take just one example, rumours reached the authorities in Cambridge that a young university lecturer called FR Leavis was intending to discuss *Ulysses* by James Joyce with his students – a novel that had fallen foul of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. And sure enough, the police soon arrived in college to examine this wunderkind's bookshelves, a scene that's really quite funny if you picture it (all those tooled leather volumes by Jane Austen and Henry James). But they weren't laughing, and nor was the home secretary, who now threatened the university with prosecution. Leavis's little seminar, then, did not go ahead – and nor did any others, anywhere, or not for a long time. When John Sutherland, who relates this story in his new book, was a teenager in the 1950s, his local library still kept its copy of *Ulysses*, complete with five pages razored out of it, carefully hidden from public view.

But still, it does feel to me, and to many others, that we are once again growing less liberal, and it's into this territory that Sutherland now steps with *Triggered Literature: Cancellation, Stealth Censorship and Cultural Warfare*. In some ways, of course, this is an obvious place for him to loiter awhile. The so-called trigger warnings lately issued by some institutions – *Mansfield Park* will upset you! *Macbeth* will make you feel ill! – are bound to be of interest to a man like him, after all. In the years after the Chatterley trial in 1960, he was a groovy young fellow, taking full advantage of all the new freedoms; as he rose up the academic ranks, it was his job to oversee the curriculum (he is emeritus Lord Northcliffe professor of modern English literature at University College London); the novels of his beloved William Makepeace Thackeray are now deemed to be horribly racist.

It's good to know that when he read Lady Chatterley's Lover at the age of 16, he did so in 'a condition of total erectionlessness'

But in other ways, it's clearly uncomfortable for him. How nervous he is of tackling the subject head-on! How fearful of sounding like a has-been (or, worse still, a bit too right wing). If it's outraged blasts from the *Daily Mail* you're after, you'll find plenty of them here. Sutherland himself, however, is seemingly determined not to be outraged by anything – even, or perhaps especially, when outrage really should be the order of the day.

Having traced the word "triggering" back to the US where, in 2014, the *New York Times* first reported that students at scores of institutions were demanding warnings on such canonical texts as *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald and *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, he provides a *tour d'horizon* of many of the incidents since in which books have been deemed potentially harmful to the reader's state of mind. He also tells us about sensitivity readers, and the various databases that aim to help readers feel better "prepared" and more "safe" ahead of reading a book (to amuse myself, I looked up Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* on one of these; among the triggers listed were cheating, murder and character death – and, no, I'm not making this up). But, alas, his own terminology is confusing. Throughout, he uses "triggered" not to refer to those people who find themselves disturbed by Enid Blyton or John Cleland, but to denote those books that now come with trigger warnings. By his telling, August Strindberg is "triggered", and Colson Whitehead. So, too, is Oliver Twist. It's bizarre and on the page it makes no sense at all.

You can't say he dives deep; mostly, this book only snorkels along, just beneath the surface. He relies almost entirely on the cuttings library: no one is interviewed; no headline is debunked. Wry rather than polemical, he only ever passes judgment on what is effectively censorship when (in my view) it feels safe to do so; when other people are unlikely to disagree or get upset. The trigger warnings issued by Glasgow University to theology students who signed up for a lecture called Jesus and Cinema, which made mention of Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*, were, in his opinion, "wholly justified". But about Maia Kobabe's controversial 2019 young adult graphic novel *Gender Queer*, he's unwilling to come to any conclusions. His long account of the upsetting views of Charles Dickens isn't utilised to encourage the writer's cancellation. But what he has to say about Dickens's talent as a writer isn't intended to encourage us to read him either. It's all passionless at best, and weedy at worst.

It's good to know that when Sutherland read DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by the Seine at the age of 16, he did so in "a condition of total erectionlessness". But what I really wondered as I read his book was: do trigger warnings (with which I disagree on principle) even work? Although he is bizarrely sceptical of the one study he cites – the National Library of Medicine in the US found that students with "relevant traumas" do not avoid triggering material even after receiving a warning about it, that its effect on them subsequently appears to be brief, and those with PTSD reported no exacerbation of their symptoms – I was pleased to read of it. While those in the sample might not much have liked Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, it did them no harm – and this way, surely, common sense lies.

Triggered Literature: Cancellation, Stealth Censorship and Cultural Warfare by John Sutherland is published by Biteback (£18.99).

Article 9

Play based on the beloved 1987 comedy will open at Birmingham Rep next year directed by Sean Foley

It is one of British cinema's most quotable comedies: a tale of destitute London actors "drifting into the arena of the unwell" who go on holiday by mistake to the Lake District. Now, the inebriated world of Withnail and I – complete with the notorious super-sized joint called the Camberwell carrot – is destined for the stage, adapted by the much-loved 1987 film's writer-director, Bruce Robinson.

The play will have its world premiere at the Birmingham Rep in May, directed by Sean Foley, who described Withnail and I as "part of the furniture of British comedy" and said "if it wasn't so funny, it would be tragic".

Robinson, 77, said that the prospect of the stage production was "most bizarre" for him, coming almost half a lifetime since he made the film. "I've written so many other scripts but I may as well have not bothered with any except this one," he said, "because it's the only one that seems to have any traction in my life."

It was a question of: do I cry my eyes out at the situation I'm in or is it so ridiculous I may as well laugh?

Bruce Robinson

The film gave early roles to Richard E Grant as the mercurial alcoholic Withnail and Paul McGann as "I", the melancholic narrator, who swerves the advances of Withnail's ruddy Uncle Monty (Richard Griffiths) when they stay at his countryside cottage. But it was a novel before it became a screenplay and was based on Robinson's own experiences as an out of work actor.

"I was sitting there with four quid a week National Assistance in Camden Town," he said. "It was just so devastatingly awful, life then. It was a question of: do I want to cry my eyes out at the situation I'm in or is it so ridiculous I may as well laugh at it? That's why I sat down and wrote the novel. I never thought it would go anywhere."

In his early 20s, Robinson secured a prominent role as Benvolio in the hugely successful film of Romeo and Juliet (1968), directed by Franco Zeffirelli in Italy. The director's unwelcome personal attention, he said, included asking him "Are you a sponge or a stone?" Robinson gave that line to the lascivious Uncle Monty in the film.

Bruce Robinson in 1989. Photograph: Handmade/Warner Bros/Kobal/Shutterstock

"I don't want to slap the dead about but Zeffirelli wasn't a very kind man," said Robinson. "I had a lot of those kinds of problems going on all the time ... I had problems with people who had the power to cast somebody in a movie ... who thought it was their right to do what they would. It was terribly disturbing. It was the thing that actually, on the positive side, made me want to be a writer – a proper writer – because to arrive in Rome straight out of drama school and to get hit on like that was, you know: why have you cast me? Have you cast me because you fancy me or because you think I can play the part?"

Robinson had further roles in TV and film but said that the "only acting I've ever done that I really self-approved of was in a play". That was a 1972 production at the Mermaid theatre in London of RC Sherriff's classic Journey's End, directed by Eric Thompson. "I did fringe theatre and bits and pieces all over the place but that was a proper part in a proper play," he said. Journey's End features in Withnail and I, as does Hamlet, whose speech "What a piece of work is a man" is delivered by Grant in the film's rain-soaked ending.

Nominated for an Oscar for his screenplay for The Killing Fields (1984), Robinson made his directorial feature debut with Withnail and I, produced by George Harrison's company Handmade Films. He has little history of writing for the theatre professionally. "When my grandfather died, I was about 12 and I got his typewriter," he remembered. "The first thing I wrote on it was a play. It was about a man who had been condemned to death in a prison cell. One guard was a bastard, the other sweet. Something in my brain was itching to write down drama." Robinson described his time at school as "bloody awful" but said that school plays had drawn him into drama: "I can thank them for that but not for anything else."

McGann and Grant in Withnail and I. Photograph: Ronald Grant Archive

Sean Foley, who will stage the world premiere at Birmingham Rep – where he is artistic director – said it is a profound account of "a friendship falling apart". Foley's CV includes directing a theatrical adaptation of the Ealing comedy The Ladykillers and he said that taking a well-known story from screen to stage was both a "poisoned chalice and holy grail". While attempting to satisfy the original's fanbase, he explained, you also try to reach a new audience while "holding the essence" of the film. Next year, in London, Foley will direct Steve Coogan in Armando Iannucci's stage adaptation of the satirical war film Dr Strangelove, Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.

A Mean Girls musical and a play based on Minority Report are among several other forthcoming productions directly inspired by films. What does Foley think of those who worry that theatre is relying too heavily on cinema for source material? "It's like saying to William Shakespeare, 'Please make up your own stories. We're not putting these on – you've stolen them from other sources.' That's my argument. Theatre is constantly using source material from other places. It always has done. Over the last 130 odd years we've had this new artform called cinema – it's just another source."

✍ **Article 10**

War in Ukraine, death of the Queen, Elon Musk ... why are Nostradamus's 'predictions' still winning converts?

You name it, the 16th-century prophet supposedly foresaw it – right down to the death of Elizabeth II, which has made a bestseller of a book interpreting his cryptic verses. It's time to sift facts from fantasy ...

There is good news and bad news. The good news is that, as you may have noticed, the world didn't end on 4 July 1999. Hence the headline in the Guardian on Monday 5 July 1999: "Nostradamus wrong (please ignore if the world ended yesterday)."

Writing 450 years earlier, the French astrologer seemed to have predicted the end in, for him, unusually date-specific terms: "The year one thousand nine ninety-nine seven month / From the sky shall come a great King of terror / [Shall be] revived the great King of Angolmois. Before and after, Mars [shall] reign as chance will have it."

The king of terror, Nostradamus's interpreters suggested, was the antichrist. Others argued that, because Angolmois is a (near) anagram of Mongolais, the 16th-century French term for Mongolians, invasion of Europe from the east was imminent – though whether by Russians, Chinese or tooled-up descendants of Genghis Khan riding like Dothraki hordes was uncertain. Nostradamus expert Prof Alexander Tollmann found the matter so worrying that he retreated to his bunker in lower Austria to wait out the catastrophe that never came.

The bad news is that if you thought 2022 was a rotten year, don't delude yourself that 2023 will be any better. Nostradamus's writings are now being used to forecast a European apocalypse. The basis of this prediction is the following quotation: "Seven months the Great War, people dead of evil-doing. / Rouen, Evreux shall not fall to the King."

Some have interpreted this to mean that escalation of the Ukraine conflict to a third world war is imminent. The Daily Star's futurological correspondent offers sensible advice: "The seven-month timeline on the conflict may initially seem like a cause for celebration, but with the terrifying nuclear arsenals of countries including America and Russia, perhaps it's best to err on the side of caution." Parisians would be well advised to hole up in Rouen until things calm down.

Perhaps Nostradamus is an unreliable guide to the future. Between about 1547 and 1555, he reportedly dictated 942 poetic, prophetic quatrains to his secretary while high on nutmeg, which causes hallucinations when taken in large doses. Even in his lifetime he was trolled mercilessly. "A certain brainless and lunatic idiot," ran 1558's First Invective of the Lord Hercules the Frenchman Against Monstradamus, "who is shouting nonsense and publishing his prognostications and fantasies on the streets."

But Nostradamus posthumously triumphed over his detractors. His quatrains, published in 1555 as Les Prophéties, have never gone out of print and have been claimed to have predicted the execution of Charles I, the Great Fire of London, the French Revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon and Hitler, the shooting of JFK, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the 9/11 attacks, the 2015 mass murders in Paris, even the abdication of King Charles III.

Certainly in 2022, Nostradamus is a literary phenomenon. A book of interpretations of his supposed prophecies last month topped the Sunday Times bestsellers list after apparently predicting when Queen Elizabeth II would die. Nostradamus: The Complete Prophecies for the Future, by Mario Reading, sold almost 8,000 copies in the week ending 17 September, after selling only five copies the week before the Queen's death.

In his book, published in 2006, Reading claimed to have found something that others who had pored over Nostradamus had missed: that his quatrains are number-indexed to correlate with dates. Hence, for instance, quatrain 10/22, purporting to forecast the death of the Queen, reads: "Because they disapproved of his divorce

/ A man who later they considered unworthy / The People will force out the King of the islands / A Man will replace who never expected to be king."
"This Quatrain," wrote Reading, "will come as no surprise to the British people and it has wide implications. The first is that Queen Elizabeth will die, circa 2022, at the age of around 96." Reading, who died in 2017, went on to claim the 10/22 Quatrain predicts that King Charles will abdicate because he is "weary at the persistent attacks on both himself and second wife" because of "resentments held against him by a certain proportion of the British population, following his divorce from Diana, Princess of Wales". His interpretation didn't end there. He also reckoned that Prince Harry will become the next king, instead of his older brother William.
The point of prophecy is not to give tipoffs but, after the event, to affirm that they were foreseen*Steven Connor*
Michel de Nostradame was born in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1503. Though Catholic, he later traded on his Jewish ancestry by saying his natural instinct for prophecy was "inherited from my forebears". He made his early living as a travelling apothecary, much in demand for the treatment of plague victims. "His time was comparable to ours," says historian Dan Jones. "He lived when there were also massive social divisions and catastrophes. It was also a time in which the new invention of the printing press made the transmission of ideas, and crazy mad bullshit, incredibly easy. It was the social media of its day."
Nostradamus took advantage of this new means of spreading ideas. From 1550 onwards he produced annual almanacs that included prophetic verses. In 1554, he started writing Les Prophéties, in which he aimed to set out the future history of the world in 1,000 quatrains, arranged in 10 "centuries". As his fame grew, Nostradamus became a close friend of the queen of France, Catherine de Médici, the death of whose husband Henry II he is supposed to have predicted in the following verse:
"The young lion will overcome the older one / On the field of combat in a single battle / He will pierce his eyes through a golden cage / Two wounds made one, then he dies a cruel death."
This has been taken to refer to a jousting tournament in 1559, when Gabriel, Comte de Montgomery's importunate lance burst through the king's poorly secured visor, skewing the king's eye, throat and temple, resulting in his death 11 days later. But the prophecy's veracity is in doubt because it didn't appear in print until long after that fatal encounter.
Perhaps Nostradamus didn't predict the king's death so much as make it look to future readers as if he had. That is not to suggest that Nostradamus was a charlatan, but something more interesting. "The point of prophecy is not to give you tipoffs about share-price fluctuations but to be able after the event to affirm that they were foreseen," argues Steven Connor, professor of English at Cambridge University, "Prophecy is only ever retroactively potent, or by the kind of anticipated retrospection that we could call 'posticipation', which always means knowing too late what you might have known in advance."
That said, at least Nostradamus predicted his own death in 1566. Mind you, given that the prediction was made a day before he died, and that he was almost bedridden with arthritis, dropsy and arteriosclerosis, perhaps this was not so much a symptom of his prophetic genius as a statement of the obvious.
"In desperate times, soothsayers have a ready audience for their nonsense. It's the meeting point of cynicism and gullibility"*Dan Jones*

✍ Article 11

The beauty of Nostradamus is you can read whatever you wish into what he wrote. What some may consider his charlatanry is, viewed from another angle, his genius, says Everett F Blieler, author, under the pseudonym Liberte E LeVert, of Prophecies and Enigmas of Nostradamus: "Circumlocution and evasion of directness play a large part. He usually waffled in his astrological datings, since conjunctions are repeated. He invoked obscure Latin words to create possibilities of double meanings; he omitted prepositions, articles, reflexives and connectives, and favoured the infinitive as a timeless, personless form that can be read many ways."
As Jones puts it: "Nostradamus has the virtue of vagueness combined with apocalyptic fervour. That's not unusual. Many sayers of sooth, from Merlin and Geoffrey of Monmouth onwards, have done the same. This vagueness lends itself to what we now know as confirmation bias. In desperate times, soothsayers have a ready audience for their insane nonsense. It's the meeting point of cynicism and gullibility."
That last point makes Nostradamus sound thoroughly modern. "Those guys didn't have social media," says Jones, "but what they were producing then would serve now as the fuel pellets on which social media runs. In fact, increasingly, Nostradamus is spreading through social media."
TS Eliot wrote that humankind cannot bear much reality. Today, when life seems irremediably chaotic, our politicians catastrophic and the future more ungraspable, we desperately seek patterns, narratives and meaning. "At moments of great change or social anxiety we do tend to go looking for explanations," says Jones. "We want the past and the future to make narrative sense." The point of the prophet is to provide this by

showing us mugs what we have not noticed, be it a providential working-out of a larger, perhaps God-determined, purpose, the march of progress, or, as Steven Connor puts it, "a redemptive parabola rising from fall to forgiveness".

Nostradamus is anything but soothing. "His verses are almost pathologically noncommittal as to causes or deserts," argues Connor. "The cost of knowing what is to come is, for Nostradamus, that history loses all direction and coherence." But none of that matters to the thriving Nostradamus industry. Interpretations of looming disasters, based on fanciful readings of his verses, are still coming thick and fast. His remark that "man will be eating man" because "the bushel of wheat will become so high", for example, is being seen as a reference to the calamitous effects of the interruption to Ukrainian grain exports, although its supposed corollary, the rise of cannibalism, seems a bit far-fetched.

Some have argued that this means Nostradamus also foresaw the looming impact of the climate crisis when he wrote: "For forty years the rainbow will not be seen. / For forty years it will be seen every day. / The dry earth will grow more parched, and there will be great floods when it is seen."

But if the prospect of floods, droughts, murderers and King Harry and Meghan livestreaming Netflix specials from Buckingham Palace aren't enough to give you the willies about what's upcoming, consider this last Nostradamus prediction. Quatrain 5/23 reads: "The two contenders will unite together / When most others unite with Mars / The African leader is fearful and trembles / The dual alliance is separated by the fleet." In his 2006 book, Reading took this to mean that the world would see "two powers unite together" in order to combat global warfare.

But that interpretation was recently doubted by Reading's son Laurie, who is clearly following in the family business of making Nostradamus's words relevant to today's world. He thinks that the "African leader" is a reference to the South African-born tech billionaire Elon Musk and his plans to colonise Mars. Indeed this quatrain, with the line from another verse, "the light of Mars shall go out", indicate that Musk will have to shelve his audacious plans to leave Earth for the red planet and remain among us while the world ends. Which, if true, is disappointing news. Leonard Cohen put it best: "I have seen the future and, brother, it is murder."

✍ Article 12

Author Arundhati Roy may face prosecution in India over 2010 speech

Top official sanctions case against Booker prize-winning novelist for comments about Kashmir

The Booker prize-winning Indian novelist Arundhati Roy could be prosecuted for a 2010 speech about Kashmir after a top official signed off on the move, according to reports in India. Roy, 61, is one of India's most famous living authors but her writing and activism, including her criticism of the prime minister Narendra Modi's government, have made her a polarising figure in the country.

A criminal complaint accusing her and several others of sedition had languished in India's notoriously glacial criminal justice system since it was filed in 2010.

But on Tuesday, Indian media reported that VK Saxena, the top official in the administration governing Delhi, had given approval for the case to proceed before the courts. Saxena's directive said there was enough evidence for a case to take place against Roy and her co-defendants "for their speeches at a public function" in the capital, the Hindu newspaper reported.

The original complaint accuses Roy and others of giving speeches advocating the secession of Kashmir from India, which partly governs the disputed region and claims it in full, as does neighbouring Pakistan. Kashmir is one of the most sensitive topics of public discussion in India, which has fought two wars and countless skirmishes with Pakistan over control of the territory.

Tens of thousands of people, including Indian troops, militants and civilians, have been killed in Kashmir since an insurgency against Indian rule broke out in 1989. Roy's home in Delhi was besieged by protesters in 2010 when her remarks from the panel discussion became public. Two of her co-defendants have died in the 13 years since the case was first lodged.

Roy became the first non-expatriate Indian to win the Booker prize for her acclaimed debut novel The God of Small Things in 1997.

She is also known for her passionate essays on the plight of the poor and dispossessed in India, occasionally earning the ire of the country's elite.

In recent years her work has marked her as one of the most high-profile critics of Modi's government, which has been accused by rights groups and others of targeting activists for criminal prosecution and working to suppress free speech.

Reporters Without Borders has warned "press freedom is in crisis" in India. Since 2014, India dropped from 140 to 161 on its rankings of media freedom, including 11 places since last year.

✍ **Article 13**

The novel is dead (this time it's for real)

Literary fiction used to be central to the culture. No more: in the digital age, not only is the physical book in decline, but the very idea of 'difficult' reading is being challenged. The future of the serious novel, argues Will Self, is as a specialised interest

If you happen to be a writer, one of the great benisons of having children is that your personal culture-mine is equipped with its own canaries. As you tunnel on relentlessly into the future, these little harbingers either choke on the noxious gases released by the extraction of decadence, or they thrive in the clean air of what we might call progress. A few months ago, one of my canaries, who's in his mid-teens and harbours a laudable ambition to be the world's greatest ever rock musician, was messing about on his electric guitar. Breaking off from a particularly jagged and angry riff, he launched into an equally jagged diatribe, the gist of which was already familiar to me: everything in popular music had been done before, and usually those who'd done it first had done it best. Besides, the instant availability of almost everything that had ever been done stifled his creativity, and made him feel it was all hopeless.

A miner, if he has any sense, treats his canary well, so I began gently remonstrating with him. Yes, I said, it's true that the web and the internet have created a permanent Now, eliminating our sense of musical eras; it's also the case that the queered demographics of our longer-living, lower-birthing population means that the middle-aged squat on top of the pyramid of endeavour, crushing the young with our nostalgic tastes. What's more, the decimation of the revenue streams once generated by analogues of recorded music have put paid to many a musician's income. But my canary had to appreciate this: if you took the long view, the advent of the 78rpm shellac disc had also been a disaster for musicians who in the teens and 20s of the last century made their daily bread by live performance. I repeated one of my favourite anecdotes: when the first wax cylinder recording of Feodor Chaliapin singing "The Song of the Volga Boatmen" was played, its listeners, despite a lowness of fidelity that would seem laughable to us (imagine a man holding forth from a giant bowl of snapping, crackling and popping Rice Krispies), were nonetheless convinced the portly Russian must be in the room, and searched behind drapes and underneath chaise longues for him.

So recorded sound blew away the nimbus of authenticity surrounding live performers – but it did worse things. My canaries have often heard me tell how back in the 1970s heyday of the pop charts, all you needed was a writing credit on some loathsome chirpy-chirpy-cheep-cheeping ditty in order to spend the rest of your born days lying by a guitar-shaped pool in the Hollywood Hills hoovering up cocaine. Surely if there's one thing we have to be grateful for it's that the web has put paid to such an egregious financial multiplier being applied to raw talentlessness. Put paid to it, and also returned musicians to the domain of live performance and, arguably, reinvigorated musicianship in the process. Anyway, I was saying all of this to my canary when I was suddenly overtaken by a great wave of noxiousness only I could smell. I faltered, I fell silent, then I said: sod you and your creative anxieties, what about me? How do you think it feels to have dedicated your entire adult life to an art form only to see the bloody thing dying before your eyes?

My canary is a perceptive songbird – he immediately ceased his own cheeping, except to chirrup: I see what you mean. The literary novel as an art work and a narrative art form central to our culture is indeed dying before our eyes. Let me refine my terms: I do not mean narrative prose fiction *tout court* is dying – the kidult boywizardsroman and the soft sadomasochistic porn fantasy are clearly in rude good health. And nor do I mean that serious novels will either cease to be written or read. But what is already no longer the case is the situation that obtained when I was a young man. In the early 1980s, and I would argue throughout the second half of the last century, the literary novel was perceived to be the prince of art forms, the cultural capstone and the apogee of creative endeavour. The capability words have when arranged sequentially to both mimic the free flow of human thought and investigate the physical expressions and interactions of thinking subjects; the way they may be shaped into a believable simulacrum of either the commonsensical world, or any number of invented ones; and the capability of the extended prose form itself, which, unlike any other art form, is able to enact self-analysis, to describe other aesthetic modes and even mimic them. All this led to a general acknowledgment: the novel was the true Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

This is not to say that everyone walked the streets with their head buried in *Ulysses* or *To the Lighthouse*, or that popular culture in all its forms didn't hold sway over the psyches and imaginations of the great majority. Nor do I mean to suggest that in our culture perennial John Bull-headed philistinism wasn't alive and snorting: "I don't know much about art, but I know what I like." However, what didn't obtain is the current dispensation, wherein

those who reject the high arts feel not merely entitled to their opinion, but wholly justified in it. It goes further: the hallmark of our contemporary culture is an active resistance to difficulty in all its aesthetic manifestations, accompanied by a sense of grievance that conflates it with political elitism. Indeed, it's arguable that tilting at this papery windmill of artistic superiority actively prevents a great many people from confronting the very real economic inequality and political disenfranchisement they're subject to, exactly as being compelled to chant the mantra "choice" drowns out the harsh background Muzak telling them they have none.

Just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean they aren't out to get you. Simply because you've remarked a number of times on the concealed fox gnawing its way into your vitals, it doesn't mean it hasn't at this moment swallowed your gall bladder. Ours is an age in which omnipresent threats of imminent extinction are also part of the background noise – nuclear annihilation, terrorism, climate change. So we can be blinkered when it comes to tectonic cultural shifts. The omnipresent and deadly threat to the novel has been imminent now for a long time – getting on, I would say, for a century – and so it's become part of culture. During that century, more books of all kinds have been printed and read by far than in the entire preceding half millennium since the invention of movable-type printing. If this was death it had a weird, pullulating way of expressing itself. The saying is that there are no second acts in American lives; the novel, I think, has led a very American sort of life: swaggering, confident, brash even – and ever aware of its world-conquering manifest destiny. But unlike Ernest Hemingway or F Scott Fitzgerald, the novel has also had a second life. The form should have been laid to rest at about the time of *Finnegans Wake*, but in fact it has continued to stalk the corridors of our minds for a further three-quarters of a century. Many fine novels have been written during this period, but I would contend that these were, taking the long view, zombie novels, instances of an undead art form that yet wouldn't lie down.

Literary critics – themselves a dying breed, a cause for considerable schadenfreude on the part of novelists – make all sorts of mistakes, but some of the most egregious ones result from an inability to think outside of the papery prison within which they conduct their lives' work. They consider the codex. They are – in Marshall McLuhan's memorable phrase – the possessors of Gutenberg minds.

✍ Article 14

There is now an almost ceaseless murmuring about the future of narrative prose. Most of it is at once Panglossian and melioristic: yes, experts assert, there's no disputing the impact of digitised text on the whole culture of the codex; fewer paper books are being sold, newspapers fold, bookshops continue to close, libraries as well. But ... but, well, there's still no substitute for the experience of close reading as we've come to understand and appreciate it – the capacity to imagine entire worlds from parsing a few lines of text; the ability to achieve deep and meditative levels of absorption in others' psyches. This circling of the wagons comes with a number of public-spirited campaigns: children are given free books; book bags are distributed with slogans on them urging readers to put books in them; books are hymned for their physical attributes – their heft, their appearance, their smell – as if they were the bodily correlates of all those Gutenberg minds, which, of course, they are.

The seeming realists among the Gutenbergers say such things as: well, clearly, books are going to become a minority technology, but the *beau livre* will survive. The populist Gutenbergers prate on about how digital texts linked to social media will allow readers to take part in a public conversation. What none of the Gutenbergers are able to countenance, because it is quite literally – for once the intensifier is justified – out of their minds, is that the advent of digital media is not simply destructive of the codex, but of the Gutenberg mind itself. There is one question alone that you must ask yourself in order to establish whether the serious novel will still retain cultural primacy and centrality in another 20 years. This is the question: if you accept that by then the vast majority of text will be read in digital form on devices linked to the web, do you also believe that those readers will voluntarily choose to disable that connectivity? If your answer to this is no, then the death of the novel is sealed out of your own mouth.

We don't know when the form of reading that supported the rise of the novel form began, but there were certain obvious and important way-stations. We think of Augustine of Hippo coming upon Bishop Ambrose in his study and being amazed to see the prelate reading silently while moving his lips. We can cite the introduction of word spaces in seventh-century Ireland, and punctuation throughout medieval Europe – then comes standardised spelling with the arrival of printing, and finally the education reforms of the early 1900s, which meant the British Expeditionary Force of 1914 was probably the first universally literate army to take to the field. Just one of the ironies that danced macabre attendance on this most awful of conflicts was that the conditions necessary for the toppling of solitary and silent reading as the most powerful and important medium were already waiting in the wings while Sassoon, Graves and Rosenberg dipped their pens in their dugouts.

In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan writes about what he terms the "unified electrical field". This manifestation of technology allows people to "hold" and "release" information at a distance; it provides for the instantaneous two-way transmission of data; and it radically transforms the relationship between producers and consumers – or, if you prefer, writers and readers. If you read McLuhan without knowing he was writing in the late 1950s, you could be forgiven for assuming he was describing the interrelated phenomena of the web and the internet that are currently revolutionising human communications. When he characterises "the global village" as an omni-located community where vast distances pose no barrier to the sharing of intimate trivia, it is hard not to believe he himself regularly tweeted. In fact, McLuhan saw the electric light and the telegraph as the founding technologies of the "unified electrical field", and, rather than being uncommonly prescient, he believed all the media necessary for its constitution – broadcast radio, film, television, the telephone – were securely in place by the time of, say, the publication of *Finnegans Wake*.

McLuhan, having enjoyed his regulation 15 minutes of fame in the unified electrical field of the 1960s has fallen out of fashion; his rigorous insistence that the content of any given medium is an irrelevance when it comes to understanding its psychological impact is unpopular with the very people who first took him up: cultural workers. No one likes to be told their play/novel/poem/film/TV programme/concept double-album is wholly analysable in terms of its means of transmission. *Understanding Media* tells us little about what media necessarily will arise, only what impact on the collective psyche they must have. In the late 20th century, a culture typified by a consumerist ethic was convinced that it – that we – could have it all. This "having it all" was even ascribed its own cultural era: the postmodern. We weren't overtaken by new technologies, we simply took what we wanted from them and collaged these fragments together, using the styles and modes of the past as a framework of ironic distancing: hence the primacy of the message was reasserted over its medium.

✍ Article 15

The main objection to this is, I think, at once profoundly commonsensical and curiously subtle. The literary critic Robert Adams observed that if postmodernism was to be regarded as a genuine cultural era, then it made modernism itself a strangely abbreviated one. After all, if we consider that all other western cultural eras – classicism, medieval, the Renaissance – seem to average about half a millennium a piece, it hardly matters whether you date modernism's onset to Rousseau, Sturm und Drang or *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, it clearly still has a long way to go. By the same token, if – as many seem keen to assert – postmodernism has already run its course, then what should we say has replaced it, post-postmodernism, perhaps? It would seem better all round to accept the truth, which is that we are still solidly within the modernist era, and that the crisis registered in the novel form in the early 1900s by the inception of new and more powerful media technologies continues apace. The use of montage for transition; the telescoping of fictional characters into their streams of consciousness; the abandonment of the omniscient narrator; the inability to suspend disbelief in the artificialities of plot – these were always latent in the problematic of the novel form, but in the early 20th century, under pressure from other, juvenescent, narrative forms, the novel began to founder. The polymorphous multilingual perversities of the later Joyce, and the extreme existential asperities of his fellow exile, Beckett, are both registered as authentic responses to the taedium vitae of the form, and so accorded tremendous, guarded respect – if not affection.

After Joyce, we continue to read; we read a great deal – after all, that's what you do when you're wheeled out into the sun porch of a care home: you read. You may find it difficult to concentrate, given the vagaries of your own ageing Gutenberg mind, while your reading material itself may also have a senescent feel, what with its greying stock and bleeding type – the equivalent, in codex form, of old copies of the Reader's Digest left lying around in dentists' waiting rooms. Yet read you do, closing your ears obstinately to the nattering of radio and television, squinting so as to shut out the bluey light from the screens that surround you, turning your head in order to block out the agitation of your neighbours' fingers as they tweezer info panels into being. I've often thought that western European socialism survived as a credible ideological alternative up until 1989 purely because of the Soviet counterexample: those on the left were able to point east and say, I may not altogether know how socialism can be achieved, but I do know it's not like this. So it was with the novel: we may not have known altogether how to make it novel again, but we knew it couldn't go the way of Hollywood. Now film, too, is losing its narrative hegemony, and so the novel – the cultural Greece to its world-girdling Rome – is also in ineluctable decline.

✍ Article 16

'I like buying books on Amazon, but I'm under no illusion that this means the novel will survive as a result of my preferences' ... Will Self. Photograph: James Grimstead/Rex Features

I repeat: just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean they aren't out to get you. When I finished my first work of fiction in 1990 and went looking for a publisher, I was offered an advance of £1,700 for a paperback original edition. I was affronted, not so much by the money (although pro rata it meant I was being paid considerably less than I would have working in McDonald's), but by not receiving the sanctification of hard covers. The agent I consulted told me to accept without demur: it was, he said, nigh-on impossible for new writers to get published – let alone paid. At that time the reconfiguration of the medium was being felt through the ending of the Net Book Agreement, the one-time price cartel that shored up publishers' profits by outlawing retailer discounting. In retrospect, the ending of the agreement was simply a localised example of a much wider phenomenon: the concertinaing of the textual distribution network into a short, wide pipe. It would be amusing to read the meliorism of the Panglosses if it weren't also so irritating; writing a few months ago in the New Statesman, Nicholas Clee, a former editor of the Bookseller, no less, surveyed all of the changes wrought by digital media – changes that funnel together into the tumultuous wordstream of Jeff Bezos's Amazon – before ending his excursus where he began, with the best of all possible facts implying we were in the best of all possible worlds: "I like," Clee wrote, "buying books on Amazon."

Groucho Marx once said to a man with six children taking part in his TV show: "I like my cigar, but I know when to take it out." By the same token: I also like buying books on Amazon, but I'm under no illusion that this means either the physical codex, or the novel – a form of content specifically adapted to it – will survive as a result of my preferences. Because I'm also very partial to sourcing digital texts from Project Gutenberg, then wordsearching them for a quotation I want to use. I like my typewriter as well, a Groma Kolibri manufactured in the German Democratic Republic in the early 1960s, but I'm under no illusion that it's anything but old technology. I switched to writing the first drafts of my fictions on a manual typewriter about a decade ago because of the inception of broadband internet. Even before this, the impulse to check email, buy something you didn't need, or goggle at images of the unattainable was there – but at least there was the annoying tocsin of dial-up connection to awake you to your time-wasting. With broadband it became seamless: one second you were struggling over a sentence, the next you were buying oven gloves. Worse, if, as a writer, you reached an impasse where you couldn't imagine what something looked or sounded like, the web was there to provide instant literalism: the work of the imagination, which needs must be fanciful, was at a few keystrokes reduced to factualism. All the opinions and conceptions of the new media amount to nothing set beside the way they're actually used.

While I may have registered the effect of digital media on my sense perception, I by no means feel immune from them; on the contrary, I've come to realise that the kind of psyche implicit in the production and consumption of serious novels (which are what, after all, serious artists produce), depends on a medium that has inbuilt privacy: we must all be Ambroses. In a recent and rather less optimistic article in the New Yorker on the Amazon phenomenon, George Packer acknowledges the impact on the publishing industry of digital text: the decline in physical sales; and the removal of what might be termed the "gatekeepers", the editors and critics who sifted the great ocean of literary content for works of value. He foresees a more polarised world emerging: with big bestsellers commanding still more sales, while down below the digital ocean seethes with instantly accessible and almost free texts. Packer observes that this development parallels others in the neoliberal economy, which sees market choice as the only human desideratum. The US court's ruling against the big five publishers in the English-speaking world and in favour of Amazon was predicated on this: their desperate attempt to resist Amazon's imposition of punitive discounting constituted a price cartel. But, really, this was only the latest skirmish in a long war; the battles of the 1990s, when both here and in the US chain bookstores began to gobble up the independents, were part of the same conflict: one between the medium and the message, and as I think I've already made clear, in the long run it's always the medium that wins.

I've no doubt that a revenue stream for digitised factual text will be established: information in this form is simply too useful for it not to be assigned monetary value. It is novels that will be the victims of the loss of effective copyright (a system of licensing and revenue collection that depended both on the objective form of the text, and defined national legal jurisdictions); novels and the people who write them. Fortunately, institutions are already in existence to look after us. The creative writing programmes burgeoning throughout our universities are exactly this; another way of looking at them is that they're a self-perpetuating and self-financing literary set-aside scheme purpose built to accommodate writers who can no longer make a living from their work. In these care homes, erstwhile novelists induct still more and younger writers into their own reflexive career paths, so that in time they too can become novelists who cannot make a living from their work and so become teachers of creative writing.

✍ **Article 17**

In case you think I'm exaggerating, I have just supervised a doctoral thesis in creative writing: this consists in the submission of a novel written by the candidate, together with a 35,000-word dissertation on the themes explored by that novel. My student, although having published several other genre works, and despite a number of ringing endorsements from his eminent creative-writing teachers, has been unable to find a publisher for this, his first serious novel. The novel isn't bad – although nor is it Turgenev. The dissertation is interesting – although it isn't a piece of original scholarship. Neither of them will, in all likelihood, ever be read again after he has been examined. The student wished to bring the date of his viva forward – why? Well, so he could use his qualification to apply for a post teaching – you guessed it – creative writing. Not that he's a neophyte: he already teaches creative writing, he just wants to be paid more highly for the midwifery of stillborn novels.

If you'll forgive a metaphoric ouroboros: it shouldn't surprise us that this is the convulsive form taken by the literary novel during its senescence; some of the same factors implicated in its extinction are also responsible for the rise of the creative writing programme; specifically a wider culture whose political economy prizes exchange value over use value, and which valorises group consciousness at the expense of the individual mind. Whenever tyro novelists ask me for career advice I always say the same thing to them: think hard about whether you wish to spend anything up to 20 or 30 years of your adult life in solitary confinement; if you don't like the sound of that silence, abandon the idea right away. But nowadays many people who sign up for creative-writing programmes have only the dimmest understanding of what's actually involved in the writing life; the programme offers them comity and sympathetic readers for their fledgling efforts – it acts, it essence, as a therapy group for the creatively misunderstood. What these people are aware of – although again, usually only hazily – is that some writers have indeed had it all; if by this is meant that they are able to create as they see fit, and make a living from what they produce. In a society where almost everyone is subject to the appropriation of their time, and a vast majority of that time is spent undertaking work that has little human or spiritual value, the ideal form of the writing life appears gilded with a sort of wonderment. The savage irony is that even as these aspirants sign up for the promise of such a golden career, so the possibility of their actually pursuing it steadily diminishes; a still more savage irony is that the very form their instruction takes militates against the culture of the texts they desire to produce. WB Yeats attributed to his father the remark that "Poetry is the social act of the solitary man"; with the creative-writing programmes and the Facebook links embedded in digitised texts encouraging readers to "share" their insights, writing and reading have become the solitary acts of social beings. And we all know how social beings tend to regard solitary acts – as perversities, if not outright perversions.

As I said at the outset: I believe the serious novel will continue to be written and read, but it will be an art form on a par with easel painting or classical music: confined to a defined social and demographic group, requiring a degree of subsidy, a subject for historical scholarship rather than public discourse. The current resistance of a lot of the literate public to difficulty in the form is only a subconscious response to having a moribund message pushed at them. As a practising novelist, do I feel depressed about this? No, not particularly, except on those occasions when I breathe in too deeply and choke on my own decadence. I've no intention of writing fictions in the form of tweets or text messages – nor do I see my future in computer-games design. My apprenticeship as a novelist has lasted a long time now, and I still cherish hopes of eventually qualifying. Besides, as the possessor of a Gutenberg mind, it is quite impossible for me to foretell what the new dominant narrative art form will be – if, that is, there is to be one at all.

What I can do is observe my canary: he doesn't read much in the way of what I'd call serious novels, but there's no doubting that he's alive, breathing deep of a rich and varied culture, and shows every sign of being a very intelligent and thoughtful songbird. On that basis, I think it's safe for us both to go on mining.

This is an edited version of this year's Richard Hillary memorial lecture, which will be given by Will Self on 6 May at the Gulbenkian theatre, St Cross Building, Oxford.

✍ **Article 18**

Once Upon a Time in Hollywood review – Tarantino's debut novel shines

The director's pulpy novelisation of his most recent film is entirely outrageous and addictively readable

Quentin Tarantino made a career alchemising movie trash into gold: with a connoisseur's ecstasy, he worked with B-movie language and grindhouse rhetoric. Now he's done the same with a genre the literary world wrinkles its nose at, the pulpiest of pulp fiction – the novelisation. This is normally the lowliest kind of movie brand promotion, which had its heyday before the VHS age, targeted at film fans who wanted a way to relive the experience.

Tarantino has turned his most recent film, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, into a novel: messing with the timeline, cranking up the backstories, mulching up reality and alt.reality pastiche, ladling in new episodes. The result comes packaged in something like those New English Library paperbacks that used to be on carousel displays in supermarkets and drugstores. In the endpapers he cheekily includes ads for old commercial paperbacks real and imagined, such as Erich Segal's *Oliver's Story*, sequel to *Love Story* ("Soon to be a major motion picture").

Plenty of movie directors have written fiction: Michael Cimino, Gus Van Sant, Ethan Coen. Ousmane Sembène adapted his own novel, *Mandabi*, into a movie. But why this choice for a move into fiction? Perhaps because the Hollywood setting gives it the right Jackie Collins-style confection of glamour and excitement. (And *Pulp Fiction* would have been too obvious.) So here again are his antiheroes from late 1960s Hollywood: Rick Dalton, played on screen by Leonardo DiCaprio, is the cheesy TV cowboy actor whose career is on the skids. The novel calls him "an Eisenhower actor in a Dennis Hopper Hollywood" – a nice line not used in the film, maybe because DiCaprio looked too gorgeously modern to be Eisenhoweresque. Cliff Booth, previously played by Brad Pitt, is Dalton's best buddy and now unemployable stunt double; the industry loathes Cliff because he's rumoured to have murdered his wife on a fishing boat. Tarantino expands that episode into a grisly and hilarious set piece; it's cheerfully sympathetic to Cliff.

Rick's personal crisis comes to a head when he realises he is living next door to the hottest young things around: Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate, whose terrible destiny was to coincide with that of cult leader Charles Manson and his followers, whose own lives, as in the film, are imagined with macabre black comedy.

I have to admit I was disappointed with the way Tarantino changes the ending, giving merely a throwaway mention early on to the ultraviolent freakout that formed the film's finale. Of course, fans of the original will know all about the big finish already; or it could be that he wants novel and film to complement each other, as a multimedia installation. But the book is entirely outrageous and addictively readable on its own terms – even the wildly prolix digressive sections and endless savant riffs about movies and TV.

As usual, the novel shows Tarantino as a black belt in provocation. He says that Cliff likes the spoof spy character Matt Helm despite or because Helm is "unconsciously racist, consciously misogynistic", but the rest of the time his characters are crashing into our sensibilities.

At the Cannes press conference for the film, Tarantino was infuriated by questions that suggested he wasn't interested in female characters. In the novel, the inner world of Sharon Tate and the fictional child actor Trudi Fraser are rounded out a fair bit, particularly Trudi, who has been developed from her screen persona into a character of real if eccentric charm.

The book is a reminder that Tarantino is, in fact, a really good writer, and it should not be so surprising that his brilliance as a screenwriter should be transferable into fiction, in the firework displays of dialogue but also the building blocks of narrative. He's maybe not in the Elmore Leonard league but, like Leonard, he's refreshingly unconcerned with the literary mainstream. I read this in one sitting – just like watching a film.

✍ **Article 19**

Spotify's new audiobook streaming could have 'devastating effect', says Society of Authors

The industry body says the music giant's move to make more than 150,000 titles available has not been discussed with authors and may compete with sales

The Society of Authors (SoA) has said it is "deeply concerned" about Spotify's new audiobook provision. The industry body cited "the devastating effect that music streaming has had on artists' incomes", and expressed its fear that authors may suffer in a similar way.

"The streaming of audiobooks competes directly with sales and is even more damaging than music streaming because books are typically only read once, while music is often streamed many times," a statement from the SoA read.

At the beginning of October, the Bookseller reported that "all of the major book publishers" had agreed limited streaming deals with Spotify. Since 4 October, Spotify Premium subscribers in the UK and Australia have been able to access to up to 15 hours of audiobook content per month, from a catalogue of more than 150,000 titles.

"As far as we are aware, no authors or agents have been approached for permission for such licences, and authors have not been consulted on licence or payment terms," the SoA said. "Publishing contracts differ but in our view most licences given to publishers for licensing of audio do not include streaming. In fact, it is likely that streaming was not a use that had been invented when many such contracts were entered into."

Yara Rodrigues Fowler, named earlier this year as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists, said that she "wasn't consulted at all" before the audiobook of her debut novel Stubborn Archivist appeared on the streaming app. Her agent, Imogen Pelham, added: "The key issue is the total obscurity of the deal. It's impossible to

understand what the benefit is supposed to be for authors." Author and historian Greg Jenner tweeted that he only learned about the Spotify deal "when a friend found both of our audiobooks on Spotify, and we had no idea".

Literary agent Jonny Geller confirmed that he and his colleagues at the agency Curtis Brown were not approached before the Spotify deal was concluded. "That is certainly unusual as audio rights are an important and growing part of an author's work and income," he said. "We will look closely at the deals being offered by the publishers to make sure the royalty offered is subject to purchases of each audiobook and not how long someone may or may not listen to it."

"We do not want to follow the disastrous path the music industry went down," he added. For years, musicians have been complaining that they are unable to make a living via digital music royalties because of reported low levels of remuneration from streaming platforms. Earlier this year a parliamentary report called for the UK government to streamline its policymaking in creative industries, in order to make the industry fairer for British musicians. The SoA's chief executive Nicola Solomon said that "the fact that all main publishers have signed similar deals with Spotify indicates that this has been in discussion for some time. So why have authors and agents not been consulted?" "How will earnings from these streaming deals be calculated?" she went on to ask. "How can we ensure that such deals do not compete with sales and that authors are fully remunerated. What will it mean for longer term earnings? What protections are publishers putting in place against piracy and unrestrained uses?"

"We urgently need the publishers involved to have the conversations with authors and agents now which they should have had before these deals were made."

In addition to seeking author and agent approval of these deals, the SoA is calling for publishers to provide a number of protections for authors, including negotiating "an appropriate share of the receipts on a clear and equitable payment model" and ensuring "that licences include safeguards to prevent pirating of authors' and narrators' works and voices including for use in AI systems".

Pan Macmillan said it is "always interested in opportunities to sell more of our licensed audio product".

"Of course we have carefully reviewed our contracts, only making titles available to Spotify where we are cleared for distribution as streamed audiobooks," a representative from the publisher said. "We are excited by the possibility of Spotify opening up new audiences for audiobooks."

According to Penguin Random House's global website, the UK's biggest publishing house is "excited" to have its titles included in Spotify's catalogue, and it describes the 15 hours per month model as comparable to token models on existing services such as Audible, where members receive one credit for an audiobook. "We're thrilled by this exciting opportunity to bring our authors' works – and voices – to Spotify's 220 million paid subscribers," the statement read.

David Kaefer, vice-president of business affairs at Spotify, told the Bookseller earlier this week that each publisher had agreed to a slightly different contract. "There is a pooling model for a segment of our partners and generally it's partners who are slightly smaller scale," he said. "Some people, particularly larger providers, wanted to do something different." Such pooling models would give publishers a percentage of the total revenue Spotify receives for its audiobooks.

Spotify has not yet responded to the Guardian's request that it addresses the SoA's concerns directly.

✍ Article 20

Cahokia Jazz by Francis Spufford review – fabulously rich noir

The Golden Hill author turns his hand to the detective genre in a multilayered reimagining of 1920s America

Francis Spufford's fabulous third novel is a piece of pulp fiction disguised as speculative history, or possibly vice versa: the tale plays both sides and switches lanes in a blur. It is set in an alternative 1920s America that is recognisable at the edges and unfamiliar at its core, centred on a First Nations people who have avoided the worst effects of manifest destiny to maintain a toehold of power in the febrile midwest. Where Golden Hill, Spufford's riotous 2016 bestseller, took its lead from the writings of Henry and Sarah Fielding to paint a portrait of nascent 18th-century New York, Cahokia Jazz nods to the hard-boiled prose of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. It rattles through the urban jungle in the manner of a fast-paced dimestore thriller.

Every good detective story is at heart a licence to roam – an excuse to kick open doors and interview all the suspects. So it is with Cahokia Jazz, which is at least as interested in the investigation of its constructed metropolis as it is in solving the murder of lowly, luckless Fred Hopper, who is found dead on a roof with his heart torn from his chest. The evidence suggests a ritual killing. Suspicion immediately falls on the Indigenous community. But Hopper, in addition to his day job as a clerk, was embroiled with the Ku Klux Klan and in debt to a bootlegger, and his death quickly points to a wider political conspiracy. Spufford's invented city – built

around the true-life Cahokia Mounds, near a village called St Louis – is a place of blind alleys and dark corners. It's thick with mystery and in thrall to arcane tribal lore. The majority First Nations population holds sway but its position is tenuous: this utopia is revealed to be a tottering house of cards.

Spufford's city is a place of blind alleys and dark corners – it's thick with mystery and in thrall to arcane tribal lore

Our tour guide and proxy is headstrong, burly Joe Barrow, a mixed-race police detective who was raised as an orphan at a boys' home in Nebraska. Barrow is conveniently new to Cahokia, still learning the ropes, and so it is via his dogged progress that Spufford draws his picture of a complex "mongrel city" in which fiction is grounded in historical fact. It's March 1922, which means that Warren Harding is president, The Birth of a Nation is the KKK's favourite film and Model-T Fords have the run of the road. But the US is here fighting Russia for control of Alaska while the "Mississippi Renaissance" plays as a kind of reverse Great Migration, funnelling African American factory workers back below the Mason-Dixon line.

Reconstruction, it's clear, hasn't bitten so fiercely in these United States, although the result is not so much a melting pot as an unstable pie chart of red, white and black influence. Spufford refers to these factions, respectively, as the *takouma*, *takata* and *taklousa* races. Officially, Barrow is working for the *takata*-dominated police department, but his physical appearance betrays his *takouma* origins and he finds himself increasingly beguiled by Cahokia's First Nations leaders.

An overtly political writer might at this stage be laying the ground for a different breed of drama – a revisionist revengers' tale, perhaps, in which an alliance of Native Americans and former slaves wrest control from their historic white oppressors. Spufford's approach is more playful than prescriptive, more akin to that of an expert model engineer. He builds a world and paints the scenery, provides a physical map and useful background information, to the point where the act of creation becomes a story in itself. Cahokia, unavoidably, is a hotbed of racial and cultural tensions. But it primarily serves as an ornate film-noir playground; one that stirs memories of the alternative Alaska that formed the centrepiece of Michael Chabon's The Yiddish Policemen's Union.

Barrow (a headstrong romantic; your classic noir archetype) is fascinated by what he describes as "the city's secret self", suspecting that each neighbourhood hides a secret and every resident wears a mask. The detective, for his part, is as compromised and entangled as anyone else. He's moonlighting as a jazz pianist and toiling to protect a wayward, rackety fellow officer. He's hopelessly in love with a *takouma* princess and unwilling to believe that she might be implicated in the crime. Cahokia Jazz similarly has its hands full, gamely juggling exposition with action, the conjuring of a world with the demands of a machine-tooled murder mystery. Gears grind and wheels spin. Headlamps light the crime scene; pennies drop with a clunk. But the book's route, although jolting, is rich with incident, texture and colour. Think of the genre plot as a tour bus; a handy mode of transportation. Spufford rides it through Cahokia and lovingly points out all the sights.