Mel Kendrick, White Block/Spiral, 2015. Precast concrete, 64 x 25 x 37 in. (160.7 x 62.2 x 94 cm)/ Image Courtesy David Nolan Gallery (KEN5706)

Sign up to receive “Critic's Notebook” in your inbox every week—it only takes a few seconds and it's completely free! “Critic's Notebook” is a weekly preview of the best to read, see, and hear in New York and beyond, compiled by the editors of The New Criterion.
This week: Corbyn, Conservatism, Cole, and Kendrick.

Fiction: Money: A Suicide Note, by Martin Amis (Penguin Ink): Since the days of Jeremy Corbyn’s election as leader of Britain’s Labour Party, there has been plenty of ink spilled by the Right surrounding dear Comrade Corbyn’s unsuitability for the office. To wit, in our forthcoming November issue we’ll have Jeremy Black’s take on the way that Britain has “leaped to the left.” And yet, much of the Left has been silent surrounding Corbyn’s ascendance, preferring to mark dissatisfaction not on the page but merely with backbench resignations. The silence appears to have abated, however, with Sunday’s publication of Martin Amis’s impression of old Jez. Writing in London’s Sunday Times, Amis takes Corbyn behind the proverbial woodshed, calling him “undereducated,” with a CV redolent of a “slow-minded rigidity.” Amis is no stalwart of the Right, and yet the lifetime Labour voter has nothing but bile to spew towards Corbyn. The piece is illustrative of Amis’s primary gift, a bombastic volubility that gives his novels great energy, the best of which is Money, his reckoning with the heady days of 1980s New York, which is worth revisiting in light of all the very recent attention on Mr. Amis. While Tom Wolfe is often credited with the quintessential New York novel of the 1980s, Amis may have bested him with Money, a madcap, cyclonic survey of New York’s bizarreness. While the plotting is sometimes baffling, the sheer ability of Amis to conjure slime makes the book worth the read. Amis knows filth, whether it’s Money’s protagonist John Self (“Unless I specifically tell you otherwise, I’m always smoking another cigarette”) or Jeremy Corbyn, who at times seems more a creation of literature than the leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition. —BR

Nonfiction: What is Conservatism?, edited by Frank S. Meyer (ISI): Remember André Gide’s observation that “Toutes choses sont dites déjà, mais comme personne n’écoute, il faut toujours recommencer”? “Everything has been said already, but as no one was listening, it is always necessary to say it again.” I thought of that melancholy mot when I chanced upon the new edition of What Is Conservatism?, a classic in the library of politically mature reflection. First published in 1964, the indispensable Intercollegiate Studies Institute has brought out a new edition of this bracing collection of twelve essays by such intellectual giants as Russell Kirk, F. A. Hayek, Frank S. Meyer, and William F. Buckley Jr. This edition also features a new and rousing forward by a contemporary giant, Jonah Goldberg, who describes the book as “The Federalist Papers of American Conservatism. Like the patriots who convened in Philadelphia to hammer out a new charter for a new nation, Goldberg notes, “the contributors to this book laid out a new consensus for a new movement.” The diaphanous gauze of history blunts the sharp edges of past controversies and differences. We forget that the differences that divided the Founders of America were deep and very nearly intractable. That the geniuses of that generation found a way to forge unity out of division was testimony to their rhetorical skill, their political wisdom, and their willingness to put local differences aside for the sake of a higher good. What Is Conservatism? performed a kindred function for a generation that was also beset by differences but managed, partly through the good offices of that supreme cultural impresario Bill Buckley and National Review, to join hands for the sake of a larger, conservative purpose. Given the divisions that now threaten to tear apart
the Republican Party and the conservatives who nest there unhappily, *What Is Conservatism?* is of more than of historical interest. It is at once a tocsin and a how-to manual, a book that sheds light on an increasingly distant moment and, by so doing, allows us to discern the contours of our own moral and political geography, a prospective safe harbor here, dangerous swamps and threatening cliffs there. We’re all in the debt of ISI for bringing back into print this admonitory book. —RK

**Poetry:** *Middle Earth: Poems*, by Henri Cole (Farrar, Straus & Giroux): If you’ve ever paused to consider how your words and actions might contradict themselves, then you and Henri Cole are among the few intrepid and introspective enough to consider your own self-created complexities. Cole’s incongruity is not, however, condemning or apologetic, but clarifying, revivifying basic paradoxes such as desire and need, love and hate. In moments when Cole demonstrates this blatant contrast, he sews together a perfectly paced patchwork of grief and passion with phrases like, "desire and disgust get mixed up" or "If the meaning of life is love, no one seems to be aware" converging polarities only after their uncanny similarities and disparate nuances are brought to the reader’s forefront. Cole continues this peaceful dissension between the natural and unnatural by comparing humans to animals, water to soil, ultimately pitting our instinctual needs in juxtaposition with learned behavior and acquiesced desire. As shown through an observation of an imprisoned ape in "Ape House, Berlin Zoo," man and animal become close, even synonymous. Cole writes, "Gazing at me longer than any human in a long time, you are my closest relative in thousands of miles." He continues, "I eat leaves, fruits and roots; I curl up when I sleep; I live alone." Through Cole's eloquent collation, it’s as if the middle earth, the place from which these poems either bloom or are resurrected, is the neutral meeting-place where paradoxes inevitably surrender to their own intolerable, inescapable differences. However, these differences are not pushed further apart in obvious opposition, but brought closer together through Cole's lucid writing in a balance of poised bifurcation. —ID

**Art:** "Mel Kendrick: sub-stratum," at David Nolan Gallery (Through December 5): The process of how to make a sculpture has long been Mel Kendrick's product. In 2009, his black-and-white striped "Markers" enlivened New York's Madison Square Park and brought his ingenious sculptures, with one part carved from the other, to a wider audience. Now at David Nolan Gallery, his latest work uses foam blocks, hot wires, and concrete molds to find increasingly supple forms in his tension between positive and negative, figure and base. —JP

**Music:** *Tosca*, by Puccini, at The Metropolitan Opera (October 29 and November 2): For two performances only, Angela Gheorghiu, a superstar soprano who has recently been absent from the Met's stage, will portray one of her signature roles, appearing as the titular diva in Puccini's *Tosca*. The piece itself needs little introduction—this is Puccini at his absolute best, a score both evocative and inventive, brimming from start to finish with raw emotional energy. Co-starring as Cavaradossi is Roberto Aronica, and Zeljko Lucic portrays the vile Baron Scarpia. Paolo Carignani conducts. —ECS

**Other:** What is art for? A forensic investigation (October 28): For those interested in art on a global
scale, the multinational monthly *The Art Newspaper* is an essential read. With English, French, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Chinese editions, the paper provides a comprehensive, panoptic view of the intricacies of the art world, from galleries to museums, auctions to private sales, and even issues of cultural heritage. The house style—snappy, straightforward, and jargon-free—is a welcome rejoinder to the puffery and blathering prose that dominates writing about art. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the venerable paper and, to celebrate, the British Museum is hosting an evening sure to delight. The question under consideration is “What is art for?,” an admittedly broad question, but one that should engender some vociferous discussion among the panelists, the list of which includes the British Museum director Neil MacGregor and Zaki Nusseibeh, the advisor to the President of the UAE and the driving force behind cultural policies in Abu Dhabi. Readers in London will want to secure their tickets for Wednesday’s event now.

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Support our friends: *The Thriving Society: On the Social Conditions of Human Flourishing* (The Witherspoon Institute). From a variety of perspectives and with diverse expertise, *The Thriving Society* essayists discuss foundational issues, institutional challenges, and controversial policies. Many cluster around five entities or institutions fundamental to a free and prosperous society: the person, the family, law and government, universities, and economic organizations. Additional essays cover religion, family law, foreign policy, and healthcare policy. The book opens with essays on first principles. The differences among the authors in topic and perspective produce a lively if often implicit debate among intellectual friends. In this respect, perhaps they model the kind of society they anticipate or promote.

From the archive: Pretentious & hollow, by Brooke Allen: Allen reviews the short stories of Martin Amis.

From our latest issue: Yale follies (cont’d): On the recently announced Center for the Study of Islamic Law and Civilization at Yale Law School.

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