

**Bijlage VWO**  
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tijdvak 1

**Engels**

Tekstboekje

**Independent Home | News | Sport | Argument |  
Education | Motoring | Money | Jobs | Travel |  
Enjoyment**

**Home > Argument > Letters**

Sir: May I contribute to the debate engendered by the antics of Fathers4Justice, from the position of one who has dealt with some hundreds of contact disputes?

A small number of fathers do have a legitimate grievance, but it is not the one stated or implied in the propaganda stunts they seek to mount. Disputes over contact with children are governed by the Children Act - an excellent piece of legislation requiring no amendment on this topic. Under the Act the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. Neither Fathers4Justice nor some politicians who appear to sympathise with them appear to argue from this starting point.

When a court limits or refuses contact to the parent who does not have the day-to-day care of the child, it does so because it considers such a course to be in the child's best interests. In any event, only a tiny proportion of divorces involve a dispute over contact with children. Where there is a disagreement, at least half are settled without a contested court hearing, thanks usually to the efforts of the Probation Service. Where a court order has to be made - perhaps in 1-2 per cent of divorces - the parties generally abide by it.

But, there is a residual problem where the order is flouted. And in these cases, fathers do have a real grievance, because the courts are scandalously faint-hearted. Men are sent to prison for not paying maintenance, and mothers for not sending their children to school, but equal sternness for mothers who refuse to obey or simply sabotage contact orders is almost wholly lacking, bringing the law into disrepute and tempting the aggrieved into disruptive action. If Fathers4Justice were to concentrate, in a reasoned and reasonable manner, upon this failing in our domestic legal system, they would deserve to command sympathy.

R J HOLLOWAY  
Penrith, Cumbria

*[www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)*

# Fine mess

Self-contradiction is the hallmark of the Government's policy on sex offenders. On Tuesday, the Department of Health announced a new Bill on Mental Incapacity. Its most striking provision is the pre-emptive detention of people who have not been convicted of a crime, but are thought to have a disposition to violence or sexual assault.

On Thursday, the Home Office announced plans to build five more "rehabilitation hostels" for serious sex offenders, who would be free to come and go as they pleased. While the Department of Health was proposing to lock up people who haven't committed any crimes, the Home Office was planning to leave more of those who have "in the community".

Does one hand of government know what the other is doing? The health department's plans to lock up sexual psychopaths such as Roy Whiting, the killer of Sarah Payne, before they rape and murder children are comprehensively undermined by the Home Office's insistence that those convicted of sexual offences should be free to live with the rest of us. Labour used to promise consistent policies. What it has delivered is not "joined up" government but broken down government.

*[www.opinion.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.opinion.telegraph.co.uk)*

*De volgende tekst is het begin van Climbing Olympus, een science-fictionroman van Kevin J. Anderson*

### RACHEL DYCEK

UNDER A SALMON SKY, the rover vehicle crawled over the rise, looking down into the cracked canyons of Mars. Without a pause, the rover descended a tortuous path into the gorge, feeling its way with a thousand sea-urchin footpads.

The site of the old disaster lay like a broken scab: fallen rock, eroded fissures, and utter silence.

Alone in the vehicle, Commissioner Rachel Dycek held a cold breath as she looked through the windowport at the debris crumbled at the bottom of the toppled cliffside. The avalanche had been enormous, wiping out all thirty-one of the *dva* workers who had been tunneling into the canyon network of Noctis Labyrinthus, the “Labyrinth of Night.”

Around Rachel, the wreckage still appeared fresh and jagged. Even after a full Earth year, the pain burned inside her. Another loss, the largest link in a long chain of disappointments, against which she had kept her face of stone. Russians were good at enduring, but inside she felt as fragile as stained glass.

The weathered rock walls of Noctis Labyrinthus formed barriers of reddish oxides, gray silicates, and black lava debris – all sliced a kilometer deep by ancient rivers. For millions of years, the entire planet had barely changed. But now, after six decades of terraforming activities had bombarded the planet with comets and seeded its atmosphere with innumerable strains of algae and free-floating plankton, Mars looked raw. The terraforming had awakened the planet like a slap in the face – and occasionally Mars lashed back, as it had with the avalanche.

The rover’s engines hummed, and the telescoping sea-urchin feet underneath made popcorn-popping sounds as the pressurized vehicle scrambled effortlessly over the rough terrain. Letting the Artificial Intelligence navigator pick its best path, Rachel brought the rover *Percival* to a halt next to a stack of granite boulders. Back at Lowell Base, operations manager Bruce Vickery had reserved *Percival* for later in the day to check his remotely placed instruments, but Rachel had traveled only a hundred kilometers. She had hours yet before she needed to worry about getting back.

Alone in this desolate spot, Rachel felt as if she were entering a haunted house. She listened to the intense, peaceful emptiness. Then she began working her way into the protective environment suit. The slick fabric was cold. The chill never went away on Mars – but it slithered up her legs, hugged her waist and shoulders, and clung to the damp sweat of her hands as she worked her fingers into the tough gloves. It took her fifteen minutes, but Rachel was accustomed to suiting up by herself; she didn’t like the interference of too many hands.

Technically, she was not supposed to be out in the rover by herself, but Rachel was still commissioner of Lowell Base – for the moment, anyway – and she could bend the rules. She had logged her intentions on the vehicle assignment terminal as “historical research”. Duration of outside activity: half a sol (which was the correct term for a Martian day, though the fifty human colonists at the base simply called them “days”). And she had set out across the sprawling wilderness by herself, leaving Lowell Base behind.

### Parents and children

## Family values

- 1 WHY was King Lear treated so cruelly by his daughters? Until recently, most of the answers have come from scholars with scant knowledge of economic theory. Fortunately, John Ermisch, an Essex economist, is working to remedy this deficiency. His research proves what many parents have long suspected – that increased wealth goes along with filial ingratitude.
- 2 Using data from the British Household Panel Survey, Mr Ermisch shows that affluent parents are slightly more likely to supply offspring with money and help with child-rearing than poor parents. But success seems to have precisely the opposite effect on children. The mere possession of a university degree makes children 20% less likely to phone their mothers regularly, and more than 50% less likely to pay them a visit.
- 3 This is puzzling because self-interested children might be expected to behave in precisely the opposite way. Most wealthy people are descended from wealthy parents, which means they have a lot of patrimony to lose by cutting back on the fawning. “Nothing will come of nothing,” as a pre-retirement and still sane King Lear put it when his youngest daughter dared to withhold her affections.
- 4 So why are rich kids such brats? There are two likely explanations. The first is that, as their income rises, the marginal cost of providing services goes up. It simply isn’t worth their while to help with the shopping, particularly



### You never call

- since affluence tends to increase distances between parents and children. And, since personal contact correlates with telephone contact, they are less likely to phone, too. Out of sight, out of mind.
- 5 The other answer comes from an obscure branch of economics known as strategic bequest theory. This predicts that children will provide only enough services to ensure they get a reasonable share of their parents’ estate. But that point is reached sooner by those who have only one sibling rival, or none at all. Wealthier families, which tend to be smaller, simply fail to ensure the optimum amount of competition.
  - 6 Given these iron laws, what are parents supposed to do? Good results might be achieved by having more children, or expressing a sudden interest in the local cats’ home. But Mr Ermisch is not optimistic. “The only thing they can do is follow their children around,” he says. And don’t make King Lear’s mistake by handing over the cash first.

*The Economist*



Books

# Surviving history

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## The Hidden Life Of Otto Frank

by Carol Ann Lee

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Reviewed by Walter Reich

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Otto Frank with his daughters Margot, left, and Anne

- 1 In *The Hidden Life Of Otto Frank*, the first biography of Anne Frank's father, Carol Ann Lee offers us a scoop: the name of the man who, she says, told the Germans where the Frank family was hiding during the Holocaust. But buried behind the scoop is an account of how Otto shaped and in some ways distorted Anne's story and her public image after her diary was found.
- 2 First the scoop. Who betrayed the Frank family? Based on archival research and interviews, Lee has

fingered Anton Ahlers, a thuggish Dutch Nazi and violent anti-semitic, and said that he probably did it for the reward the Germans were giving to those who turned in Jews.

- 3 In the course of writing about Ahlers, Lee also tells us about his relationship with Otto. It turns out, according to Lee, that Ahlers, a chronic blackmailer, victimized Otto repeatedly. One of these occasions was in 1941, after the Germans occupied the Netherlands but before the Franks went into hiding. He showed Otto a letter to Dutch Nazi Party officials in which one of Otto's former employees denounced him for having made unflattering remarks about the German military and asking that "the Jew Frank" be arrested; Otto paid Ahlers off and took the letter.
- 4 Otto paid Ahlers off again, though not with money, in 1945, after returning from Auschwitz. By that time the Dutch were arresting collaborators, and Ahlers was picked up. Otto wrote to the authorities, telling them that Ahlers had helped him by giving him the denunciatory letter but not mentioning that he had paid Ahlers for it.
- 5 Why did Otto do this? Because of another hidden part of his life, Lee suggests. She contends that he was afraid that Ahlers would divulge to the Dutch authorities that he had done business with the Germans before going into hiding.
- 6 Otto's firm produced pectin, used in making jam, and he apparently sold some of it to the Germans. More than



80 percent of Dutch firms did business with the Germans, and selling pectin was neither important to the German war effort nor significant business. Still, it was business, and Lee argues that Otto felt vulnerable on that account after the war. The letters Otto sent to the authorities for Ahlers, Lee writes, “would ensure that Ahlers” – who knew of the pectin sales to the Germans – “kept his silence.”

7 But the most protracted period of payoffs, Lee suggests, took place in the 1960s, after Otto had become a public figure as a result of Anne’s diary. However, a more important dimension to Otto’s life, and one that had a direct bearing on Anne’s diary, was the way in which he edited it and shaped its career. Lee shows how decisions that Otto made about editing the diary, finding a publisher, arranging for foreign translations, and having it turned into a play and a movie, determined how Anne’s story would be told. Otto’s sense of himself as an assimilated Jew likely affected these decisions, as did his sense of what should be said by and about Anne.

8 In editing the diary Otto removed some of Anne’s critical comments about her mother and some of her references to her own sexuality. He also diminished, somewhat, her focus on her Jewishness. But it was in his choice of writers for the stage adaptation that he most significantly distanced Anne from her Jewish roots and leached from her story the dark themes that, in the diary, were plainly a part of it.

9 He chose Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, Hollywood screenwriters whose credits included *It’s A Wonderful Life*. Not surprisingly, they crafted a sentimental and upbeat

play. And the play’s director, Garson Kanin, wanted Anne’s focus on Jewish suffering to be translated into human suffering in general. Lee notes that, under Kanin’s direction, “almost all references to Jews and Jewish suffering were erased.”

10 With regard to maximizing the audience for Anne’s story and making it universally embraceable, at least in those early years after the Holocaust, Otto’s instincts may have been right. The diary has reportedly sold more than 31m copies in 67 languages. The annual number of visitors to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam is approaching a million.

11 But is audience all? Anne had to go into hiding only because she was a Jew. She was betrayed only because she was a Jew. She was sent to her death only because she was a Jew. To soft-pedal her Jewishness is to deny the reality of her fate.

12 Moreover, after arrest, Anne’s life wasn’t uplifting or inspiring at all. A witness who saw Anne and her sister, Margot, in Bergen-Belsen described them as “two scrawny threadbare figures” who “looked like little birds”. They contracted typhus and died soon after.

13 Otto may have been right that, in his time, the world preferred an uplifting and a universal Anne. Clearly, as we can see in Lee’s biography, he had those preferences himself. One hopes, though, that in the decades since Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz, during which we have witnessed repeated genocides, we can stare such horror in the eyes and recognize its face without the need to universalize the victim or transform the horror into consolation and kitsch.

*The Washington Post*

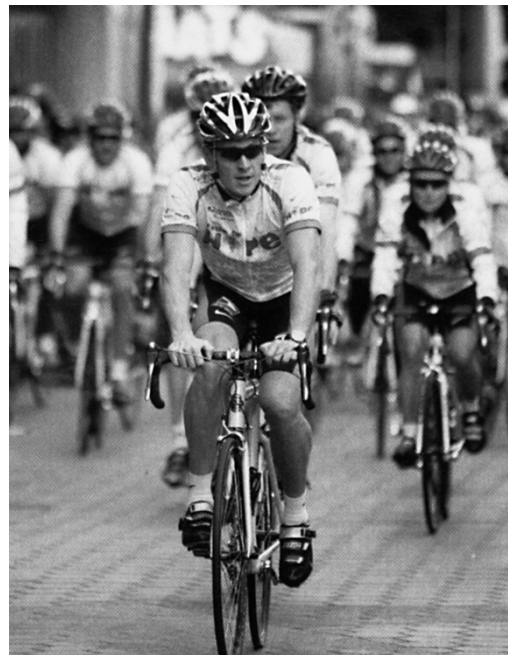
# CELEBRITY PITCH

1 **U**NLESS YOU SUFFER from peripheral neuropathy, chances are you've never heard of it. PN is a condition in which damaged nerves cause debilitating pain and numbness in the extremities. It affects as many as 20 million people in the United States alone, including nearly 10 percent of all Medicare patients. So why don't we hear more about it? What does a condition like ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) have that PN doesn't? Well, Lou Gehrig, for one thing. Stephen Hawking, for another. When Ben Stiller hosts a gala for Project ALS, people like George Clooney, Matthew Broderick and Sarah Jessica Parker show up. The Neuropathy Association has yet to snag even a soap-opera star. "Johnny Cash, who suffered from it, actually said he would do a spot for us once he got better," says Dr. Norman Latov, the association's medical director. "But he died."

2 For better or worse, star power is transforming health and medicine. Movie actors now dominate congressional hearings on research policy, and drug companies compete to link famous names to lucrative afflictions. Bob Dole has been trotted out to discuss his erectile difficulties; Debbie Reynolds, her urinary incontinence; American football icon Terry Bradshaw, his struggle with depression; Lance Armstrong, his triumph over testicular cancer. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Celebrities can raise awareness, shatter stigmas and promote healthy behavior.

But when their confessions are prompted by seven-figure contracts and orchestrated by corporate marketers, some scepticism is indicated. In certain cases, says University of Pennsylvania bioethicist Arthur Caplan, the celebrity pitch is "just a fancy form of prostitution."

3 No one would have said that a decade ago. Drug companies didn't need sitcom stars back in 1991, says Dr. Leon Rosenberg, a former chief scientific officer for Bristol-Myers Squibb. "If you got a drug approved, you depended on physicians to improve sales and market share." But physicians no longer hold all the cards. With the rise of health activism in the 1990s, and the growth of the Internet, patients gained far more say in their own treatment. They're now consumers of care, not passive



**CHARITY RIDE?** Armstrong on his lucrative 'Tour of Hope'

recipients – and the medical industry has strong incentives to reach out to them. That’s why celebrity testimonials “have become a big business,” says Barry Greenberg of Celebrity Connection, a Los Angeles celebrity brokerage that matches stars with sponsors according to their medical conditions. “I wouldn’t want to be the pharmaceutical guy who stands up at a meeting and says, ‘You know what? The companies to the left and the right of us are all using celebrities, but I think we’ll pass’.”

4 Unlike ads for cars or dog food, celebrity drug promotions are presented as awareness campaigns. “Talk to your doctor,” goes the refrain. “This condition is treatable.” The pitchman may stick to that message (enough said if there’s only one treatment), but the sponsor often gets a special nod. “My treatment included three drugs made by Bristol-Myers Squibb, the world’s leader in cancer research and development,” Lance Armstrong says in publicity material for his recent “Tour of Hope.” The tour was billed as an effort to “inspire and inform the public about the importance of participating in cancer

research.” It also netted Armstrong more than \$2 million from Bristol-Myers Squibb, according to news reports. (Neither the company nor Armstrong’s agent would discuss his fee when we approached them about this.)

5 Stars like Christopher Reeve and Michael J. Fox have won praise for educating policymakers about particular afflictions. But when funds are finite, a campaign that boosts support for one disease reduces it for another. Suppose Julia Roberts persuades Congress to fund more research on Rett syndrome (a rare condition she spoke out for in 2002). “Certainly there’s research to be done,” says Dr. Gilbert Ross of the American Council on Science and Health. “But is the money going to be diverted from tobacco education? Is it going to be diverted from diabetes research?” If so, the net effect on public health would probably be negative. As medicine sheds its paternalism, celebrities may gain even greater stature as health advisers. For the rest of us, the challenge is not to take them too seriously.

Geoffrey Cowley and  
Karen Springen in *Newsweek*

JAMES LAMONT

## A battered faith in the new South Africa

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### BEYOND THE MIRACLE

**By Allister Sparks**

Profile Books, £12.99,  
published August 28, 2003

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**E**ven now, nearly 10 years after the end of apartheid, Allister Sparks still feels twinges of disbelief when he sits in the press gallery of South Africa's parliament in Cape Town.

Earlier in his career as a journalist on the Rand Daily Mail, he listened in the same gallery to Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, defending 24. "It sounded so plausible in that isolated, all-white chamber, cut off like an ocean liner from the pulsating polyglot reality of the society outside," Mr Sparks recalls.

Today, Mr Sparks peers down on a diverse throng of parliamentarians, rubbing shoulders good-humouredly. Racial division has given way to an open, tolerant society. A closed economy, rooted in mining and agriculture, has opened its borders and is hungry for foreign investment.

Can the change from white minority rule to multiracial democracy have 25, the veteran journalist asks himself. And is it as good as it looks?

Mr Sparks's latest book, *Beyond the Miracle*, is among the first of what will be many appraisals of South Africa in the coming months, marking 10 years since the end of apartheid. In April next year, a decade will have passed since Nelson Mandela took power in

the country's first fully democratic elections. It is a passage of time that many consider sufficient to gauge to what extent he and his African National Congress government have 26 the inequalities of apartheid.

Journalistic scorecards will come out. But South Africans themselves will be able to pass judgment on the ANC's performance at the ballot box. Parliamentary elections are expected in the first half of the year.

Mr Sparks's own comprehensive and readable assessment of the new South Africa is generous. He reminds us that South Africa's miracle transition achieved the 27 that other parts of the world still find so elusive. Its people stood at the brink of civil war and stepped back.

His book, the third in a trilogy, begins with Mr Mandela's swearing-in as president and ends with the prevailing debates about how to tackle the HIV/Aids pandemic, narrow the wealth gap and deal with Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe.

On the way, he takes in many of the 28 the post-apartheid era. He explains how the government transformed its economic policy, ditching nationalisation for a liberal economy with privatisation at its core. He recounts episodes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where victims' families confronted their torturers. And he draws sympathetic portraits of two very different leaders: Mr Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, his successor.

Mr Sparks writes as 29. He admits to Mr Mbeki drinking him under the table in Lusaka; he arranges meetings to break the logjam between Afrikaners and the liberation movement; and he shares car rides with community leaders before they are assassinated by hit squads.

The book captures both the 30 of liberators who found – once in government – how impoverished South Africa had become in the last days of apartheid, and the pragmatic spirit with which they have set about taking the country forward.

“There was a feeling that if you dealt with apartheid a lot of other things would automatically fall into place, but that has not been the case. It is much harder than we expected,” Gill Marcus, deputy governor of the Reserve Bank, tells the author.

Some of the book’s most striking chapters illuminate that 31. Mr Sparks’s own efforts to reinvigorate the news operation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation – formerly an apartheid propaganda organ – show some of the shortcomings of

transformation. The SABC’s new management is dogged by indecision and in-fighting. The same tensions are to be found in many South African businesses.

Mr Sparks’s visits over the years to a once all-white suburb adjoining a squatter camp on the outskirts of Johannesburg 32. White people build a wall to keep the blacks out. The wall fails to do so. Black people move in. White people leave the neighbourhood. But some stay behind. People, irrespective of colour, lose their jobs. Overall, the cameos convey a battered optimism.

*Beyond the Miracle* sums up the challenge that the ANC faces as it approaches its third election with an analogy of a double decker bus. The top deck – the middle class – is increasingly multiracial and getting along just fine. Downstairs is filled to bursting with black people for whom little has changed. But there is no stairway that joins the two.

*The reviewer is the FT’s former South Africa correspondent*

*Financial Times*

# Sign here to book your money-back guarantee

By Jim White

(1) It is called in the trade, as Andrew Marr revealed on these pages last week, “spoilt”. Once autographed by its author, a copy of a new book cannot be remaindered; it might sit for months on the shelves untouched by paying customers, but it still counts as sold.

5 (2) This is useful information for budding writers, which I was first tipped off about by the gangster Frankie Fraser. Frankie was at the launch party of a book I’d written (I’m not sure why he was there, but nobody on the door was going to stop this gatecrasher). He took me by the elbow and whispered conspiratorially: “Let me give you a word of advice, son, author to author: whenever you pass a bookshop, go in and sign copies of your book. That way, even if you never sell a bean, the bastards have still got to pay you.”

10 (3) I thought of this when I heard a caller to BBC Radio 5 last week ringing in to say that he had just gone out and bought 15 signed copies of a new hardback the day it arrived in his bookshop. Not to read them; no, these were to remain pristine in his attic. They were, he said, investments.

15 (4) The book that the caller reckoned was worth this extravagant punt is called *Wolf Brother* by Michelle Paver. This is not an author who is likely to trouble judges of the Booker Prize. Nor will her work feature in the literary pages of the Sunday newspapers. The only context in which most of us will have heard of her before is when her name is appended to the words “record advance”.

20 (5) An unprecedented £2.8 million she received from Orion to snaffle up the rights to a five-book series called *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, a sum so vast it is usually associated in publishing terms only with the ghosted life stories of Premiership footballers. *Wolf Brother* is the first instalment in pay-back time.

25 (6) You will find *Wolf Brother* in the children’s section, but its intended audience is much wider. As its rather sophisticated dust jacket suggests, this is the sort of book that could discreetly be read on the train by adults on their way to work. On the inside cover is a hand-drawn map of the journey undertaken by Torak, the youthful hero, a boy growing up in the world of prehistory, as he makes his way across the Deep Forest and the Ice River past the Mountain of the World Spirit.

30 (7) But the territory that the book is aiming to traverse is more familiar: turn left at Tolkien Peaks, walk for several days across the Pullman Plains, cross the Rowling Foothills and there you will find the Money Well, with its inexhaustible torrents of cash.

35 (8) Not much seems to enrage the traditionalist critic more than the concept of the “kidult” book. Why should adults be reading the wearisome adventures of Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, the pompous sword and sorcery of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* or the GCSE philosophising of Philip Pullman, when they could be engaging with Dickens,

Trollope or Austen? Or even Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, modern fiction-spinners who at least deal with the world of grown-ups? Though in Amis's case perhaps grown-up is pushing it.

40 Publishers, on the other hand, love the concept of the kidult book. This is sales terrain without discernible boundaries, where young and old club together, encourage each other, producing a market in which there is no age limit. And personally I have nothing against J K Rowling. For me, anyone who makes reading a competitive sport among 10-year-olds deserves canonisation. No matter how derivative and turgid their prose.

45 **(9)** The triumph of Philip Pullman and J K Rowling, though, is that they found their own market against all precedent. In order to play catch-up, to seize some of the ground opened up by those pioneers, publishers are obliged to join the race at a much pricier entry point.

50 **(10)** The cost began, in the case of Michelle Paver, with the advance. That in itself became a story. Then with the money came the mystique: we were told that, like J K, she had her tales mapped out in her head years ago; she had known for two decades what would appear on her final page. The hype was all in place before a book hit the stores, so much so that optimists were punting on first editions becoming collectors' items.

55 **(11)** But the real gamblers here are the publishers, who are playing with stakes entirely provided by other authors. If this book fails, there will be no money for future projects. If it succeeds - and it is, to be fair, a rollicking, easy read - it will only reinforce the growing habit of putting resources solely behind those whose work fits into pre-conceived marketing boxes.

60 **(12)** It is too early to tell which direction *Wolf Brother* will go. But when I went into my bookshop to pick up a copy, the pile of unsold items was sky high.

**(13)** What's more, every single one of them was signed by the author.

*www.opinion.telegraph.co.uk*

*Lees bij de volgende teksten steeds eerst de vraag voordat je de tekst zelf raadpleegt.*

## Tekst 9

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Letter to the editor

### **Insulted**

David Hargreaves astutely describes the anxiety of students awaiting their A-level results. As one such 18-year-old, I have been in a state of nervous anticipation; not for my results, more a fear of the ill-informed speculation about “dumbing down” which inevitably accompanies them, of which his article is an excellent example.

When harking back to a “golden age” in which students were required to “know thoroughly 100 years of British and European history” he appears unaware that current history courses require students to answer in depth on, for instance, over 100 years of post-Reformation European history.

English syllabuses, contrary to his beliefs, still demand knowledge of writers of the era of Milton and Dryden as well as the study of Shakespeare. Although I come from a humble comprehensive, I cannot imagine that the A-level courses taught in independent schools such as Mr Hargreaves’s are as unchallenging as he claims.

A-level students should feel insulted by the attempts to denigrate their achievements. The advent of the AS examination has - rather than creating the easy modular component Mr Hargreaves decries - introduced a massive workload for Year 12 pupils; harder, university friends have claimed, in terms of its intensive nature, than that set for a degree.

**Helen Mort, Chesterfield, Derbyshire**

*The Sunday Telegraph*



### **Psoriasis: new treatment**

PEOPLE who suffer from psoriasis may soon be able to get rid of their sores by exposing them to a red light, writes Roger Dobson.

More than 40 patients have so far benefited from an experimental technology being developed by dermatologists in Britain. It involves treating patches of skin with a chemical and then exposing them to a special red light.

Eventually, doctors hope to be able to develop a treatment in which sufferers will walk into special light kiosks and have their skin cleared of the characteristic red flaky plaques at the touch of a button.

Psoriasis is an ailment where the surface layer of the skin, the epidermis, is reproduced so quickly that it piles up on itself, forming itchy lumps. When scratched, the skin flakes off, exposing a raw red surface underneath that may bleed.

The precise triggers for psoriasis are not known, although it can run in families and stress is thought to be involved. There is no known cure, but treatments are available, including steroid therapy and a range of homeopathic medicines.

One of the treatments is exposure to ultraviolet light, but this has the risk of side effects such as cancer, or ageing of the skin, particularly when it has to be used repeatedly as the patches return. It is also unable to discriminate between healthy skin and psoriasis plaques.

Dermatologists in Manchester are now working on a photo-sensitive technique that uses ordinary visible red light, similar to that from a red light

#### MEDICINE

bulb, but which attacks only the areas of skin where there are psoriasis marks.

Chris Griffiths, professor of dermatology at Manchester University and Hope Hospital, says that the psoriasis patches treated on all the patients so far have been eliminated with the technique.

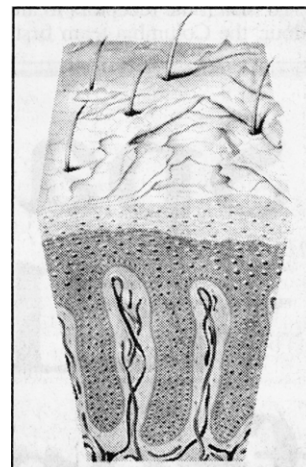
‘It seems to work very well and the results are encouraging. The advantage over ultraviolet is that you are treating only affected skin and there appear to be no side effects apart from a negligible localised burning sensation.

‘One of the problems with psoriasis is that it can come back again, so no treatment is a permanent fix.’

Because the new treatment appears to have no side effects, it is likely to be safe for repeated application to the same areas if the psoriasis returns.

The goal of the Manchester team now is to work up to a system that exposes the whole body to the light.

‘The way forward is to paint this photo-sensitiser on to all the plaques and then stand the patient in a light-therapy kiosk. Just the areas treated with the sensitiser cream would be treated, sparing the patient’s normal skin,’ says Griffiths.



Psoriasis: new treatment

*The Sunday Times*