

The New Criterion

Notes & Comments June 2010

A word of thanks

We take a moment to express our gratitude to supporters and subscribers.

For the last several years, we've taken the opportunity of our final issue before aestivation to thank the individuals and institutions that make *The New Criterion* possible. As the magazine approaches its thirtieth anniversary—Volume 30, Number 1 arrives in September 2012—it seems appropriate also to add a dollop of self-assessment to the expression of gratitude.

The New Criterion began as an experiment. Partly, it has been an exercise in cultural polemics. We have endeavored to tell the truth about the many naked emperors parading about the cultural landscape. The emperors have not always been gratified by our attention. But polemics was only part of the story. *The New Criterion* has also been about cultural recuperation: about the battle against cultural amnesia. We endeavored to expose what was empty, meretricious, or overrated, but at the same time we have sought to recover the pertinence of what had been unfairly neglected or overlooked. From the beginning, the magazine has attempted to combine seriousness about cultural issues with rhetorical liveliness. We have tried to steer a course between the frothy ephemera of pop culture and the lugubrious introversions of the academy. If those aspirations are “conservative”—the dread epithet with which friends and foes alike have greeted *The New Criterion*—it was primarily in the sense of endeavoring to *conserve* enabling cultural achievements against the ravages of stupidity, inattention, ideological co-optation, and the insatiable demand for entertainment and distraction. Above all, we have been cognizant of Edmund Burke's admonitions about the fragility of civilizational achievement. In the realm of culture as in the realm of politics and civil society, the hard-won accomplishments of generations require persistent attention and nurturing. What took decades or even centuries to build can be swept away in a few years. The demolition can be measured not only in governments toppled and institutions denuded of purpose but also in the more insinuating index of trivialization and forgetfulness.

Over the course of nearly thirty years, *The New Criterion* has battled against those armies of irrelevancy. On the occasion of our twentieth anniversary, we quoted Evelyn Waugh who, towards the end of his life, reflected on the conservatism of Rudyard Kipling:

He believed civilization to be something laboriously achieved which was only precariously defended. He wanted to see the defenses fully manned and he hated the liberals because he thought them gullible and feeble, believing in the easy perfectibility of man and ready to abandon the work of centuries for sentimental qualms.

Nearly three decades earlier, Waugh had expatiated more fully on this theme. "Barbarism," he wrote in 1938,

is never finally defeated; given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly will commit every conceivable atrocity. The danger does not come merely from habitual hooligans; we are all potential recruits for anarchy. Unremitting effort is needed to keep men living together at peace; there is only a margin of energy left over for experiment however beneficent. Once the prisons of the mind have been opened, the orgy is on. There is no more agreeable position than that of dissident from a stable society. Theirs are all the solid advantages of other people's creation and preservation, and all the fun of detecting hypocrisies and inconsistencies. There are times when dissidents are not only enviable but valuable. The work of preserving society is sometimes onerous, sometimes almost effortless. The more elaborate the society, the more vulnerable it is to attack, and the more complete its collapse in case of defeat. At a time like the present it is notably precarious. If it falls we shall see not merely the dissolution of a few joint-stock corporations, but of the spiritual and material achievements of our history.

The contest between barbarism and civilization is perpetual. There are no permanent victories, only permanent values. *The New Criterion* exists to celebrate that permanency and, with Kipling, to help keep the defenses of civilization "fully manned." It is an effort we could never have undertaken alone. From the beginning, *The New Criterion* has been a collaborative enterprise. We have depended absolutely on a family of supporters who understood the importance of conservative cultural criticism. For more than twenty years, from our very first issue in September 1982, the late, lamented John M. Olin Foundation was a central supporter of *The New Criterion*. The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation and the Sarah Scaife Foundation have also been indispensable allies and supporters for decades. It is worth mentioning again that these three foundations made possible not only *The New Criterion* but also an entire constellation of conservative cultural and intellectual endeavor. We hear a lot about "diversity" in the university and media today; these institutions made genuine diversity a reality by supporting countless initiatives that gave voice to opinions and work that dissented from the left-liberal consensus and continues to define establishment opinion. We are immensely grateful to all three of these institutions, without whose support *The New Criterion* would not exist.

We are also immensely grateful to the ever-widening circle of friends and supporters who have stepped up to help us at this critical juncture. Their show of support, especially at this moment of economic peril, is more than gratifying: it has also been increasingly essential to our survival. It would take many pages simply to list everyone who has pitched in to help. We are grateful for every gift, no matter how modest. But we would like to mention in particular the major gifts this year of Arthur and Johanna Cinader, Michael and Marilyn Fedak, Arianna Packard Martell, James Piereson, Bagley Wright, and several donors who prefer to remain anonymous. Their exceptionally generous support has been essential in keeping *The New Criterion* alive and well in these (to say the least) challenging times. We are profoundly grateful to them all. We reserve special thanks for

Donald Kahn, a dear friend, whose extraordinarily generous support of our efforts for more than a decade has helped transform a brash literary and cultural experiment into a thriving adventure. Our grateful thanks to all of you who have helped make *The New Criterion* what it is today.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 28 Number 10 , on page 2

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