

The distaste of boys for the school environment becomes more apparent if you look at behaviour and attendance records. Last year, boys were responsible for 79 per cent of expulsions and 72 per cent of suspensions. That's over 250,000 boys who had such severe problems with school that they were thrown out.

This is bad news for everyone involved in trying to raise educational standards. But it seems clear to me that the problem with boys at school is a symptom of a bigger issue: the rapid feminisation of developed societies. There are three main ways in which what one might call traditional male virtues have been downgraded or delegitimised. They are the rising importance of emotions and feeling in modern life, the delegitimisation of risk and competition, and the declining relevance of physical strength.

First, the world of education and, increasingly, of work requires more "soft" interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence than in the past. I do not want to venture too far into the debate about whether female superiority in this area is cultural or "hard-wired," but it is, for now, true that average performance in the "fact" world and the "feeling" world differs markedly between the sexes. Simon Baron-Cohen at the Cambridge Autism Research Centre has even suggested that autism is an "exaggeration" of the normal male brain.

Second, the explosion of the litigation culture and the tyranny of health and safety rules in the education system discourage risk-taking and physical competitiveness, and this bears down more heavily on male forms of behaviour.

Finally, muscle doesn't count for much any more. Changing technology and work patterns mean that men's historical advantage—their physical strength—is increasingly an obsolete currency in the workplace. This is felt with special keenness in parts of the country formerly dominated by heavy industry, where there are a high number of underperforming schools.

These factors comprise the three-way assault on male virtues: feeling over fact, safety over risk and the downgrading of physical strength. There has been reluctance to broach the subject of the difference between males and females for fear of being accused of gender stereotyping. But we are now seeing the tangible results of that inhibition.

It is not by chance that girls are staying on at school more than boys. The

trend towards exam questions that concentrate on subjective interpretations over factual analysis, favours girls. The anti-risk culture is manifest in the introduction of endlessly retakeable modules. The proliferation of coursework tends to favour conscientious girls over boys who prefer the one-off risk of the exam.

If we are going to force children to stay at school until they are 18, we have to think hard about what those extra years will entail, otherwise the difference in achievement between boys and girls will only become more ingrained. Any extra compulsory school years must start to reset the gender imbalance. We need a greater appreciation of analytical skill, more competition and rewards for risk-taking, and more development of sport and practically demanding qualifications.

If our world is becoming more feminised and masculinity is being recast, that's all the more reason to give boys the best start we can. Particularly for anyone who believes in the equality of the sexes,



EUROPE

Marxist populism

BY ANDREW MORAVCSIK

Perry Anderson, Britain's most respected Marxist intellectual, has embraced Eurosceptic populism

The sad saga of European institutional reform continues. Having initially spun the reform treaty as a "constitu-

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tion," many of Europe's leaders have been obliged to re-spin—telling the public that they have fundamentally revised the document, transforming it into a mere treaty amendment. The Eurosceptics are correct to insist that the document remains largely unchanged. But the deeper truth is that the reforms are modest and pragmatic. Euro-spin has piled up so thick over the past six years, however, that no

Anderson's article reveals a lot about what's wrong with leftist thinking about Europe

one believes ministers when they say this. Even smart guys are confused. Take Perry Anderson, one of the most creative of British Marxists in recent decades, who recently tossed a tubful of Euroscepticism out the window of his ivory tower on to the pages of the *London Review of Books*. His critique is aimed at those—among them Mark Leonard, Tony Judt, Jeremy Rifkin, Jürgen Habermas, Marcel Gauchet and myself—who argue that Europe is emerging as a model of world-historical significance. Despite our differences, all of us believe that the old continent strikes the most admirable balance to be found in today's world—superior to the US, Japan, Russia or China—among the three fundamental elements of modern democracy: market economics, social democracy and multilateral institutions.

Anderson's response reveals a bit that's wrong with Europe, but a lot more that's wrong with leftist thinking about Europe. To be sure, he displays some of the virtues of old-fashioned Marxist history—a hard-headed, fact-based focus on material interests. He shows, for example, how the single market, the single currency and even enlargement, while important achievements, are often oversold. He exposes the distributional conflicts that underlie the EU: Europe is about national interests, and the bargaining is tough. Just ask German car workers about Slovak competition, or Poles why their subsidies are smaller than Spaniards'.

Anderson devastatingly dissects naive left-wing geopolitics, notably Habermas's 1968-er scheme to forge a European identity around an anti-American crusade. Leaving aside the obvious lack of pan-European consensus, European governments in fact broadly support US military intervention everywhere, except

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Iraq, and quietly back legally questionable US anti-terrorism policies, sometimes even including "rendition." It is in their interest: Europeans and Americans face the same challenges from terror and rogue states. Divisions over Iraq are not the rule, but exceptions wrought by foolish blunders in Washington.

So far so good. Yet Anderson goes off the rails when he moves from material reality to politics and institutions—from base to superstructure. Like many Europeans, he is haunted by the spectre of Europe's so-called "democratic deficit." He believes that Eurosceptic criticism, the French and Dutch referendum defeats and the current constitutional crisis have all occurred because the European masses are rising up against the "conclaves at Brussels" with their "closed world of chancelleries," "impenetrable scheme for the redistribution of oligarchic power" and "untrammelled... executive discretion," designed to "short-circuit... national legislatures."

Here, Anderson has entered a fact-free zone. His indignation is fueled by naive populism, not analysis. But the claims merit close inspection, if only because so many European leftists—and not a few on the right—talk the same way.

Europeans, Anderson says, are disillusioned with the EU because it is an "arrogant, opaque system" that circumvents national legislatures. This is untrue. Polls show that across the continent, support for the EU is roughly equal to that for national institutions. Anyway, more democracy does not mean more legitimacy: data shows that citizens do not, as a rule, dislike "opaque" courts and bureaucracies, and that they loathe parliaments and elected politicians.

Did the French and Dutch referendums signal a "popular repudiation of Europe"? Hardly. Exit polls and voting studies reveal that few French or Dutch votes were cast with regard to European issues (modest concern about Turkish accession excepted). Despite intense Euro-debates in places like *Le Monde*, the average voter was motivated almost exclusively by national political concerns.

What about the claim that the EU functions with "untrammelled... executive discretion," free of democratic checks? Wrong again. In area after area, EU wonks are pursuing policies they dislike because voters make them do so. Last year, left-wing populists successfully diluted EU services liberalisation. Turkish accession, probably the EU policy that

would contribute most to global peace and security, is stalled in the face of public opposition. Pressure from strong green and farm voting blocs stands behind the EU's opposition to trade in genetically modified organisms. Policies to let in foreign workers desperately needed by European economies is impeded by popular concerns about immigration. The EU responds to such pressures because everyone in the system, except the ever-weakening commission officials, is elected: national ministers, heads of government, Euro-parliamentarians.

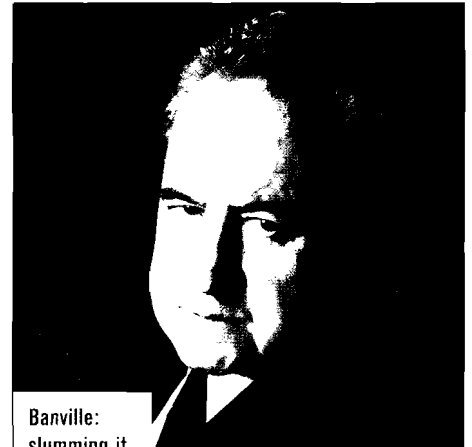
Anderson says that national legislatures "are continually confronted with a mass of (EU) decisions over which they lack any oversight." Incorrect. Any country can mandate its national parliamentary committees to impose real-time oversight. Denmark and Sweden do so. Yet little deliberation results. One parliamentarian recently told me why: his colleagues find EU issues far less compelling than national issues like taxes,

EU wonks are pursuing policies they dislike because voters make them do so

pensions, health, education, social benefits, transport, immigration and environmental enforcement. "They don't like to be woken up at 2am to approve an EU agricultural subsidy."

Citizens feel the same way. They have many opportunities to influence Europe, but choose not to use them. They shun Euro-elections and refuse to debate EU matters in national elections. The issues they care about remain national. The essential truth is that the EU is just too tedious to motivate political action.

Federalists and left-wingers alike hate to admit this. Federalists, who spend lifetimes inside the Brussels beltway, are reminded that Europe is not becoming the superstate of which Jean Monnet dreamed. Left-wingers, who still harbour dreams of spontaneous mass action, are reminded that the working class is not the motive force of history. As Anderson himself ruefully admits, the transcendence of the nation state or, more properly, the limited, pragmatic, essentially nation state-based multilateralism that prevails in Europe today has turned out to be the project of boring bourgeois elites, not the proletarian masses.



Banville:
slumming it

FICTION

The genre divide

BY TOM CHATFIELD

Despite the latest efforts of John Banville, the gulf between genre and literary fiction remains wide

Ever since Edgar Allan Poe laid the foundations of horror and detective fiction in the 1830s—and was soundly reviled for this impertinence in his native land—genre and literary authors have been wary of one another. The history of high literature is also the history of genius; of the Shakespeares and Byrons whose unique talents have bewildered the world. Throughout genre fiction's briefer lifetime, however—from Poe to le Carré via Verne—the contract between audience and author has always been the most important matter. This is what genre signifies: you aim to please *them* at least as much as yourself, and you aim to sell. In a history thick with pulps and penny dreadfuls, no area of fiction has been more thoroughly commercial in its instincts than genre fiction; and when audience is the bottom line, this means sales. The number one slot on the *New York Times's* bestseller list is to a genre writer what the National Book award is to a literary novelist: a badge of ultimate respectability. Literary books sometimes sell well, of course (though not as well as genre works), and praise is sporadically wafted from the ivory towers towards deserving outsiders

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