

= Bernard Levin =

Henry Bernard Levin CBE (19 August 1928 ? 7 August 2004) was an English journalist , author and broadcaster , described by The Times as " the most famous journalist of his day " . The son of a poor Jewish family in London , he won a scholarship to the independent school Christ 's Hospital and went on to the London School of Economics , graduating in 1952 . After a short spell in a lowly job at the BBC selecting press cuttings for use in programmes , he secured a post as a junior member of the editorial staff of a weekly periodical , Truth , in 1953 .

Levin reviewed television for The Manchester Guardian and wrote a weekly political column in The Spectator noted for its irreverence and influence on modern parliamentary sketches . During the 1960s he wrote five columns a week for The Daily Mail on any subject that he chose . After a disagreement with the proprietor of the paper over attempted censorship of his column in 1970 , Levin moved to The Times where , with one break of just over a year in 1981 ? 82 , he remained as resident columnist until his retirement , covering a wide range of topics , both serious and comic .

Levin became a well @-@ known broadcaster , first on the weekly satirical television show That Was The Week That Was in the early 1960s , then as a panellist on a musical quiz , Face the Music , and finally in three series of travel programmes in the 1980s . He began to write books in the 1970s , publishing 17 between 1970 and 1998 . From the early 1990s , Levin developed Alzheimer 's disease , which eventually forced him to give up his regular column in 1997 , and to stop writing altogether not long afterwards .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Levin was born in London , the second child and only son of Philip Levin , a tailor of Jewish Bessarabian descent , and his wife , Rose , née Racklin . Philip Levin abandoned the family and moved to South Africa when Levin was three . The two children were brought up with the help of their maternal grandparents , who had emigrated from Lithuania at the turn of the 20th century . Levin wrote of his childhood , " My home was not a religious one ; my grandfather read the scriptures to himself silently and struggled through a little English ; my grandmother , who could read no language at all , lit a candle on the appropriate days , as did my mother , though for her it was not really a religious sign . My uncles were quite secular ... and had hardly anything to do with the religion of their father and grandfathers " . In The Guardian after Levin 's death , Quentin Crewe wrote , " His illiterate grandparents ' stories about life in Russia must have instilled in him the passionate belief in the freedom of the individual that lasted his whole life . In return , as he grew older , he used to read to them . Bernard could not read Hebrew , but he could get by in Yiddish " .

Rose Levin was a capable cook , and , though the household was not well off , Levin was well fed and acquired an interest in food that in adult life became one of the regular themes of his journalism . The cuisine was traditional Jewish , with fried fish as one cornerstone of the repertoire , and chicken as another ? boiled , roast , or in soup with lokshen (noodles) , kreplach or kneidlach . As an adult Levin retained his love of Jewish cookery along with his passion for French haute cuisine .

The Levin household was not especially musical , though it had a piano which Judith was taught to play ; Rose Levin bought her son a violin and paid for lessons , convinced that he was " destined to be the next Kreisler or Heifetz " . Levin persevered ineptly for two and a half years and then gave up with relief . The experience put him off music for some time , and it was only later that it became one of his passions , a frequent topic in his writing .

Levin was a bright child , and , encouraged by his mother , he worked hard enough to win a scholarship to the independent school Christ 's Hospital in the countryside near Horsham , West Sussex . His housemaster was D.S. (" Boom ") Macnutt , the school 's head of Classics . Macnutt was a strict , even bullying , teacher , and was feared rather than loved by his pupils , but Levin learned Classics well , and retained a lifelong love of Latin tags and quotations in his writing . He

battled on many fronts at Christ 's Hospital : he was a Jew at a Church of England establishment ; he was from a poor family ; he was slight of stature ; he was utterly indifferent to sport ; he adopted a Marxist stance , hanging the Red Flag from a school window to celebrate the Labour victory in 1945 . In the local streets , the school 's conspicuous uniform , including a cloak and tight stockings , attracted unwanted attention . Levin 's biographer Bel Mooney writes of this period , " Jeers put iron in his soul " . Among the consolations of Christ 's Hospital was its thriving musical life . At concerts by the school orchestra (whose members included Levin 's contemporary , Colin Davis) , Levin listened seriously to music for the first time . The food at the school was no such consolation ; according to Levin it was so appalling that there must be something better to be found , and from his late teens he sought out the best restaurants he could afford .

Levin hoped to go to the University of Cambridge , but , as his obituarist in The Times wrote , he " was not considered Oxbridge material " . He was accepted by the London School of Economics (LSE) , where he studied from 1948 to 1952 . His talents were recognised and encouraged by LSE tutors including Karl Popper and Harold Laski ; Levin 's deep affection for both did not prevent his perfecting a comic impersonation of the latter . Levin became a skilled debater ; he wrote for the student newspaper The Beaver , on a range of subjects , not least opera , which became one of his lifelong passions .

Having graduated from the LSE in 1952 , Levin worked briefly as a tour guide , and then joined the BBC 's North American Service . His job was to read all the newspapers and weekly magazines , selecting articles that might be useful for broadcasting .

= = = Journalism = = =

In 1953 , Levin applied for a job on the weekly periodical Truth . The paper had recently been taken over by the liberal publisher Ronald Staples who together with his new editor Vincent Evans was determined to cleanse it of its previous right @-@ wing racist reputation . Levin 's noticeably Jewish surname , together with such skills as he had acquired in shorthand and typing , gained him immediate acceptance . He was offered the post of " general editorial dogsbody , which was exactly what I had been looking for " . After a year , Evans left and was succeeded by his deputy , George Scott ; Levin was promoted in Scott 's place . He wrote for the paper under a variety of pseudonyms , including " A.E. Cherryman " .

While still at Truth , Levin was invited to write a column in The Manchester Guardian about ITV , Britain 's first commercial television channel , launched in 1955 . Mooney describes his television reviews as " notably punchy " and The Times wrote , " Levin took out his shotgun and let loose with both barrels " . Levin gave the opening programmes a kindly review , but by the fourth day of commercial television he was beginning to baulk : " There has been nothing to get our teeth into apart from three different brands of cake @-@ mix and a patent doughnut " . Thereafter , he did not spare the network : " cliché succeeded to cliché " ; " a mentally defective aborigine who was deaf in both ears would have little difficulty in leaving ' Double Your Money ' £ 32 richer than when he entered " ; and after the network 's first hundred days he attributed its viewing figures to the " number of people who are sufficiently stupid to derive pleasure from such programmes " .

= = = The Spectator = = =

In 1956 , Levin found himself in irreconcilable disagreement with Truth 's support of the Anglo @-@ French military action in the Suez Crisis . The proprietor and editor of the long @-@ established weekly The Spectator , Ian Gilmour , invited Levin to join his staff . Levin left Truth and became the political correspondent of The Spectator . He declared that he was no expert in politics , but Gilmour advised him , " review it as you would review television " . Levin wrote his column under the pseudonym " Taper " , from the name of a corrupt political insider in Disraeli 's 1844 novel Coningsby . He followed Gilmour 's advice , becoming , as The Guardian 's Simon Hoggart said , " the father of the modern parliamentary sketch " :

Until then sketch writers were basically on the side of the MPs . Their job was to convey to voters

the majesty of our legislators ' oratory , to remind us of the surpassing importance of their deliberations . A predecessor of mine published his collected works as The Glory of Parliament . Levin had truck with none of that nonsense . As he said later , he treated the old place as if it were a theatre . ' I was watching a farce , from the front row of the stalls , with a glass of champagne in my hand.'

Levin made no pretence of even @-@ handedness . There were politicians he liked and politicians he did not like . For those in the latter category , " Taper 's lacerations wounded " . He invented unflattering nicknames ; he wrote later , " I did not (though I wish I had) think of calling Sir Hartley Shawcross Sir Shortly Floorcross , but I did call Sir Reginald Manningham @-@ Buller Sir Reginald Bullying @-@ Manner " . When the latter was elevated to the peerage as Lord Dilhorne , Levin renamed him Lord Stillborn .

Taper was not Levin 's only work for The Spectator . He wrote on a wide range of subjects , from a campaign for the release of three Arabs imprisoned by the British authorities , to supporting publication of the banned novel Lady Chatterley 's Lover , and denunciation of the retired Lord Chief Justice , Lord Goddard . The last led to a secret meeting of more than 20 senior judges to see whether Levin could be prosecuted for criminal libel ; there was no prosecution , and his accusations about Goddard 's vindictiveness , deceit and bias have relatively recently been claimed to have been justified . In 1959 , Gilmour , while remaining as proprietor , stepped down as editor and was succeeded by his deputy , Brian Inglis ; Levin took over from Inglis as assistant editor . Later in that year , after the general election victory of another of his bêtes noires , Harold Macmillan , Levin gave up the Taper column , professing himself to be in despair .

Concurrently with his work at The Spectator , Levin was the drama critic of The Daily Express from 1959 , offending many in theatrical circles by his outspoken verdicts . He modelled his reviewing style on that of Bernard Shaw 's musical reviews of the late 19th century . He gave a fellow @-@ critic an edition of Shaw 's collected criticism , writing inside the cover , " ' In the hope that when you come across the phrases I have already stolen you will keep quiet about it " .

Gilmour discouraged any hopes Levin might have had of succeeding Inglis as editor and in 1962 , Levin left both The Spectator and The Daily Express , becoming drama critic of The Daily Mail . He remained there for eight years , and for the last five of them also wrote five columns a week on any subject of his choice .

= = = Television and The Pendulum Years = = =

Although by the early 1960s Levin was becoming a well @-@ known name , his was not yet a well @-@ known face . Meeting him in London the publisher Rupert Hart @-@ Davis did not immediately recognise him : " He looks about sixteen , and at first I thought he was someone ? s little boy brought along to see the fun ? very Jewish , with wavy fairish hair , very intelligent and agreeable to talk to " . In 1963 Levin was invited to appear regularly on BBC television 's new weekly late @-@ night satirical revue , That Was The Week That Was , where he delivered monologues to camera about his pet hates and conducted interviews , appearing as " a tiny figure taking on assorted noisy giants in debate " . The programme , which had a short but much @-@ discussed run , was transmitted live ; this added to its edginess and impact , but also made it prone to disruption . Levin was twice assaulted on air , once by the husband of an actress whose show Levin had reviewed severely , and once by a woman astrologer who squirted him with water .

In 1966 BBC television screened a new musical quiz , Face the Music presented by Joseph Cooper . It ran intermittently until 1984 . Levin was a frequent panel member along with , among others , Robin Ray , Joyce Grenfell , David Attenborough and Richard Baker .

Levin published his first book in 1970 . Called The Pendulum Years , its subtitle , Britain and the Sixties , summed up its subject . In 22 self @-@ contained chapters , Levin considered various aspects of British life during the decade . Among his topics were prominent people including Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson ? dubbed the Walrus and the Carpenter by Levin ? and institutions such as the monarchy , the churches and the British Empire in its last days . Among the individual events examined in the book were the 1968 student riots and the prosecution for obscenity of the

publishers of Lady Chatterley 's Lover .

Levin 's interest in indexes developed from his work on The Pendulum Years . He compiled his own index for the book , " and swore a mighty oath , when I had finished the task , that I would rather die , and in a particularly unpleasant manner , than do it again " . He contrived to include in his index an obscene joke at the expense of the hapless prosecutor in the Chatterley trial , but found the difficulty of indexing so great that he became a champion of the Society of Indexers . He wrote several articles on the subject , and when reviewing books made a point of praising good indexes and condemning bad ones .

= = = The Times = = =

In June 1970 , during the general election campaign , Levin fell out with the proprietors of The Daily Mail , Lord Rothermere and his son Vere Harmsworth . Levin 's contract guaranteed him absolute freedom to write whatever he chose , but Harmsworth , an unswerving Conservative , attempted to censor Levin 's support for the other major party , Labour . Levin resigned , and immediately received offers from The Guardian and The Times to join them as a columnist . He found both tempting , and at one point " even had a wild notion of suggesting that I should write for both simultaneously " . In the end , he chose The Times , giving as his reason that though the liberal Guardian was more in line with his own politics than the conservative Times , " I wrote more comfortably against the grain of the paper I worked for rather than with it " . His obituarist in The Times adds that the decision may also have been swayed by the better remuneration offered by the paper .

Among the perquisites of the Times appointment were a company car and a large and splendid office at the paper 's building in Printing House Square , London . Levin accepted neither ; he could not drive and he hated to be isolated . He commandeered a desk in the anteroom to the editor 's office , a location that kept him closely in touch with the daily affairs of the paper . It also gave him ready access to the editor , William Rees Mogg , with whom he developed a good friendship . Levin 's brief was to write two columns a week (later three) on any subject that he wished . His range was prodigious ; he published nine volumes of his selected journalism of which the first , Taking Sides , covered subjects as diverse as the death watch beetle , Field Marshal Montgomery , Wagner , homophobia , censorship , Eldridge Cleaver , arachniphobia , theatrical nudity , and the North Thames Gas Board .

Within weeks of joining The Times Levin provoked a lawsuit and a strident controversy . The first was in March 1971 , in an article titled " Profit and dishonour in Fleet Street " , accusing Rothermere of underhand conduct and personal avarice during the merger of The Daily Mail and The Daily Sketch . The libel action brought by Rothermere was settled out of court , at substantial cost to the proprietor of The Times , Lord Thomson . Two months later , controversy followed Levin 's renewed condemnation of Lord Goddard immediately after the latter 's death in May 1971 . The legal profession closed ranks and defended Goddard 's reputation against Levin 's attacks . Among those denouncing Levin were Lords Denning , Devlin , Hodson , Parker , Shawcross and Stow Hill . After Levin 's death The Times published an article opining that information made public since 1971 " strongly supported " his criticisms of Goddard . At the time , the lawyers took revenge on Levin by ensuring that his candidacy for membership of the Garrick , a London club much favoured by lawyers and journalists , was blackballed .

At The Daily Mail , Levin had generally been restricted to 600 words for his articles . At The Times he had more licence to spread himself . He appeared in The Guinness Book of Records for the longest sentence ever to appear in a newspaper ? 1 @, @ 667 words . He was proud of this , and affected to be outraged when " some bugger in India wrote a sentence very considerably longer " . He maintained that he could construct impromptu a sentence of up to 40 subordinate clauses " and many a native of these islands , speaking English as to the manner born , has followed me trustingly into the labyrinth only to perish miserably trying to find the way out " .

Sometimes Levin wrote about frivolous , even farcical matters , such as a series of mock @-@ indignant articles about the sex @-@ lives of mosquitoes . At other times he wrote about matters of

grave moral importance , unfailingly denouncing authoritarian regimes whether of the left or the right . He observed , " I am barred by the governments concerned from entering the Soviet Union and the lands of her empire on the one hand and South Africa on the other . These decrees constitute a pair of campaign medals that I wear with considerable pleasure and I have a profound suspicion of those who rebuke me for partisanship while wearing only one " . He wrote regularly about the arts . Music was a recurrent theme ; he was notorious for his addiction to Wagner , and other favourite composers included Schubert and Mozart . He wrote about performers he admired , including Otto Klemperer , Alfred Brendel , and Kiri Te Kanawa . He turned less regularly to the visual arts , but when he did his views were clear @-@ cut and trenchantly expressed . He wrote of a Pre @-@ Raphaelite exhibition in 1984 , " Never , in all my life , not even at the exclusively Millais exhibition in 1967 , have I seen so much sickening rubbish in one place at one time " . His knowledge and love of literature were reflected in many of his writings ; among his best @-@ known pieces is a long paragraph about the influence of Shakespeare on everyday discourse . It begins :

If you cannot understand my argument , and declare ' It 's Greek to me ' , you are quoting Shakespeare ; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning , you are quoting Shakespeare ; if you recall your salad days , you are quoting Shakespeare ; if you act more in sorrow than in anger , if your wish is father to the thought , if your lost property has vanished into thin air , you are quoting Shakespeare " .

= = = Arianna Stassinopoulos (Huffington) = = =

In 1971 , Levin appeared in an edition of Face the Music along with a new panellist , Arianna Stassinopoulos (later known as Arianna Huffington) . He was 42 ; she was 21 . A relationship developed , of which she wrote after his death : " He wasn 't just the big love of my life , he was a mentor as a writer and a role model as a thinker " .

Although Levin had rejected Judaism when a youth , he quested after spirituality . Such religious sympathies as he had , he said , were " with quietist faiths , like Buddhism , on the one hand , and with a straightforward message of salvation , like Christianity , on the other " . With the help of Stassinopoulos he continued to search after spiritual truth . She later wrote , " He tried therapy , he tried Insight , a self @-@ awareness seminar that I had helped to bring to London , he tried a stint in an ashram in India . Lesser souls would have avoided the ridicule that was heaped on him for his spiritual ' search ' by simply keeping it to himself . But he didn 't , because anything he was touched by he had to write about " . In 1980 he wrote extensive accounts in his column about his visit to the Indian commune of the meditation teacher Osho .

Levin was commissioned by the BBC to visit musical festivals around the world , broadcasting a series of talks about them . Together with Stassinopoulos , he visited festivals in Britain , Ireland , continental Europe and Australia . He later wrote a book , Conducted Tour (1982) on the same subject . By the time it was published he and Stassinopoulos were no longer together . At the age of 30 , she remained deeply in love with him but longed to have children ; Levin never wanted to marry or be a father . She concluded that she must break away , and moved to New York in 1980 .

= = = 1980s = = =

In 1981 Levin took a sabbatical from The Times after Rupert Murdoch bought the paper and Harold Evans succeeded Rees @-@ Mogg as editor . Evans and Levin were friends , but Levin had publicly stated his preference that Charles Douglas @-@ Home should be appointed . Within a year Evans and Murdoch fell out and Evans left in 1982 ; Douglas @-@ Home became editor , and coaxed Levin back , to write two columns a week . On returning to the paper in October 1982 , he began his column with the words , " And another thing " . This mirrored his opening gambit when publication of The Times resumed in 1979 after a printers ' strike lasting nearly a year : his first column then had begun with the word " Moreover " . By the 1980s Levin was sufficiently well known to be the subject of satire himself . The satirical ITV show Spitting Image caricatured him in high @-@ flown discussion with another well @-@ known intellectual in a sketch entitled " Bernard Levin

and Jonathan Miller Talk Bollocks " . By now , Levin 's political views were moving to the right , and he was no longer writing so much against the grain of his newspaper . He had come to admire Margaret Thatcher , though not the rest of her party : " But there is one , and only one , political position that , through all the years and all my changing views and feelings , has never altered , never come into question , never seemed too simple for a complex world . It is my profound and unwavering contempt for the Conservative Party " .

Levin never published an autobiography , but his book Enthusiasms , published in 1983 , consists of chapters on his principal pleasures : books , pictures , cities , walking , Shakespeare , music , food and drink , and spiritual mystery . The book is dedicated " To Arianna , with much more than enthusiasm " ? they remained loving friends for the rest of his life . It contains a sentence that far outdoes his earlier 1 @,@ 667 word effort in The Times , starting on page 212 and ending four pages later ; it lists the restaurants most esteemed by Levin in Europe , Asia and America .

In the 1980s , Levin made three television series for Channel 4 . The first , Hannibal 's Footsteps , screened in 1985 , showed Levin walking the presumed route taken by Hannibal when he invaded Italy in 218 BC .. The programme followed Levin 's 320 @-@ mile journey from Aigues @-@ Mortes to the crossing into Italy in the Queyras valley . He remained true to his declared intention of eschewing all forms of vehicular transport , and walked all the way , with the exception of his crossing the Rhone , rowing himself in a small boat . He followed this with To the End of the Rhine in 1987 , following the Rhine from its two sources , the Hinterrhein and the Vorderrhein , in Switzerland , to its estuary at Rotterdam , 1 @,@ 233 km (766 mi) to the north . In between he joined the Swiss citizen army on manoeuvres , visited Liechtenstein bankers , zig @-@ zagged the Swiss ? German border at Lake Constance , attended the Schubertiade at Hohenems and the opera at Bregenz , took the waters at Baden @-@ Baden , visited the manufacturers of eau de Cologne , and paid tribute to Erasmus at Basle . The last of the three series was in 1989 , A Walk up Fifth Avenue in New York , from Washington Square to the Harlem River . In this series he encountered extremes of wealth and poverty , and met a wide variety of people , some famous (such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Donald Trump) and some not (including a sword @-@ swallowing unicyclist , and a bag lady in Central Park) . He wrote books based on each of the three series , published in 1985 , 1987 and 1989 respectively .

= = = Last years = = =

Levin began to have difficulty with his balance as early as 1988 , although Alzheimer 's disease was not diagnosed until the early 1990s . From September 1995 his Times column appeared once weekly instead of twice , and in January 1997 the editor , Peter Stothard , concluded , despite a great admiration for Levin , that the weekly column should cease . Levin retired , though he continued to write for the paper occasionally over the next year .

In his last decade , Levin 's partner was the journalist Liz Anderson , who took care of him during the long degenerative phase of his illness . He died in Westminster , London , aged 75 . He is buried in Brompton Cemetery , London . A memorial service was held at the church of St Martin @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Fields at which Sir David Frost delivering the eulogy described Levin as " a faithful crusader for tolerance and against injustice who had declared , ' The pen is mightier than the sword ? and much easier to write with ' " .

= = Honours and commemorations = =

Levin was appointed CBE for services to journalism in 1990 . The Society of Indexers has instituted an award in Levin 's name ; it is given to " a journalist and author whose writings show untiring and eloquent support for indexers and indexing " . He was president of the English Association , 1984 ? 85 , and vice @-@ president 1985 ? 88 . He was an honorary fellow of the LSE from 1977 , and a member of the Order of Polonia Restituta , conferred by the Polish Government @-@ in @-@ Exile in 1976 . In its obituary tribute to him , The Times described Levin as " the most famous journalist of his day " .

