**Letters to the Editor**

**Stonewall and after**

Sir – In a discussion of “the All Party Parliamentary Writers Group’s ‘inquiry into authors’ earnings’ (NB, June 28) which ‘have fallen by 42 per cent in real terms since 2005’, J.C. notes that “the novelist Joanne Harris, asked to comment on the report … managed to see in the falling level of authors’ incomes ‘warning evidence that the writing profession is set to get less diverse rather than being the place for all kinds of voices that it needs to be’.”

J.C. observes that it is “hard to see what” diversity “has to do” with authors’ earnings. To help: the need for a stable salary may be greater for those with disabilities, and/or those who come from a background of economic insecurity. In both cases, a “portfolio” career may not be viable. Those in caring roles (at the time of writing, predominantly women) often experience additional financial pressures; data gathered from a 2016 Access HE report shows that “a number of financial barriers” prevent BAME students post-A level from pursuing careers in the arts including “the lower post-A level wages levels in many arts fields”.

Having praised diversity for its undoubted “worthiness” but dismissed it as irrelevant, J.C. suggests “the problem [relating to authors’ earnings] is much plainer than any of the well-meaning members of the APPWG are willing to say … writers need to write books that people want to buy and read”. This hearty piece of “plain” speech reflects some important contradictions. What writer? Which writer? What does “need” mean here? Who says who gets to be important? Which writers? Who says who gets to be read. This hearty piece is much plainer than any of the well-meaning members of the APPWG are willing to say … writers need to write books that people want to buy and read”. This hearty piece of “plain” speech reflects some important contradictions. What writer? Which writer? What does “need” mean here? Who says who gets to be important? Which writers? Who says who gets to be read.

Lauritsen objects to the term, finding it unacceptable, vilely offensive, and disrespectful. Equality is one thing – and my generation should be very grateful indeed to Lauritsen for fighting that battle. An odd, spurious, worthless, deviant he seems to me to be.

I don’t know which dictionary Lauritsen is using, but when he claims that the core meanings of queer are “odd, spurious, worthless, deviant” he seems to me to be slipping “worthless” (a secondary meaning, the first of many others) in among the other three terms. Personally, I have no issue with the idea of banding together with the odd, the spurious and the deviant. They appeal to me far more than the purely conventional. And if the idea of “worth” is coming with puritan overtones, then I am all for the worthlessness, too. Again, it is a matter of personal judgement.

What I find offensive in Lauritsen’s letter is his presumption that he speaks for “most gay men” and refers to gay people as one big “us”. “Sexual preference does not make us a community,” Jarman noted in his diary, “it’s the assimilationists who are the enemy.” Lauritsen has every right to be appalled by the word “queer” and by the sight of it in the TLS. I have every right to think differently. Speak out, of course – but speak for yourself.

HAL JENSEN
London W1

Sir – I’m sorry if my word choice hurt John Lauritsen. I am happy, should we ever have a personal conversation, never to use the “Q” word. No one word matters more to me than having an honest conversation, where both people can participate fully, without being re-traumatized by semantics. I’ll avoid repeating that word here, in the interest of this discussion. But all of us LGBT+ folks carry wounds: from words, from actions, from things said or left unsaid. Growing up, the insult I was most likely to hear was “gay” – as in “that’s so gay”. Does that mean “gay” should now be banned as well? Where does this language policing end?

Furthermore, why should “gay” – a word most commonly associated with men – get to be the universal term for our community? The Gay Liberation Front was an incredible organization, and we are all indebted to Lauritsen and his comrades. My life is immeasurably better thanks to the work of the GLF. But this kind of not so subtle sexism was one of the areas in which GLF stumbled, and it tears up again in his letter. I’m not just writing for, to, or about “gay males”. Lauritsen should make the language choices that work for him, but to impose those choices on others seems to me the opposite of liberation.

Personally, I find intent more important than word choice. Language moves quickly, particularly the language of slights and slang and subcultures – the nooks and crannies the language of slights and slang and subcultures – the nooks and crannies where LGBT+ culture has for so long lived and thrived. Trying to nail it down to one particular moment in the 1970s is like standing in a river, yelling at it to stop.

HUGH RYAN
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**Wool in Greece**

Sir – In her short review of Mireille Duchêne’s edition of Virginia Woolf: An unpublished notebook (In Brief, July 12), Vanessa Curtis writes that Woolf “travelled to Crete near the end of her life and found it a comfort, at one point even considering running the Hogarth Press there”.

Throughout her second and last visit to Greece in April–May 1932, in the company of Leonard Woolf, Roger Fry, and Roger’s sister Marjory Fry, Woolf was unusually happy, and on May 8, the evening before she and Leonard began their journey home from Athens, fantasized in her diary about their return to Greece each summer, bringing a tent and “existing on bread yaot, butter, eggs, say in Crete”. On the journey home from Athens, fantasized in her diary about their return to Greece each summer, bringing a tent and “existing on bread yaot, butter, eggs, say in Crete”. On the journey home from Athens, fantasized in her diary about their return to Greece each summer, bringing a tent and “existing on bread yaot, butter, eggs, say in Crete”.

Haggard’s She, which perhaps is what either Maizten or Howell was thinking of.

DIANE DARROW
Manhattan, New York.

**Malaria in Haggard**

Sir – In her review of Jessica Howell’s Malaria and Victorian Fictions of Empire (In Brief, June 21), Rohan Maizten invites the inference that H. Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines involves a character battling malaria. The disease does not figure in that narrative. It does feature prominently in Haggard’s She, which perhaps is what either Maizten or Howell was thinking of.

SOPHIE RATCLIFFE
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

**At the National Book Awards**

Sir – The caption to the photograph accompanying Claire Lowdon’s interesting review of the Library of America’s edition of John Updike’s first four novels (July 5) is incorrectly dated. The National Book Award ceremony – at which his novel The Centaur claimed the fiction award – was held in the New York Hilton on March 10, 1964, not 1966. An aside: addressing the audience in the image is Aileen Ward (1919–2016), her John Keats: The making of a poet having received the prize for biography.

KENNETH BOTSFORD
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**Model soldiers**

Sir – As a member of the British Model Soldier Society I believe that something was missing from the review by Leslie Jamison of Simon Garfield’s book In Miniature (July 12). There was no mention of toy soldiers.

H.G. Wells ended Little Wars, his seminal work on fighting battles with toy soldiers, with “A Sort of Challenge”. “How much better is this amiable miniature than the Real Thing.”

GAVIN MUSGRAVE
Cavalry and Guards Club, Piccadilly, London W1.

**Iris Murdoch**

Sir – With regard to why Iris Murdock matters (July 12), the proprietor of the tiny supermarket in Steeple Aston, the village where she was living in the mid-80s, had his own view. Entering the shop one Saturday morning to find her the only other customer, I took what I needed and went to the checkout, by which time she had left. “Do you know who that was?” asked the man, with beaming pride, “was Mrs. Bayley!”

PAUL GRIFFITHS
Manorbier, Wales.