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THIS WEEK

Afghan leaders are making a fool of those who want to be their friends. As Alex de Waal describes this week, there is nothing abnormal, or even irrational, in their choosing a process of government that shares among themselves the financial fruits of foreigners' fears. He cites the former UN economist Graciana del Castillo: "in Afghanistan most political figures saw the state as a redistributive instrument, funded by foreign donors, to build power through patronage networks". Not only does this approach come with the blessing of tradition, de Waal argues, it remains "well suited to those borderlands of the global system where local resources are too scarce to sustain a state based on a domestic tax base". Fortunately for foreigners still ambitious to rebuild war-torn states, the prospects for El Salvador, Kosovo and Iraq are judged much better.

British failures in Afghanistan have long provided ammunition for critics of British policy elsewhere. Gerald MacLean considers the special brand of Orientalism that has flourished in Ireland, reviewing Joseph Lennon's book which links Cork to Kandahar as sites of imperial oppression. Eighteenth-century Irish satire shifted over the following 200 years to embrace Eastern arguments for religious tolerance, also the opportunity to go abroad as colonial administrators, ruling others as some small compensation for being ruled by others at home.



Hugo von Hofmannsthal was a literary prodigy whom even his sharpest Viennese critics considered a great writer. He was an aesthete and collector of fine porcelain who, according to Paul Reitter, saw his lyricism as strangely related to the reality of the stock-market crash of 1873. He was also a Jewish writer who promoted the peasant culture of the *Volk* in order to alter his public image.

Elizabeth I discouraged the veneration of saints in her domain but in manuscript verses of the seventeenth century is herself revered as Saint Elizabeth. The reasons are explained alongside critiques of other unprinted poems of uncourtly love among the early moderns.

PS

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