

Out of Hours Books

DOES THE FUTURE HAVE AN NHS?

**NHS SOS: How The NHS Was Betrayed —
And How We Can Save It**

Jacky Davis and Raymond Tallis
Oneworld Publications, 2013
PB, 288pp, £8.99, 978-1780743288

The thesis of this book is simple. It states:

'When the NHS was founded in 1948 it represented a historic, qualitative leap forward over any previous system, superseding the crisis ridden 'mixed economy' of health care which [was] unable to meet demand. Today, it is being replaced by a new 'mixed economy' of health care, a change that the public has never called for or supported, and a system that will cost more but be less efficient and deliver less care. Driven not by evidence but by ideology, the Tories have reinvented the flat tyre.' [p 19–20]

As a GP and thus a connoisseur of the follies of mankind in general I tend to be drawn more to cock-up theories than conspiracy theories. As I have learned more about the Health and Social Care Act and its surrounding regulations (the Act for short) over the past couple of years I have nonetheless been drawn to the conclusion that the likely effects of these 'reforms' will be to degrade the social solidarity promoted by the NHS, and that they are ideologically driven. Why else would the politicians fight so hard to block reasonable amendments suggested to mitigate obvious risks? The Act's omission of the normal preliminary clause that obliges the Secretary of State for Health to ensure the provision of a comprehensive health service is a bit of a giveaway. This

obligation was there in every previous Health Service Act. There can only be one possible interpretation to the government's dogged determination first to leave it out and then to water it down to the point of futility.

This book seeks to answer some vital questions. Will the Act in some sense privatise the profitable parts of the NHS leaving behind a chaotic rump service for the disadvantaged? If so, was this the intention? Why have the media not properly reported such threats? And why (with the very honourable exception of Clare Gerada and a few others) haven't our own medical leaders opposed these dangers more effectively?

This book gives a detailed narrative account of how these issues have unfolded. The book is onesided in the same sense that when I seek to protect my family from harm I am onesided. It is right that this stance should be examined, but the real question is whether the book is right. If it is then we are witnessing a shift away from the post-war liberal consensus that will downgrade the support our society gives to the vulnerable and sick. It threatens a major worsening of health inequalities. And it appears to be completely without democratic mandate. The Act did not appear in any party manifesto before the election and it cannot claim popular support by the UK population or by the healthcare professions.

This book has a Marmite factor. I confess I am not a socialist, at least not with a capital S. This book too often assumes that the reader will be cheering it on from a socialist ticket. This irritated me; socialism is not the only vision for a healthy and caring society. If you are a socialist you will love every inch of this book. But if not then please get over

your initial irritation and read it anyway. It is as broad and detailed an exploration of the current NHS 'reforms' as you will find. And many of us will share the authors' passionate concern for what happens next.

Despite my occasional irritation at its tone I found the narrative of this book to be overwhelmingly credible and its arguments valid. If you have any interest in the future of the NHS or the future of UK medicine then buy it and read it. Its thesis — the degradation of social solidarity by conspiracy not accident — deserves scrutiny.

The book's strap line is 'how the NHS was betrayed — and how we can save it.' It claims that the battle is not yet lost. It ends with a plan of action. Whatever your political views, if you care about the NHS then consider whether its core thesis rings true, and if so, what you should do about it.

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WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU MR BOYD

Solo: A James Bond Novel

William Boyd

Jonathan Cape, 2013, £18.99
HB, 336pp, £18.99, 978-0224097475

Halfway through William Boyd's re-creation of James Bond, set in Africa in 1969, with Bond aged 45, I had a number of questions.



Out of Hours

Art

Where is the super-villain, bent on world domination? What happened to the beautiful Blessing? And how on earth, in the middle of a war-torn African republic, did Bond flag down a taxi on page 163? Clearly, I am not going to answer these questions, but I'm able to give you one or two facts which should not diminish your pleasure in reading this well-written and enjoyable story, in which Bond comes across as more literary and reflective than we might have expected.

Like the *BJGP*, the Bond novels are 60 this year: Ian Fleming published *Casino Royale* in 1953. He wrote another thirteen Bond books, and twice as many more have been produced by other authors, including Kingsley Amis and Sebastian Faulks. William Boyd has been described as an Ian Fleming geek, and included him in his novel *Any Human Heart*. He counts among his friends three actors who have played Bond and have also acted in films that he has written — Sean Connery, Pierce Brosnan, and Daniel Craig.

Solo is no Fleming pastiche — it is all Boyd, cleverly plotted and elegantly written, at ease with Bond and comfortable in Africa, where he spent some of his childhood. His idiosyncratic choice of the Jensen Interceptor for Bond's wheels may raise eyebrows — the Bentley was being mended. Bond, of course, gets the girl, two of them in fact, knocks back heroic quantities of alcohol and smokes like a chimney. Boyd introduces us to two appealing formulae for Martinis, and to Bond's very own salad dressing.

In the first half of the story Bond is sent by M, and minimally equipped by Q, to Zanzarim, a small and potentially extremely oil-rich West African state in the grip of civil war, and where things do not go entirely smoothly. In the second half the action moves to Washington DC, where a more complex web of domestic and geopolitical intrigue begins to emerge, and where Felix Leiter makes a welcome appearance. The hokum is never on the scale at which Fleming's more deranged villains have operated, so come on Mr. Boyd! We medics have coped with Andrew Lansley and Jeremy Hunt; let's have another one when you write your next Bond book.

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JACK VETTRIANO — THE MARMITE OF THE ART WORLD?

Jack Vettriano: A Retrospective

*Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum,
Glasgow*

21 September 2013–23 February 2014

As a young man, Jack Hoggan (as he was then) would fabricate excuses for leaving work to visit Kelvingrove and be inspired by great art like Dalí's *Christ of St John of the Cross*, and works by the Impressionists and the Glasgow Boys. It is fitting that this major exhibition of his work, the first in Scotland outside of his native Fife, should bring him back to Kelvingrove some 30 years later.

Much has been said and written about Jack Vettriano OBE, one of only a handful of contemporary artists whose work is known worldwide: his working class background, leaving school at 16, teaching himself to paint using materials gifted from his grandfather (whose surname he later adopted) and from a girlfriend when he was 21, his rejection by Edinburgh College of Art, and then his meteoric rise to become one of the very few millionaire artists in the world, much to the disgust of the Scottish Art Establishment. Dubbed 'The People's Painter', Vettriano is both loved (by his many fans) and loathed (by his fiercest critics).

This thoughtfully presented exhibition, which includes 101 paintings spanning over 20 years, allows us (for just £5) to make our

own assessment of his work — from well-known paintings such as *Mad Dogs*, *The Singing Butler*, and *The Billy Boys* (inspired by a scene from Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*) to erotic works such as *Game On*, *Fetish* and *Night Geometry*. But be warned, as the writer AL Kennedy cautions in her foreword to the exhibition catalogue:

'Be careful when you look at a Vettriano — you will see what you want to see. The pictures will tell you as much about yourself as they do about the artist and his figures.'

As well as its characteristic style (1930s and 1940s scenes featuring glamorous brunettes in red dresses, set against beaches, bars, and bedrooms), the hallmark of Vettriano's work is its engaging narrative quality, often described as 'cinematic'. In his own words, the exhibition features a number of video interviews with Vettriano and quotes appear on the walls throughout:

'With Martin Scorcese you get a movie, with me you get one image, and you build the movie around that, any which way you choose.'

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The Billy Boys, © Jack Vettriano 1994, www.jackvettriano.com.

