The New Criterion Vol. 31 No. 10

The New Criterion

June 2013

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

Volume 31, Number 10, $7.75 / £7.50

June 2013

The Editors of

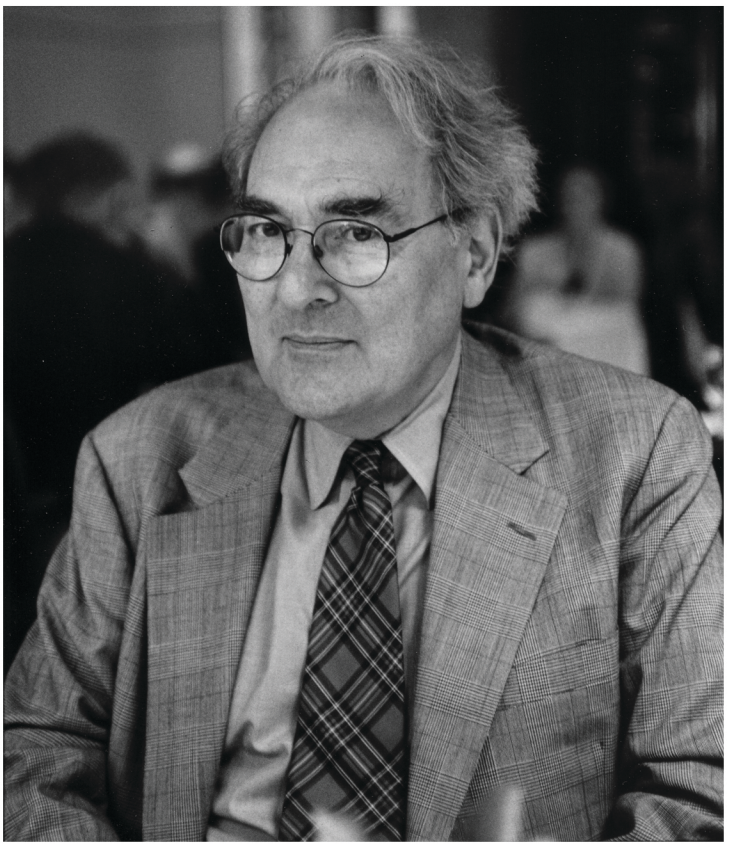
The New Criterion

are pleased to announce that

Eric C. Simpson

is the recipient of the inaugural

Hilton Kramer Fellowship



Photograph by Peter Aaron

The Hilton Kramer Fellowship in Criticism at *The New Criterion* is devoted to preserving the memory of the magazine's founding editor and perpetuating his ideas and legacy by kindling young, bright, and talented writers who want to forge a career in cultural criticism.

For Hilton, the job of the critic was to uphold the lasting values of our culture and to discriminate between serious intellectual and artistic achievement and their many counterfeits. The yearlong journalism fellowship, beginning in June of every year, is awarded to one college graduate who has demonstrated passion, initiative, and originality in the pursuit of the "elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste," as T. S. Eliot defined the task of the critic.

Eric Simpson writes music criticism. He is a former intern for *The New Criterion* and a recent Yale graduate.

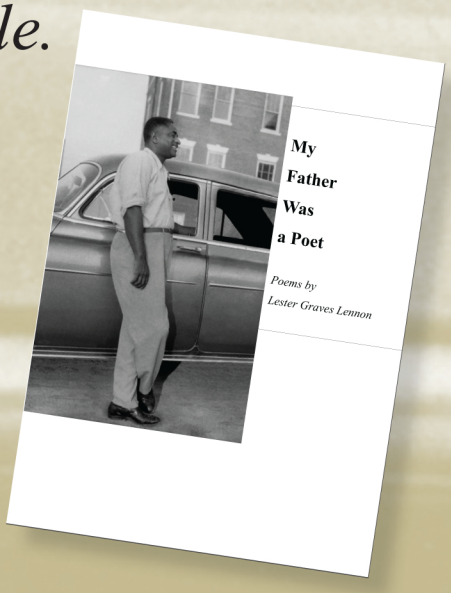
The Hilton Kramer Fellowship is made possible through the generosity of the Thomas W. Smith Foundation and donors like you.
To learn more about how to support The New Criterion, *please visit us at www.newcriterion.com*

New poetry collection
by Lester Graves Lennon

My Father Was a Poet

"This is a collection of startling contradictions in which love and hate, peace and violence, light and dark not only clash but intermingle.

"Best of all, these poems feel alive." — Dana Gioia



CW Books

Available on Amazon and at www.readcwbooks.com

"REPLETE WITH ELEGANT PATHOS"

—HAROLD BLOOM
Yale University

"GIVE[S] REPEATED PLEASURE"

—RICHARD WILBUR
US Poet Laureate

"FORMAL AND POLISHED, HIS VOICE IS ALWAYS INTIMATE...AND EXTRAORDINARILY CONFIDING"

—MICHAEL DIRDA
Pulitzer Prize Winner

"A CAUSTIC SADNESS PECULIAR TO HIS GENERATION"

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY
Starred Review

Birds of the Air

a new collection of poetry from

David Yezzi

Now available from Carnegie Mellon and distributed by UPNE

The editors are pleased to announce the fourteenth annual

New Criterion Poetry Prize

for a book-length manuscript of poems that pay close attention to form.

Judges:
Roger Kimball, Charles Martin
& David Yezzi

The winner will receive $3,000 and the winning manuscript will be published by St. Augustine's Press.

Please address manuscripts to:

The New Criterion Poetry Prize
900 Broadway, Suite 602
New York, NY 10003

"The New Criterion Poetry Prize . . . has become a more reliable indicator of high readability than most other poetry prizes."—*Booklist*

An entrance fee of $25, by money order or certified check (no personal checks), must accompany each entry. Manuscripts should not exceed sixty pages in length. Submissions must be postmarked no later than 30 September 2013. The winner will be announced in February 2014. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The New Criterion *June 2013*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen's latest book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Ivan R. Dee).

Leann Davis Alspaugh writes about art, literature, and opera.

James Bowman is the author of *Honor: A History* (Encounter).

Anthony Daniels's latest book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books).

Eric Gibson is the Leisure & Arts Features Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*.

Andrew Hamilton covered the Pentagon during the Vietnam War and served on the National Security Council.

George Sim Johnston is a writer living in New York.

Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University and recipient of the National Humanities Medal, retired in May.

William Logan's new book of poems, *Madame X* (Penguin), was published last fall.

Harvey C. Mansfield is the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard.

Andrew C. McCarthy is the author of *The Grand Jihad* (Encounter).

Stephen Miller's latest book is *The Peculiar Life of Sundays* (Harvard).

Mario Naves is an artist, critic, and teacher who lives in New York City.

Jay Nordlinger is a Senior Editor of *National Review.*

James Piereson is a senior fellow at The Manhattan Institute.

Andrew Roberts's latest book is *Storm of War* (Harper Collins).

Pat Rogers is the DeBartolo Professor in the Liberal Arts at University of South Florida.

Sarah Ruden's most recent translation is Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (Yale).

Karen Wilkin is an independent curator and critic.

Kevin D. Williamson is the author of *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Socialism* (Regnery).

Christian Wiman's *My Bright Abyss* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is forthcoming.

The New Criterion. ISSN 0734-0222. June 2013, Volume 31, Number 10. Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 900 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. Subscriptions: $48 for one year, $88 for two. For Canada, add $14 per year. For all other foreign subscriptions, add $22 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to this address within three months of the issue date. All other correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 900 Broadway, Suite 602, New York, NY 10003. (212) 247-6980.

Newsstand distribution by CMG, 155 Village Blvd., Princeton, NJ 08540. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.
Internet: www.newcriterion.com Email: letters@newcriterion.com

Advertising: Telephone: (212) 247-6980 Email: advertising@newcriterion.com.
Subscriptions: To subscribe, renew, or report a problem please call (800) 783-4903.

Notes & Comments: June 2013

Higher education bubble: Williams edition

Last month in this space, we paid a visit to Bowdoin College, courtesy of *What Does Bowdoin Teach? How a Contemporary Liberal Arts College Shapes Students*, a long and devastating examination of the college published by the National Association of Scholars earlier this spring. "Varieties of Closed-Mindedness." "Queer Outrage." "Climate Days and True Believers." Those and kindred chapter heads epitomize the existential weather at Bowdoin: lots of *talk* about "diversity" but in fact strict conformity to the whole rancid agenda of political correctness with its intolerance, florid public obsession about sex, and pagan worship at the altar of environmentalism. ("Environmentalism," the philosopher Harvey Mansfield once observed, "is school prayer for liberals.")

As we noted last month, the real importance of *What Does Bowdoin Teach?* goes far beyond the privileged confines of that elite, beta-plus liberal arts institution with its 1,200 students, silly president, and nearly $1 billion endowment. What the NAS has given us with its peek into the dismal, expensive swamp that is Bowdoin is a glimpse into the heart of American higher education writ large. And that diseased organ, in turn, is symptomatic of pathologies in the body politic as a whole.

Look almost anywhere in academia: What Harold Rosenberg called "the herd of independent minds" has huddled together in bovine complacency, mooing ankle-deep in its own effluvia, safe within its gated enclosure. Consider, to take just one example, Williams College, another beta-plus (or possibly even alpha-minus) liberal arts institution: rich, bucolic, self-satisfied, pathological. A year or so back, a racist graffito was discovered on the wall of a student dormitory during homecoming weekend. Result? Instant lockdown of the campus as the president of the college denounced the "horrifying," "vile act" and enlisted not just the campus security and the local police but the FBI in the search for the perpetrator of this "hate crime." The culprit was never discovered, or at least his (or her) identity was never made public. We are not surprised. As we speculated in this space at the time, the offending graffito was probably not scrawled by racists lurking about the ivied purlieus of Williams. Can there be a more racially sensitive environment than an elite liberal arts college? More likely, we suspect, is the rumor we heard that the secret culprit was a member of the minority community whose special perquisites depend heavily on a steady diet of racialist provocation.

Don't get us wrong. We do not condone defacing private property. But the hysteria over the mysterious graffito was not only disproportionate, it was also a textbook illustration of political correctness run amok.

Sometimes what happens at places like Williams is merely farcical. Several months ago, a friend who teaches a Williams sent us a memo circulated by a diligent colleague:

> Dear Studio Faculty,
> Security came to my office this morning and said that they found a bucket with what appears to be medical waste in it in Driscoll Dining Hall. They thought it might be an art project. It has been turned over to Health Services for testing to see if it's real.
> Does anyone know of any such art project?

Overly cautious? In the age of charlatans like Damien Hirst, Jenny Holzer, the Chapman Brothers, and many other practitioners of mind-numbing psycho-pathology, who can say whether a bucket of medical waste is or is not an art project? If Tracey Emin can win the Turner Prize for *My Bed*—"her own bed, in all its embarrassing glory. Empty booze bottles, fag butts, stained sheets, worn panties: the bloody aftermath of a nervous breakdown"—why couldn't a bucket of medical waste be an art project at the "art" department of an over-priced private college in Massachusetts? Maybe the bucket was the product of a performance by Millie Brown, a "vomit artist" who drinks dyed milk which she then regurgitates over a canvas (or, more recently, over the pop singer Lady Gaga in a music video)? Who knows? Certainly, the author of that memo was exercising rational caution. Otherwise, she might have wound up like the janitor at a Cork Street gallery in London who, tidying up after an opening party for Damien Hirst's latest exhibit, cleared away a tray full of soiled coffee cups, overflowing ashtrays, and the like.

Bad move. The tray was not just a tray full of trash. It was a tray full of trash artfully arranged by Damien Hirst, worth, according to the distraught gallery director, more than £100,000. (But be of good cheer: the garbage in question could be "recreated.")

Such stories—and they are legion—might make it seem that what is happening in the cultural-academic complex is mostly comic: repellent, no doubt, but somehow more silly than minatory.

The problem is that they are part and parcel of a concerted assault on the fundamental civilizational values of our culture. By some strange process of moral entropy, those institutions which had been the bearers and preservers of our cultural inheritance have mutated into its deadly enemies. It was Williams College, once again, that prompts this melancholy thought. Just last month, the college sponsored "Worlds of Wonder: The Queerness of Childhood," an "interdisciplinary workshop" that basked in the imprimatur of a dozen college entities from the Dean's office to the "Committee for Human Sexuality and Diversity" and the "Queer Student Union." Among the festivities were "Lessons in Drag," a performance piece, and papers on such pressing subjects as "Queering America's Progress Narrative: The California Ruins of Leland Stanford Jr.," "What Does it Mean to Be an Adult if We Queer the Child? Laws of Consent in Comparative Perspective," and "Sex Panics, Child Prostitutes, and Global Sporting Events, or: How to Save a Sexually Precocious Child and Get a Luxury Hotel for Free."

We have had occasion before to quote Kingsley Amis's wise observation that much of what is wrong with our culture can be summed up in the word "workshop." But even a satirist of Amis's asperity, we suspect, would have been at a loss when confronted with "The Queerness of Childhood." "This workshop," the program reads, "brings together a group of scholars and clinicians working at the intersections of childhood studies, psychoanalysis, psychology, pedagogy, and queer theory in order to have a conversation about queer children and the queerness of childhood." Really?

> It seeks to investigate the child as a critical tool, a political trope, an affective field, a site of cul-

tural production and consumption, a psychoanalytic subject, and a living, breathing, historical personage to whom we are ethically beholden: a figure for both queer political possibility (Jack Halberstam) and political or symbolic death (Edelman). Participants were asked to explore questions such as: Who is the queer child and why does it continue to command the attention of queer theorists and psychoanalysts? What is queer about childhood? . . . What does the concept of the queer child do to notions of childhood? What does it mean for the queer to "fuck the figural Child" (Edelman) when the gay child is already fucked, in suicidal crisis? How can we attend to the sideways growth of all children?

It costs $59,712 per year to attend Williams. For what? Politically correct hysteria, buckets of medical waste that are mistaken as art works, and conferences like "The Queerness of Childhood." Over the last couple of years, there's been a lot of talk about "the higher education bubble." What can't go on forever, the economist Herb Stein once observed, won't. The gassy, mephitic, overinflated travesty that is the higher education establishment cannot go on forever. Therefore it won't. A collateral benefit will be the eclipse of these exercises in pathology masquerading as scholarship. It's not just Williams, or Bowdoin. The disease is endemic. That is the problem. But it is also the reason it won't prevail.

A note of thanks

For the last several years, we have taken the occasion of our June issue to salute the individuals and institutions that make our work possible. Now as we end our thirty-first season, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the people whose support has helped transform *The New Criterion* from a brash experiment in conservative cultural criticism into a thriving and influential institution waging battle on the parapets of the culture wars. We are deeply grateful not only for the generosity of our benefactors, but also for the longevity of their support. From its inception in 1982, *The New Criterion* enjoyed significant support from the John M. Olin Foundation, which closed its doors a few years back, and the Sarah Scaife Foundation. They were joined in the mid-1980s by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation which has since that time been a stalwart partner helping us to carry on our work. Without their long-term, visionary support, *The New Criterion* could not have survived. Over the years, that triumvirate has been joined by numerous institutions and individuals. We are grateful to all our supporters, and would like to mention in particular our friend Donald Kahn, whose extraordinarily generous intervention at a critical moment was indispensable to the magazine's future, as well as the Thomas W. Smith Foundation, whose generous support these last few years has been crucial to enabling us to carry on not only with the magazine but also with our growing program of conferences and symposia. We could devote an entire issue to thanking the many people who make *The New Criterion* possible. We come close to doing just that with our Friends Report, which will be published later this month and will list everyone in the growing extended family of our contributors. For now, we would like to mention other people and institutions who have taken a leadership role in helping to assure the survival of *The New Criterion*: James Piereson, the Mercer Family Foundation, the Achelis and Bodman Foundations, the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Charitable Foundation, the Carson-Myre Charitable Foundation, the Fritz Maytag Family Foundation, the JM Foundation, the Thomas D. Klingenstein Fund, Michael and Marilyn Fedak, Arthur Cinader, and George Yeager. The editors and staff of *The New Criterion* are grateful to you all.

Ave atque vale
by Donald Kagan

Editors' Note: Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University and recipient of the National Humanities Medal (2002), retired in May. In forty-four years at the University, Professor Kagan has served in such varied capacities as Dean of Yale College, Master of Timothy Dwight College, and Director of Athletics. He has been a prolific author as well as a celebrated teacher; his four-volume history of the Peloponnesian War is widely considered to be among the twentieth century's greatest works of classical scholarship. The following essay on liberal education is a revised version of the valedictory lecture he delivered on April 25 to a capacity audience in Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall, New Haven, Connecticut.

My subject is liberal education, and today more than ever the term requires definition, especially as to the questions: What is a liberal education and what it is for? From Cicero's *artes liberales*, to the attempts at common curricula in more recent times, to the chaotic cafeteria that passes for a curriculum in most American universities today, the concept has suffered from vagueness, confusion, and contradiction. From the beginning, the champions of a liberal education have thought of it as seeking at least four kinds of goals. One was as an end in itself, or at least as a way of achieving that contemplative life that Aristotle thought was the greatest happiness. Knowledge and the acts of acquiring and considering it were the ends of this education and good in themselves. A second was as a means of shaping the character, the style, the taste of a person—to make him good and better able to fit in well with and take his place in the society of others like him. A third was to prepare him for a useful career in the world, one appropriate to his status as a free man. For Cicero and Quintilian, this meant a career as an orator that would allow a man to protect the private interests of himself and his friends in the law courts and to advance the public interest in the assemblies, senate, and magistracies. The fourth was to contribute to the individual citizen's freedom in ancient society. Servants were ignorant and parochial, so free men must be learned and cosmopolitan; servants were ruled by others, so free men must take part in their own government; servants specialized to become competent at some specific and limited task, so free men must know something of everything and understand general principles without yielding to the narrowness of expertise. The Romans' recommended course of study was literature, history, philosophy, and rhetoric.

It was once common to think of the medieval university as very different, as a place that focused on learning for its own sake. But the medieval universities, whatever their commitment to learning for its own sake, were institutions that trained their students for professional careers. Graduates in the liberal arts were awarded a certificate that was a license to teach others what they had learned and to make a living that way. For some, the study of liberal arts was preliminary to professional study in medicine, theology, or law and was

part of the road to important positions in church and state.

The seven liberal arts of the Middle Ages consisted of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). The discovery and absorption of Aristotle's works in the twelfth century quickly led to the triumph of logic and dialectic over the other arts. They were the glamour subjects of the time, believed both to be the best means for training and disciplining the mind and to provide the best tools for successful careers in both church and state. The dominant view of knowledge and truth was that they both already existed. They needed only to be learned, organized, and harmonized. There was nothing still to be discovered; knowledge and truth had only to be systematized and explained. An ambitious scholar could hope to achieve some semblance of universal knowledge. This was good in itself, for to the medieval men God was the source of all truth and to comprehend it was to come closer to divinity. They also placed great value on the practical rewards of their liberal education, and rightly so, for their logical, dialectical, mathematical, and rhetorical studies were the best available training for the clerks, notaries, lawyers, canons, and managers so badly needed in the high Middle Ages.

That was not quite enough for the humanists of the Renaissance, who made a conscious effort to return to the ideas and values of the classical age. As Christians they continued to study the Church Fathers but rejected the commentaries of the medieval schoolmen and went directly to the sources themselves, applying the powerful new tools of philological analysis. Their greatest innovation and delight, however, was the study of classical texts by the pagan authors whose focus on the secular world and elevation of the importance of mankind powerfully appealed to them. Their idea of a liberal education, the *studia humanitatis*, continued to include grammar and rhetoric from the old curriculum, but added the study of a canon of classical authors writing poetry, history, treatises on politics, and moral philosophy.

They thought these studies delightful in themselves but also essential for achieving the goals of a liberal education: to become wise and to speak eloquently. The emphasis was on use and action. The beneficiary of a humanistic liberal education was meant to know what is good so that he could practice virtue. Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* set forth the ideal of the well-rounded man who united in his person a knowledge of language, literature, and history with athletic, military, and musical skills, all framed by good manners and good moral character. These qualities were thought to be desirable in themselves, but they would also be most useful to a man making his way in the courts of Renaissance Italy.

The civic humanists looked to the liberal education of the humanists to train good men for public service, for leadership in cultural and political life. Such humanists as Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, and Poggio Bracciolini served as chancellors of Florence and used their skills and abilities to defend it against aggression. They also found time to write histories of their city meant to celebrate its virtues and win for it the devotion of its citizens, a no less important contribution to its survival and flourishing.

Pietro Paolo Vergerio, another of the Italian humanists close to the Florentine circle, summarized the group's idea neatly:

> We call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and mind which ennoble men and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only, for to a vulgar temper, gain and pleasure are the one aim of existence, to a lofty nature, moral worth and fame.

For the Italian humanists, freedom meant putting aside concern for gain and instead devoting oneself to the training of mind, body, and spirit for the sake of higher things. No more than the ancients did the Humanists think that liberal education should be remote from the responsibilities and rewards of the secular life of

mankind. Their study should lead to a knowledge of virtue, but that knowledge should also lead to virtuous action in the public interest, and such action should bring fame as its reward.

The idea of liberal education came to America by way of the English colleges and universities, where the approach of the Renaissance humanists gained favor only in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the study of a broad range of classical texts on a variety of subjects had no institutional home.

In Georgian England, however, the humanists' education took hold. But the English version of a humanistic liberal education showed little interest in the hard training that turned philology into a keen and powerful tool for the critical examination of primary sources and the discovery of truth. Nor was it meant as preparation for an active life of public service. It was an education of one of Castiglione's courtiers rather than one of the civic humanists' chancellors. The result was an education that suited English society in the eighteenth century, one where the landed aristocracy was still powerful and where connections and favor were very important. A liberal education was one suitable to a free man, who, it was assumed, was well-born and rich enough to afford it. It was to be a training aimed at gaining command of arts that were "liberal," "such as fit for Gentlemen and Scholars," as a contemporary dictionary put it, and not those that were servile—"Mechanick Trades and Handicrafts" suited for "meaner People." It was not an education meant to prepare its recipients for a career or some specific function but an education for gentlemen. The goal was to produce a well-rounded man who would feel comfortable and be accepted in the best circles of society and so get on in the world. It placed special emphasis on preparing young men to make the kind of educated conversation required in polite society.

There was no fixed canon of authors on which one was examined at school or university. Their main contribution to the current idea of liberal education was to give their students the opportunity to make the right sort of friends. "Friendship," as one schoolmaster put it, "is known to heighten our joys, and to soften our cares," but no less important, "by the attachments which it forms . . . is often the means of advancing a man's fortunes in this world."

Such an education prized sociability above the solitude of hard study. It took a dim view of solitary study aimed at acquiring knowledge for its own sake, which was called pedantry, a terrible term of abuse at that time. Pedants were thought to be fussy, self-absorbed, engaged in the study of knowledge that was useless. We find fathers writing to warn their sons at the university against the dangers of working too hard and becoming pedants, ruining their health, and damaging their social life. Education was meant to shape character and manners much more than intellect.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century the number of undergraduates entering the universities grew rapidly. Though the new generation came from the same social class as its predecessors, its members thought and acted differently, for the world had changed. The long years of war against France, the arrival of the radical ideas of the French Revolution, the vogue of romantic individualism, and the revival of serious interest in religion that came in their wake unsettled the easy-going society of eighteenth-century England and its emphasis on polite behavior. The pressure of war made the government take at least a few steps toward filling important posts on the basis of competence instead of connections. The response of the university faculties was to revive a medieval device that had fallen into disuse—competitive examinations.

These examinations had the desired effect, absorbing the time and energy of the undergraduates and turning their minds away from dangerous channels. They also enhanced respect for the universities and the teachers in them. The idleness of the eighteenth century was replaced by hard teaching and learning. For most students, a liberal education came to mean the careful study of a limited list of Latin and Greek classics, with emphasis on mastery of the ancient languages, but it was now justified on a new basis. This kind of learning, it was said, cultivated and strengthened the intel-

lectual faculties. Commissions investigating Oxford and Cambridge in the 1850s concluded that "It is the sole business of the University to train the powers of the mind."

This new definition, the defined curriculum, and the examination system that connected them greatly improved both the performance and the self-confidence of university faculties. Before long, however, they came under attack from two new directions. The growth of industry and democracy led to a demand for a more practical schooling that would be "useful" in ways that the Oxbridge liberal education was not. It would train its students for particular vocations, on the one hand, and it would provide the expertise the new kind of leaders needed in the modern world, on the other. At the same time, critics in the mid-nineteenth century complained of the loss of the old values of liberal education undermined by the limited classical curriculum, the sentence-parsing and fact-cramming imposed by the examinations. Liberal education, they insisted, must not be narrow, pedantic, one-sided—in short, illiberal. It must be more than merely useful in a pragmatic sense; it must train the character and the whole man, not merely the mind. But the restless, tumultuous, industrial society of the nineteenth century, increasingly lacking agreement and a common core of values, needed leaders trained in more than style and manners. Such leaders must understand the magnitude of the new problems: "by an effort of speculative imagination, based on a solid understanding of the meaning of industrialism in the context of world history, [they] would be able to give the turbulent society a proper sense of its character and its mission, directing it towards the realization of its uncommon potential." Liberal education must become general education, including languages, literature, history, and the natural sciences. In the words of one writer, "A man of the highest education ought to know something of everything, and everything of something."

The answer of some was "universal knowledge." They urged a broadening of the field of learning to include all that was known and an attempt to synthesize and integrate the information collected by discovering the philosophical principles that underlay it all. As one Victorian put it, "The summit of a liberal education . . . is Philosophy—meaning by Philosophy the sustained effort . . . to frame a complete and reasoned synthesis of the facts of the universe."

The new universal education remained intellectual and academic, not practical and professional. It aimed at broad understanding rather than special expertise, but its champions insisted that although it was not purely useful, it was nonetheless useful. Cardinal Newman was the most famous proponent of the new program, but he resisted the idea of usefulness entirely. "That alone is liberal knowledge," he said, "which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be informed (as it is called) by any end, or absorbed in any art, in order to present itself to our contemplations. The most ordinary pursuits have this specific character, if they are self-sufficient and complete; the highest lose it, when they minister to something beyond them." Newman was an intellectual, an academic, and an Aristotelian and he defended the ancient idea of the value of learning and knowledge for their own sake at a time when the tide was running against it, as it usually does.

The result was the same one that awaited Canute. In the last decades of the century, Newman's idea of knowledge for its own sake and the whole concept of universal knowledge for the purpose of philosophical understanding were swept away by a great tidal wave from across the channel, whose chief source was Germany. All the educational ideas we had considered to this point had this in common: They regarded knowledge as something that existed already. There was little thought of discovering anything true that had not previously been known.

By the nineteenth century, however, the power of natural science and the scientific method to discover new knowledge had become so obvious that it could no longer be prevented from influencing universities. At its core was the German idea of academic freedom, a freedom to investigate new questions

and old in new ways, with a bold willingness to challenge accepted opinion unhampered by traditions from the past. Originality and discovery became the prime values. The idea of the university as a museum, a repository of learning, gave way to the notion that it should be dynamic, a place where knowledge was discovered and generated.

Scientific method and the new values were not confined to the natural sciences but were applied to the old humanistic studies, as well. The new methods and the new zeal for research invigorated the study of history, literature, and theology. The Classics, symbol of the old order and chief target of reformers, flourished more than most disciplines, making great progress in the technical fields of linguistics and philology, broadening the limits of their studies to include all the humanistic disciplines and even the new social science of anthropology. The content and meaning of classical texts became more important than the construal and composition of the classical languages.

These gains, however, exacted a price. The new knowledge required specialization—hard, narrow training at the expense of broad, general education for the purpose of philosophical understanding aimed at by the advocates of "universal knowledge." Champions of the new order, therefore, changed the definition of liberal education. An Oxford classical philologist put it this way: It is "the essence of a liberal education that it should stand in constant relation to the advance of knowledge. Research and discovery are the processes by which truth is directly acquired; education is the preparation of the mind for its reception, and the creation of a truth-loving habit." He believed that knowledge obtained by rigorous research would produce truth and that only truth could lead to morality. Research, therefore would provide a new basis for morality. Useful knowledge, good examples, and wisdom were not to be sought in the past but in the future. That required the application of scientific method to all subjects, which, in turn, demanded specialization. New knowledge, moreover, did not fit neatly into the small number of old packages that made up the traditional university organization. Science and social science kept creating new fields and subfields, all of which had equal claim to attention and a place in a liberal education, since all employed the correct method and all claimed to produce new knowledge and truth. No one could or dared to rank subjects according to an idea of their intrinsic value or their usefulness. Practitioners in each field came to have more in common with their fellow investigators in other universities than with their colleagues in other fields at their own. Both they and their students became more professional in their allegiance and in their attitudes. Preparation for and advancement in a career became the chief concern of both. The distinction between a liberal and a professional education became ever more vague. These developments seem to me to have been the forces that have shaped our own universities and remain dominant today.

I have rehearsed this inadequate capsule history of the idea of a liberal education because I think it may be a useful basis for examining the status of liberal education today and for considering what directions it might need to take in the future. I am struck by the fact that every claim ever made on behalf of liberal education is still being made at some college or university at least some of the time; at some places and some times all the benefits are claimed at the same time.

In evaluating the performance of major American universities in meeting the various goals of liberal education sought over the centuries, I came to conclusions that surprise me. It seems to me that the education provided at a typical liberal arts college today comes closest to achieving the goals sought by English gentlemen in the eighteenth century. To be sure, success in that world did not require any particular set of studies or any specialization. If it had done so, I am sure the training then would have contained some equivalent of our modern departmental major. In most other respects, our curricula today—with their lack of any collection of works or even subjects studied in common, the absence of agreement on any particular method of training the mind, the lack of a culminating examina-

tion testing the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge, the emphasis on well-roundedness (defined only as the opposite of narrowness and achieved by taking a few courses in some specified number of different fields)—fit the model nicely. If we examine the full reality rather than only the formal curriculum, the similarities seem even greater. I submit that in America today the most important social distinction, one almost as significant as the old one between gentle and simple, is whether or not one has a college education. Within the favored group, finer distinctions place a liberal education, as opposed to a vocational or merely professional one, at the top of the social pyramid. Graduates of the better liberal arts colleges are most likely to marry the most desired partners and hold the best positions and appointments in business, their professions, and government. That this is true and widely understood is shown by the fact that each year there are great numbers of applicants for every place in the freshman classes of such colleges at a cost of perhaps $60,000 each year, a phenomenon otherwise inexplicable. Apart from any pre-professional training they may obtain, successful applicants gain about the same advantages as those sought by young Englishmen from their somewhat less formal eighteenth-century education. They sharpen useful skills in writing and speaking, they pick up enough of subjects thought interesting in their circle and the style of discussing them to permit agreeable and acceptable conversation. They learn the style and manner, political opinions and prejudices to make them comfortable in a similarly educated society. They have excellent opportunities to make friends who may be advantageous to them in later life. This education, of course, is purely secular. There is, moreover, no attempt to shape good character, for the better universities lead the country in the direction of a kind of relativism, even nihilism. The message that seems to get through is: "Do your own thing, and demand that everyone else in the world behave according to the strictest possible moral code (as it is currently understood in the halls of the most favored colleges)." No doubt, the absence of religion and the failure to shape character would disappoint an eighteenth-century gentlemen, but in other respects I think he would not be dismayed by what is called a liberal education today.

Other definitions and objectives are, I think, less well served. The search for general, universal knowledge and for the philosophical principles on which it may be based has long since been abandoned. In truth, I think it never had much hope or support. Nor do I think that most modern attempts at liberal education encourage the pursuit of learning and knowledge as an end in itself. I doubt that many students were ever deeply impressed by that goal, but when there was general agreement that there was a core of knowledge worth learning, one that all educated people could share, and one, therefore, that could readily serve as the basis for serious discussion of important questions and thereby, perhaps, yield wisdom, there was a far greater chance of success than there is today.

It might be thought, at least, that those values produced by the study of the natural sciences, of research, and of scientific method flourish in today's version of liberal education; I mean the rigorous training of the mind, the inculcation of a "truth-loving habit," and the universal triumph of the scientific method. I am inclined to think otherwise. In liberal arts colleges today, the study of mathematics and the natural sciences is separated from other studies in important ways. The study of the hard sciences is committed to rigorous training of the mind in a single method, the scientific one. Teachers of science continue to believe in the cumulative and progressive character of knowledge and in the possibility of moving toward truth. Students who major in these subjects are likely to acquire the method and to share these beliefs. Though teachers and students are interested in the practical uses of science, I think many of them come to value learning and knowledge as good in themselves. But only a minority of students in liberal arts colleges major in mathematics or natural science. In some programs, students who do not major in these subjects are required to study

neither; in others, there is a minimal requirement that rarely achieves the desired goals.

But hasn't the scientific method made its way into other disciplines, and can't its benefits be obtained through them? Where the attempt has been made most seriously, in the social sciences, it has been a failure. It is increasingly obvious that trying to deal with human beings, creatures of independent will and purpose, as if they were objects like atoms, molecules, cells, and tissues, produces unsatisfactory results. The social sciences, far from producing a progressive narrowing of differences and a growing agreement on a common body of knowledge and of principles capable of explanation and prediction, like the natural sciences, has seen each generation undermine the beliefs of its predecessors rather than building on and refining them. What we see is a war of methodologies within and between fields. In fact, the fundamental idea of the whole enterprise, the attempt to remove values from the consideration of human behavior and simply to apply the scientific method, now seems most implausible.

To me, however, the greatest shortcoming of most attempts at liberal education today, with their individualized, unfocused, and scattered curricula, is their failure to enhance the students' understanding of their role as free citizens of a free society and the responsibilities it entails. Every successful civilization must possess a means for passing on its basic values to each generation. When it no longer does so, its days are numbered. The danger is particularly great in a society such as our own, the freest the world has known, whose special character is to encourage doubt and questioning even of its own values and assumptions. Such questioning has always been and still remains a distinctive, admirable, and salutary part of our education and way of life. So long as there was a shared belief in the personal and social morality taught by the Judeo-Christian tradition and so long as there was a belief in the excellence of the tradition and institutions of Western Civilization and of this nation, so long as these values were communicated in the schools, such questioning was also safe. Our tradition of free critical inquiry counteracted the tendency for received moral and civic teachings from becoming ethnocentric complacency and intolerance and prevented a proper patriotism from degenerating into arrogant chauvinism. When students came to college they found their values and prejudices challenged by the books they read, by their fellow-students from other places and backgrounds, and by their teachers.

I suggest to you that the situation is far different today. Whatever the formal religious attachments of our students may be, I find that a firm belief in the traditional values and the ability to understand and the willingness to defend them are rare. Still rarer is an informed understanding of the traditions and institutions of our western civilization and of our country and an appreciation of their special qualities and values. The admirable, even the uniquely good elements are taken for granted as if they were universally available, had always existed, and required no special effort to preserve. All shortcomings, however, are quickly noticed and harshly condemned. Our society is judged not against the experience of human societies in other times and places, but against the Kingdom of Heaven. There is great danger in this, because our society, no less than others now and in the past, requires the allegiance and devotion of its members if it is to defend itself and make progress toward a better life.

Traditional beliefs, however, are not replaced by a different set of values resting on different traditions. Instead, I find a kind of cultural void, an ignorance of the past, a sense of rootlessness and aimlessness, as though not only the students but also the world was born yesterday, a feeling that they are attached to the society in which they live only incidentally and accidentally. Having little or no sense of the human experience through the ages, of what has been tried, of what has succeeded and what has failed, of what is the price of cherishing some values as opposed to others, or of how values relate to one another, they leap from acting as though anything is possible, without cost, to despairing that nothing is possible. They are inclined to see other people's values as mere prejudices, one no better than another,

while viewing their own as entirely valid, for they see themselves as autonomous entities entitled to be free from interference by society and from obligation to it.

Because of the cultural vacuum in their earlier education and because of the informal education they receive from the communications media, which both shape and reflect the larger society, today's liberal arts students come to college, it seems to me, bearing a sort of relativism verging on nihilism, a kind of individualism that is really isolation from community. The education they receive in college these days, I believe, is more likely to reinforce this condition than to change it. In this way, too, it fails in its liberating function, in its responsibility to shape free men and women. Earlier generations who came to college with traditional beliefs rooted in the past had them challenged by hard questioning and the requirement to consider alternatives and were thereby unnerved, and thereby liberated, by the need to make reasoned choices. The students of today and tomorrow deserve the same opportunity. They, too, must be freed from the tyranny that comes from the accident of being born at a particular time in a particular place, but that liberation can only come from a return to the belief that we may have something to learn from the past. The challenge to the relativism, nihilism, and privatism of the present can best be presented by a careful and respectful examination of earlier ideas, ideas that have not been rejected by the current generation but are simply unknown to them. When they have been allowed to consider the alternatives, they, too, can enjoy the freedom of making an informed and reasoned choice.

The liberal education needed for the students of today and tomorrow, I suggest, should include a common core of studies for all its students. That would have many advantages, for it would create an intellectual communion among students and teachers that does not now exist and would encourage the idea that learning and knowledge are good things in themselves. It would also affirm that some questions are of fundamental importance to everyone, regardless of his origins and personal plans, that we must all think about our values, responsibilities, and our relationships with one another and with the society in which we live. The core I would propose would include the study of the literature, philosophy, and history (in which I include the history of the arts and sciences) of our culture from its origins. It would be a study that tries to meet the past on its own terms, examining it critically but also respectfully, always keeping alive the possibility that the past may contain wisdom that can be useful to us today. It would be a study that was consciously and deliberately moral and civic in its purposes, eager to examine the values discussed, private and public, personal and political. Such an education would show the modern student times and worlds where the common understanding was quite different from his own—where it was believed that man has capacities and a nature that are different from those of the other animals, that his nature is gregarious and that his flourishing requires an ordered beneficent society, that his nature can reach its highest perfection only by living a good life in a well-ordered society. It would reveal that a good society requires citizens who understand and share its values, which includes examining it and them critically, and accept their own connection with it and dependence on it, that there must be mutual respect among citizens and common effort by them both for their own flourishing and for its survival. Students enjoying such an education would encounter the idea that freedom is essential to the good and happy life of human beings but that freedom cannot exist without good laws and respect for them.

Aristotle rightly observed that, in matters other than scientific, people learn best not by precept but by example. Let me conclude, therefore, by making it clear that the colleges who claim to offer a liberal education today and tomorrow must make their commitment to freedom clear by their actions. To a university, even more than to other institutions in a free society, the right of free speech, the free exchange of ideas, the presentation of a variety of opinions, especially of unpopular points of view, the freedom to move about and make use of public facilities without in-

terference, are vital. Discussion, argument, and persuasion are the devices appropriate to the life of the mind, not selective exclusion, suppression, obstruction, and intimidation. Yet in my time our colleges and universities have often seen speakers shouted down or prevented from speaking, buildings forcibly occupied and access to them denied, different modes of intimidation employed with much success. Most of the time the perpetrators have gone unpunished in any significant way. These assaults typically have come from just one section of opinion, and they have been very successful. Over the years few advocates of views that challenge the campus consensus have been invited, and fewer still, sometimes victims of such behavior, have come. Colleges and universities that permit such attacks on freedom and take no firm and effective action to deter and punish those who carry them out sabotage the most basic educational freedoms. Yet to defend those freedoms is the first obligation of anyone who claims to engage in liberal education.

Ever less can students benefit from different opinions and approaches offered by their teachers, for faculty members with atypical views grow ever rarer on the campus. For some years now I have been asking students to name professors who seem not to share the views common among the faculty. There are some seven hundred members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, but the largest number ever named in these inquiries was ten to fifteen. This year the highest number I heard came to three. This has no small significance for the chance at a liberal education, for the opportunity not only to put uncomfortable questions to the teacher, but also to challenge him on the authority of one of his peers is vital to that end. That is how things were early in my career. In the critical fields of history and government there were a few teachers who did not conform to the standard opinions, but they had a great effect, for the students regarded them so well as teachers that they filled their classes in great numbers and challenged other teachers with their ideas.

Once, my late student and friend Alvin Bernstein was teaching a course in the history of Western civilization the same semester that Allan Bloom was teaching his famous course in political philosophy. Al was discussing Plato's Republic when the subject of some of Socrates' less pleasant recommendations came to hand. A student objected that Al's presentation was incorrect, that Plato did not mean for these to be taken at face value, that there was a deeper, ironical, in fact opposite meaning to the dialogue that was not for the ordinary reader but for the more intelligent and worthy people. Al asked, "Who told you that?" "Professor Bloom," the student answered. "Ah," said Al without missing a beat. "That is what he told you, but his deeper ironic meaning is not for the ordinary reader but for the more intelligent and worthy people."

Alas, few faculties have great teachers like Bernstein or Bloom in any number, but colleges must work hard to acquire and keep such talented teachers with such diverse opinions if there is to be any hope for a truly liberal education.

If you see something, say nothing

by Andrew C. McCarthy

It was a report of the now numbingly familiar sort. Witnesses at the synagogue in Paris recounted that an Iranian immigrant had been screaming "*Allahu Akbar!*" while he chased the rabbi and his son. When he finally caught up, he slashed away at them with a box-cutter, causing severe lacerations. Nevertheless, the Associated Press assured readers that "[a]n official investigation was underway *to determine a possible motive*."

Quite a mystery, that.

It is necessary to search for some "possible" motive because to notice the actual and perfectly obvious motive is *verboten* in the judgment of both the legacy media and Western governments. The motive, of course, is adherence to Islamic supremacist ideology, a mainstream interpretation of Muslim doctrine commonly referred to by the shorthand "Islamist."

Indeed, just this April, the AP revised its stylebook to posit new guidelines for use of the term "Islamist." In so doing, the news service deferred to admonitions from the Council on American-Islamic Relations. CAIR, the Muslim Brotherhood's influential public-relations-cum-lawfare arm in the United States, is a longtime supporter of Hamas, the terrorist organization that doubles as the Brotherhood's Palestinian branch.

Before these revisions, the definition off which the AP had been working was reasonably accurate. An *Islamist*, according to the old guidelines, was "a supporter of government in accord with the laws of Islam." Such supporters make up a sizeable percentage of the 1.4 billion-strong global Islamic *ummah* (the community), and thus reflect a wide range of Muslim notions about how best to impose these "laws of Islam"—the societal framework and politico-legal system known as *sharia* (the path). But all Islamists agree that they must be imposed. That is what makes an Islamist an Islamist. The dramatic ascendancy of Islamists—the implementation of their substantially anti-democratic system through democratic procedures—is the story of the so-called Arab Spring.

There is plenty of disagreement within the *ummah* about what constitutes sharia, which is derived from the Koran and other sources of Islamic scripture, in particular the hadith—authoritative collections of the words and deeds of Mohammed, Islam's warrior prophet. Some claim it is merely a set of aspirational guidelines intended as a private behavioral compass designed to achieve a Muslim's personal experience of the divine. This construction, though held by various reformers and modernizing "secular Muslims," flies in the face of some stubborn realities.

Sharia, for example, is the law of Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran, bastions of fundamentalist Islam that admit of no other legal systems, that employ "religious police" to promote strict sharia compliance, and that routinely apply Islam's harsh corporal punishments, such as scourging and even stoning. Furthermore, even in Islamic countries that attempt to meld sharia with other legal systems (e.g., Napoleonic law), sharia is given pride

of place and enforced both officially, in civil and criminal court cases, and culturally, by public mores.

The claims that sharia is aspirational and a matter of personal conscience are further contradicted, by its emphasis on governance: Only a small percentage of Islamic ideology prescribes what we in the West would recognize as religious principles (e.g., the oneness of Allah); the lion's share is a thoroughgoing regulation of political and social life, from economic and military affairs through interpersonal relations and matters of hygiene. In addition, sharia has long been codified: The treatise "*Umdat al-Salik*," reflecting the broad consensus on sharia's prescriptions across the four ancient Sunni jurisprudential schools, was assembled by the renowned scholar Ahmad ibn an-Naqib al-Misri in the fourteenth century. It is translated into English as *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, and is readily available through most large book retailers—complete with endorsements, in the manual's foreword, from such influential institutions as Cairo's al-Azhar University, the seat of Sunni learning since the tenth century, and the International Institute of Islamic Thought, an Islamist think-tank headquartered in Virginia by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Islamic supremacist interpretation of sharia found in *Reliance of the Traveller* and systematically taught by the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's most significant Islamic mass-movement, is the dynamic Islam of the Muslim Middle East. It is also gradually making inroads in the West, courtesy of a Brotherhood stratagem best described as "voluntary apartheid." The idea is for Muslims to immigrate and integrate, but not assimilate. They are encouraged, instead, to move into Islamic enclaves, organizing their lives around the local mosque and Islamic community center, which the Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna stressed as the "axis" of the movement. The goal is to pressure the host government to abide an ever-increasing degree of sharia autonomy.

This form of sharia, to which Islamists widely adhere and aspire, is fundamentally antithetical to Western liberalism. It rejects individual liberty and privacy, equality before the law for women and non-Muslims, freedom of conscience and speech, economic liberty, and even the bedrock principle that a body politic has the power to make law for itself, irrespective of any religious or ideological code. Sharia also expressly endorses jihad. These are the "laws of Islam" to which the AP refers without describing them. The installation of these laws is the top priority of emerging Islamist "democracies," which establish Islam as the state religion and enshrine sharia in their new constitutions—such new governments as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose sharia constitutions were drafted with the helping hand of the U.S. State Department.

The former AP definition of *Islamist* elaborated that "[t]hose who view the Quran as a political model encompass a wide range of Muslims, from mainstream politicians to militants known as jihadi." April's revisions bowdlerized this definition, though. The AP denied the ideological component—the imperative to establish governance under the laws of Islam—from Islamic supremacists who engage in violence. Henceforth, an *Islamist* is to be understood as merely "an advocate or supporter of a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam." The term is not to be used "as a synonym for Islamic fighters, militants, extremists, or radicals."

In a vertiginous bit of incoherence, the AP conceded that such aggressors "may or may not be Islamists"—although it was not explained how they "may not be" if, as is the case, what moves them to aggression is this aforementioned "desire to reorder government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam." Moreover, it is difficult to see how a Muslim who wants to supplant the U.S. Constitution and Western law with repressive sharia is not "extremist" and "radical," even if, to our great relief, he seeks to achieve this end through "a political movement" rather than savagery.

To support their cleaving of supremacist ideology from the violence it reliably inspires, the best the AP could offer was the tautology

that because some Islamists are non-violent, Islamists are not necessarily violent: "Those who view the Quran as a political model encompass a wide range of Muslims, from mainstream politicians to militants known as jihadi." That, however, simply demonstrates that the press has defined "mainstream" down, not that "Islamist" ought to be spruced into respectability. Nevertheless, AP journalists were instructed to "be specific and use the name of militant affiliations: al-Qaida-linked, Hezbollah, Taliban, etc.," rather than branding terrorists as "Islamists." The reasoning may be gibberish but the message was clear: Islam is never to be portrayed as relevant to, much less causative of, violence. If you see something, say nothing.

With inevitable irony, less than two weeks after the AP codified the expungement of Islamist ideology from Islamic terrorism, a pair of Islamists bombed the Boston Marathon. Dozens were wounded, many losing limbs. Three spectators were killed: two young women, Krystle Campbell and Lu Lingzi, and eight-year-old Martin Richard.

The two improvised explosive devices used in the attack mirrored a type commonly used by jihadists throughout the last decade to wage a terrorist war against American and allied forces—small homemade pressure-cooker bombs, easy to carry, camouflage, and detonate remotely. The al Qaeda network does not merely deploy these IEDs; they teach fledgling terrorists how to make them and even publish the recipe in a widely disseminated jihadist periodical called *Inspire*.

Yet, in the days after the Marathon bombing, before the culprits were identified, neither our extensive recent history of jihadist mass-murder plots against dense civilian targets, nor the jihad's nimble post-9/11 shift from heavy bombs and airliner missiles to IEDs counted for much. Conventional media wisdom held it inconceivable that the bombers could have been Muslims. Thus was the most likely explanation dismissed out of hand. To the contrary, speculation ran rampant that the terrorists were "right-wing extremists," bizarrely said to be inspired by the fact that the Marathon is run on "Patriot's Day." Writing at the left-wing Salon.com, David Sirota instantiated the Zeitgeist with an appalling column entitled "Let's hope the Boston Marathon bomber is a white American."

Well, as Kevin D. Williamson quipped at *National Review*, our cognoscenti did get a pair of "literal Caucasians"—just not the kind they were bargaining for. The terrorists were young Muslim brothers, the Tsarnaevs, whose family had immigrated to the United States from Chechnya, a hotbed of jihadist violence in the Northern Caucasus. The tale that surrounds them—the combustible and all-too-familiar mix of steely Islamist determination with Leviathan's Clouseau-meets-Magoo approach to counterterrorism—would be comic if its wages were not so painful. In a memoir of the government's first grappling with Islamic terrorism in our homeland in the early 1990s (when I was a federal prosecutor), I labeled this syndrome "Willful Blindness." If anything, things have significantly deteriorated in the ensuing twenty years, to something more like "Depraved Indifference."

It turns out that our nation's $100 billion per annum national security edifice—the gargantuan intelligence community along with the FBI and a newer bureaucratic behemoth, the Department of Homeland Security—was acutely aware of the Marathon jihad's apparent ringleader. The older Tsarnaev brother, twenty-six-year-old Tamerlan, namesake of a fourteenth-century Muslim warrior whose campaigns through Asia Minor are legendary for their brutalization of non-Muslims, had been brought to the attention of American authorities by the Russian intelligence service. The Russians surmised that he'd been "radicalized"—another conventional term that sedulously elides mention of what one has been radicalized by—and might be spoiling to join the jihad in Chechnya or nearby Dagestan. Consequently, the CIA entered him into a terrorism database.

Separately, the FBI conducted an investigation in which agents actually interviewed Tamerlan face-to-face, confirming that he was an Islamist. We have since learned that his wife, an American Christian named Katherine Russell who lived with him in the small apartment

where the Marathon bombs were built, had converted to Islam, donning the veil and isolating herself from American acquaintances in favor of other Muslim women. Tamerlan took to studying with Sheikh Feiz Mohammed, a former boxer like himself, but also a notorious sharia hardliner who spews bile against non-Muslims and endorses jihadist violence. Tamerlan even began maintaining YouTube playlists glorifying Islamic supremacist conquest, which included a ditty called "I Will Dedicate My Life to Jihad." One of the lists he entitled, simply, "Terrorists."

Yet the FBI closed its file on Tsarnaev, concluding that the investigation had turned up "no derogatory information." How could that be? Easy: The government may have concluded that Tsarnaev was steeped in jihadist ideology, but, like the AP, it has internalized the politically correct guide to what it fastidiously calls "violent extremism"—i.e., Islamic terror without the Islam. In accordance with these protocols, Islamic supremacist ideology is utterly unrelated to terrorism carried out by Muslims.

For those of us not in this hallucinatory thrall, it comes as no surprise that Tamerlan Tsarnaev did, in fact, travel to the Northern Caucasus, just as Russian intelligence suspected he would. He remained in that region for six months, reportedly meeting up with veteran jihadists. Given the advanced degree of sophistication suggested by the IEDs the Tsarnaevs eventually deployed, it is a virtual certainty that Tamerlan received guerrilla training during his journey—enough, no doubt, to instruct his younger brother Dzhokhar, when the elder brother finally returned to the United States last year. That re-entry, it bears observing, raised no terror watchlist alarms or other red flags. After all, the file had been closed. Yes, Tsarnaev may have been a five-alarm Islamist—hiding not in plain sight but, rather, not at all. Yet, so far as the government was concerned, he had not acted on his ideology . . . yet.

"Fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them," commands Allah in the Koran's sura 9:5. "And seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war." The war ends in one of only two ways: conversion or submission. Sura 9's "verses of the sword" elaborate that conversion requires the defeated to "repent, and establish regular prayers, and pay *Zakat*"—the Muslim obligation of "charitable" giving, which, as *Reliance of the Traveller* explains, calls for one-eighth of contributions to be diverted to support violent jihad. Submission, sura 9:29 instructs, allows non-Muslims to live only as *dhimmis*: an inferior caste that surrenders to the authority of sharia and pays the *Jizya*—a poll-tax that is accepted as tribute provided that some humiliation attends the payment so the non-Muslims "feel themselves subdued."

These are only the best-known aggressor verses. There are over 100 verses in the Koran that explicitly or implicitly endorse holy war. And that is what jihad, in the classic sense, is. Because jihad is a central tenet of Islam, authentic Muslim moderates must try to reinterpret it, to render it as a personal, internal struggle to become a better person—although even this overhaul means "better" not based on some universal standard of the good, but in the peculiarly Islamic sense of becoming more sharia-compliant. Still, the revisionist effort cannot bleach out the Koran's jihad, which is incontestably forcible in nature. As *Reliance of the Traveller* succinctly teaches: "*Jihad* means to war against non-Muslims, and is etymologically derived from the word *mujahada*, signifying warfare to establish the religion."

Warfare to establish the religion. Recall that establishing the religion—installing the laws of Islam—is what being an Islamist is all about. Warfare is just a method; it doesn't change the underlying ideology. Indeed, if anything, it makes the ideology more pronounced.

This is why the Western depiction of jihadists is so risible. You are not to see them as "Islamists"; they are "violent extremists" . . . just make sure to avert your eyes from what it is that they are being *extreme* about. Violence, however, is a tactic, not an ideology; and appending "ism" to "extreme" cannot obscure that the word is an adjective in search of something to modify. That something is Islam. That is what the violence is about. Jihadists do not kill wantonly. They kill for a very specific

purpose: to install the sharia legal system and societal framework. That this is a notoriously ruthless form of extortion does not mean it lacks extortion's cold logic. The installation of sharia is what the Koran and hadith mean by "establish the religion."

"It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated." So taught Banna, the aforementioned Muslim Brotherhood founder. The mission of Islam, he elaborated, is "to impose its law on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet." To achieve global hegemony, the Egyptian academic conceived a sophisticated plan for ground-up revolution, starting with indoctrination of the Muslim individual and family, building outward. The strategy was to pressure and infiltrate every influential institution of society, particularly academe, media, and government. A key goal, particularly in the early, strength-gaining stages, was for Islamists to ingratiate themselves with the society targeted for conquest. As internal Brotherhood memoranda seized by the FBI from the home of a top organization operative proclaimed, the American-based Islamists see their mission here primarily as "sabotage"—a "grand jihad" aimed at "the elimination and destruction of Western civilization from within." But the specter of certain violence always hovers.

Banna called it the "art of death." The laws of Islam could not ultimately be implemented without committing to the necessity of martyrdom and death. Not only does lethality directly clear the field of opposition; it terrorizes the infidel opponent. The extortionate effect, the fear of the next savage round, renders him more submissive to the jihad's softer iterations—not least, the mere "political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam," which our media and government are so anxious to bifurcate from Islamist violence.

We cannot protect ourselves by airbrushing the terrorism out of Islamist ideology. Propagation of the latter leads inexorably to instances of the former. We can continue deluding ourselves into believing this is not the case, but then we'd better prepare for more Bostons.

Clearing London's fog
by Pat Rogers

Most times it's hard to match, let alone top, an early success. Just ask those producers of movie series who tried to follow up hits like *Rambo* or *The Exorcist*. The same thing applies to literature. "It is the fate of sequels to disappoint those who have waited for them," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson in the dedication to *Catriona*. He feared that the hero of *Kidnapped*, David Balfour, had been left to kick his heels too long, and "must expect his late re-appearance to be greeted with hoots, if not with missiles." Biographers occasionally struggle with the same problem. Irvin Ehrenpreis wrote two brilliant volumes for his thee-part life of Jonathan Swift, but seems to have lost interest when he neared the end-zone, while J. H. Plumb simply gave up on his masterly account of Robert Walpole after he got within thirty yards of the line. Jerry White faced a similar prospect when he decided to add a clincher to his much-praised books on London in the twentieth century (2001) and in the nineteenth century (2007). The Hanoverian age had not previously been his home turf, and he may have dreaded some of the hoots that Stevenson anticipated. But, unlike *Catriona*, White's London III fully lives up to what has gone before.[1] No call for the missiles: Bring out the garlands once more.

The title of White's book, *A Great and Monstrous Thing*, comes from the section on the capital in Daniel Defoe's *Tour through Great Britain*. Size matters here, as the monstrosity was a function of the city's dynamic surge in population, building, and (for some) prosperity. As White points out, London had recently overtaken the relatively stagnant Paris as the largest city in the West, if not in the whole world. It left far behind even Amsterdam, which continued to expand until the second half of the century. At two thirds of a million in 1750, London dwarfed places like Berlin, Madrid, and Rome, each with less than a quarter of its population. Only Naples was coming up on the outside at 300,000. Equally important, London dominated the nation as no other urban center did: England had only a dozen or so towns big enough, at around 10,000 people, to make them regional hubs, and none at all bigger than the roughly 30,000 reached by Bristol and Norwich. (At the time of the American Revolution, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston would have ranked among the top ten British cities: At the mid-century Charleston had been as large as Manchester, Leeds, or Sheffield.) By contrast, France, the states of Italy and Germany, and even the tiny Netherlands were dotted with substantial cities. Such rivals ought to have induced healthy competition, and in some ways they did. Yet London flourished partly because of its unique position. It dominated national government, trade, shipping, finance, culture, and entertainment—all these are among aspects of its life vividly exposed by White. Until the Industrial Revolution started to make inroads in the 1770s, this monopoly by the metropolis extended even to manufacturing and industry.

1 *A Great and Monstrous Thing: London in the Eighteenth Century*, by Jerry White; Harvard University Press, 670 pages, $39.99.

Today people complain about the dominance of the South-East in the British economy, but the region exercises no more cultural or financial influence than London did three hundred years ago. And there were more smoggy days in London town then, too.

How is an author to render the life of a city in all its myriad teeming forms? One approach would be a straight chronological narrative, but that has never been the favored way. Contemporary accounts, such as those of John Strype and William Maitland on which White draws heavily, are organized generally on a topographic scheme by parish or electoral ward. The topical approach predominates in a still useful history by Walter Besant, a novelist who clashed with Henry James and a brother-in-law of the more famous social-reforming Annie. At the outset, Besant declared "With the accession of the House of Brunswick [in 1714] the narrative of events in London practically ceases," an absurd claim but one that allowed him to stuff his volume with a vast amount of facts and figures. These include appendices telling us what time each church held its services, the locations of dissenting chapels and almshouses, and the various offices relating to taxes and the like, with a list of tavern signs. By comparison White describes a full range of events, but although he too supplies abundant statistical evidence (naturally more reliable than those Besant used), he doesn't have these conveniently set out in separate tables as his predecessor did.

Recent historians have continued to prefer a topical layout. The Marxist or *marxisant* group has used this method to emphasize the social conflicts of the day. George Rudé's *Hanoverian London 1714–1808* puts a strong focus on riots and industrial disputes, which partly explains its odd terminal date; Jack Lindsay's more derivative *The Monster City: Defoe's London 1688–1730* draws its title from the same quote as White's book. Both of these depend heavily on a classic study by Dorothy George, *London Life in the 18th Century.* Though White reprocesses much of the material on George's work, he surpasses her by dint of a wider range of concerns and of the advance in databanks to beef up information that we now enjoy. Full-dress scholarly histories of the period can be supplemented by brisk and readable accounts of Dr. Johnson's London by Dorothy Marshall and Liza Picard. None of these, for all their individual merits, remotely competes with White in terms of intellectual richness or variety of content.

One thing that marks off the new book is the space devoted to the pleasures of the town, especially those of high society. George wasn't interested in the subject and the Marxists gave it pretty short shrift. Yet, in truth, the liveliest passages in White's treatment deal with the hazards of life for the dispossessed members of society, at the hands of sickness, crime, the law, or their betters. A crucial passage turns up in the preface:

> The fashions of history-writing have swung in recent years towards a celebration of the English eighteenth century as an age of artistic and scientific genius, of reason, civility, elegance, and manners. It has often been summarized as the Age of Politeness. And when we think of England in this century it is really London we have in mind. . . . There is a good deal of truth in this characterization, but a proper balance needs to be struck. For this was a city (and an Age) of starving poverty as well as shining polish, a city of civility and a city of truculence, a city of decorum and a city of lewdness, a city of joy and a city of despair, a city of sentiment and a city of cruelty.

Well, yes; but while these rhetorical flourishes open the way nicely for the book to come, they invite challenges. It is strange to describe the swing of historical emphasis in these terms when we recall works published in the last two decades which tilt the balance the other way, and many of which White himself deploys to great effect. I'm thinking of studies with titles like *The London Mob*: *Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England*; *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London*; *The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital*; *Flunkeys and Scullions: Life Below Stairs in Georgian England*; and *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law.* All these came out in the last ten years. Going

back only into the 1990s, we had major studies of *The London Hanged* and *The Hanging Tree*. It is good that the black population (up to perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 of the 675,000 total) should have been decently treated by several books in the last thirty years, including one devoted to *Black Dance in London, 1730–1850*—but this hardly indicates neglect. The "polite" royal borough of Chelsea creeps into the bibliography via *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations 1733–1766*. Meanwhile several popular books aimed at a more general audience, below White's radar, have come out under titles such as *City of Sin: London and its Vices*; *Bedlam: London and its Mad*; and *Conmen and Cutpurses*. This, along with wider surveys of London as "the sinful city," replete with scandal, bawdry, sodomy, and bagnios (essentially massage parlors).

All these elements find their way into White's coverage, and the author writes well on aspects of the lives of women and gay men which would have been impossible to chronicle in time of Besant or even Dorothy George, but he has numerous paths in modern research to guide him. Finally, it's doubtful whether we always have London in mind when considering the eighteenth century. Plenty of the best modern scholarship points us not just outside the narrow borders of England to Scotland and Ireland, but to beacons of provincial society such as the Lunar Society of Birmingham. Nobody told James Watt, Matthew Boulton, Erasmus Darwin, Joseph Priestley, or Josiah Wedgwood that London was the only place to be.

Whatever the basis for the approach White has chosen, it yields spectacular results in terms of graphic illustrative material. Rightly he does not spare the reader any of the grisly details. We read for instance of a woman who gouged out her children's eyes to excite pity and alms from passers-by. Other scams to which the indigent had recourse involved faking epilepsy or plastering their legs with flour and sheep's blood to simulate mortification. Beggars throng the text: In the 1790s, we are told, a third of vagrants on the London streets were Irish. White reminds us of the terrible prison conditions producing the highly contagious jail fever; the plight of hapless debtors; the gruesome progress of criminals to the scaffold at Tyburn, with stops along the way that seem almost blasphemously close to the stations of the cross; and the miseries of prostitutes, but also their splendors when they rose up the social ladder. This happened to a few such as the courtesan Kitty Fisher, who was linked to dukes and earls, married an MP, and became the subject of a sumptuous portrait by Joshua Reynolds. But of course, these success stories made up exceptions to a rule which prescribed a life for most women on the streets that was nasty, brutish, and sometimes all too prolonged.

You did not have to be a criminal or a whore to undergo massive deprivations. Ordinary working folk, common seamen, street-vendors, shoeblacks, and people in a huge array of low-paid occupations were guaranteed a borderline existence. This was especially true in the densest of the slums, such as the maze of alleys in St. Giles, near the modern theaterland district at the top of Charing Cross Road, or the crime-infested backways around Chick Lane that squatted beside the offal-filled Fleet Ditch adjacent to Smithfield market. Of course crime was not the only thing infesting such spots. Along with other plagues, White has a nice passage on "that London torment, the bedbug." Nobody in that unsterile age was immune: Newspapers carried an ad by someone claiming to be "Bug-Doctor to the King." The ever-present fires that rampaged through the city in earlier centuries disproportionately affected the poor in their combustible lath and plaster shanties, as did the "falling houses [that] thunder on your head," in the words of Samuel Johnson's early satire on *London*. (Not that this problem disappeared overnight, witness the collapse of the Clennams' house in *Little Dorrit*.) These are not new topics, but repeatedly White finds striking examples to light up even the most familiar aspects of life among the submerged classes.

High life produces fewer eye-catching instances. But White finds room for pleasures of the town among the upper class, noting that these were often shared with socially inferior groups, and tells some enlightening tales. One good story, new to me, concerns a wager at White's gentlemen's club (which then con-

noted dining and gambling, not lap-dances): "Ld. Cholmondeley has given two guineas to Lord Derby, to receive 500 Gs. whenever his lordship fucks a woman in a Balloon one thousand yards from the Earth." This was the Lord Derby who gave his name to so many horse-races. Neither peer can have collected. Such a thing might not come as much of a shock to later members of White's, among them Evelyn Waugh and Randolph Churchill. But what would the patrons at Churchill Downs think about commemorating the sort of men who aspired to join the quarter-mile high club?

The gap between rich and poor forms one of the fault-lines that the book explores. Another is the on-running clash between the twin cities of London and Westminster. Across the river lay Southwark, irrelevant to many of the most urgent issues. These divides were imperfectly bridged in the period, just as the long-needed second crossing to supplement higgledy-piggledy old London Bridge was long resisted—thanks to the opposition of vested interests ranging from the boatmen to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who held the gift of the horse-ferry from Lambeth to Westminster. White concludes that the balance sheet on how far the age got in handling "London's multilayered divisions" must contain many entries on the debit side: "There would be much work still to do." These departing words neatly recast his book as a prequel to the two segments of his triptych which have already appeared.

Any topical history, lacking the inbuilt teleology that a narrative account possesses, will raise questions of organization. Where should a given subject be placed, in chapter X, Y, or Z? And what order should they come in—XZY or YZX perhaps? White's solution is bold and for the most part very successful. To understand his aims, we need to look at the structure of the book in some detail.

The author begins with two introductory chapters, one on the first half of the period, subtitled "James Gibbs's London," and one on the latter half, "Robert Adam's London." The invocation of these architects permits White to describe the skyline of the city. Gibbs contributed the famous spire of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, as well as the bijou delicacy of the Oxford Chapel—this stood on the trailblazing Portland estate which extended polite and prosperous London northwards, in the direction of modern Harley Street, home of pricey doctors, and Portland Place, home of the BBC. Adam gave us the Adelphi, a riverside project involving multistory terraces of staggering originality that hovered on the edge of financial disaster and only became profitable after parliament set up a public lottery to fund it. The two architects fit White's case as outsiders, Scots arriving in the capital after a training on the Continent—Gibbs was a Catholic and a Jacobite to boot, hence his work is showcased rather than the more spectacular creations of Nicholas Hawksmoor. But these chapters do not deal just with the built environment in terms of bricks and mortar. They consider too the infrastructure of London, the tangled road system of this "sclerotically congested city," and the lack of any plans to direct its headlong growth. The dedicated observer Horace Walpole saw new buildings spring up if he stayed home at Strawberry Hill for as little as two weeks: "Rows of houses shoot out every way like a polypus." He wrote this on July 16, 1776. You might have thought Walpole, a strong supporter of American independence, would have been agog for news on a more global issue—but for Londoners the world has always revolved around their city.

After this come four more parts, labeled "People," "Work," "Culture," and "Power." Each contains chapters named for an individual and a topic: "Samuel Johnson's London—Britons," "John Wilkes's London—Politics and Government," and so on. A potted biography of each individual leads off. Inevitably this arrangement has something arbitrary about it. Ignatius Sancho stands not just for his fellow blacks from Africa and India, but for a variety of immigrants including gypsies, Jews, and Huguenots. Again, Johnson and Scottish medical men (strangely omitting the remarkable John Hunter, anatomist, collector, and grave-robber by proxy) appear not in culture but among people; literature, journalism, and the book trade go into a section on Eliza Haywood and "Print, Pictures, and the Profes-

sions." Haywood is a good choice, though the content of her novels is not explored and her significance thus blurred. A laudable desire to give women a better crack of the whip leads White to choose three other female exemplary figures. However, the choices fall on Teresa Cornelys, the promoter of masquerades with a somewhat checkered career; Mary Stracey, a prostitute of eighteen hanged for complicity in a murder, whom nobody has ever heard of; and Mary Young, a pickpocket who might have modeled herself on Moll Flanders, and you would only know if you'd spent long hours with the *Newgate Calendar*. This could look like tokenism, and invidious tokenism at that.

Each of the chapters processes a huge range of data with admirable clarity. They draw on a bewildering array of sources, including some little-used manuscripts, such as the papers of the louche diplomat and satirist Charles Hanbury Williams. Well-thumbed diaries such as those of Dudley Ryder and James Boswell are exploited to great effect—Boswell, not surprisingly, comes into his own when matter such as heavy drinking, prostitution, and executions enter the text. White has managed to find apposite references on most topics in the forty-eight fat volumes of Horace Walpole's correspondence, which is like locating a dozen Easter eggs scattered along the Appalachian Trail. The liveliest potted life is that of the radical tailor Francis Place, while the most successful chapter is the one headed by the philanthropist Jonas Hanway, noted for his campaign against tea-drinking and his "effeminate" recourse to an umbrella. Within a few pages White manages to provide succinct descriptions of charities, the Foundling Hospital, workhouses, charity schools, the Wesleyan movement, illicit Fleet marriages, and a great deal else. This qualifies as a masterpiece of intellectual compression. After this, the story comes to a tumultuous climax with carnage in the city during the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780.

It is a great tribute to the author's skill in deploying such a vast amount of material that he has made only a few venial slips. He once confuses Lady Mary Wortley Montagu with Elizabeth Montagu, and he has a couple of minor misdates (for example, the outbreak of bubonic plague reached Marseille in 1720, not 1722). By no means all of Alexander Pope's patrons were Jacobites, and not many historians follow White in accepting recent claims that one more of these, Lord Burlington, was a secret adherent of the Stuart Pretender. The founder of the *Grub Street Journal*, John Martyn, was not a doctor but a botanist. In *The Beggar's Opera*, Robert Walpole is represented not by the ineffectual highwayman Macheath, but by the cunning thief-taker Peachum. It is a pity that the maps are so small that they resemble a Google satellite view before you've started to zoom in. Some comments inevitably prompt disagreement. White calls Henry Fielding "one of the greatest hypocrites of the age" and claims that his reputation for "magisterial wisdom and probity seems now overdue for reappraisal." The historian Peter Linebaugh made the same case twenty years ago, and it still fails to convince. Both Linebaugh and White base their argument on two controversial cases—one of them the notorious Elizabeth Canning scandal, which supplied the groundwork for Josephine Tey's thriller *The Franchise Affair.* Fielding's judgment may have been awry in either instance, but he believed in the guilt of the suspects whom he sentenced. White rightly points to the tough line Fielding took with those he considered to be hardened criminals, but he completely ignores the numerous occasions on which the magistrate exercised charity and compassion toward unfortunate victims of the cruel world anatomized in this book. No other judge of the day let off so many hapless and inadequate defendants in the face of damning evidence.

If you want a rounded and immensely detailed picture of the "Hogarthian" world, this is the place to go. As we've seen, White spends more time coloring in the mean alleys surrounding Gin Lane than he does on the almost bucolic delights of Beer Street, but that may be unavoidable. Scholars will make *A Great and Monstrous Thing* their first port of call, and anyone with the faintest interest in bygone London will be able to access an immense trove of thick description here.

Henry James's America
by Stephen Miller

Henry James is widely regarded as a writer who was deeply disturbed by the new immigrants who came to America after 1890—mainly Jews from Eastern Europe and Italians from Southern Italy and Sicily. James wrote about the new immigrants in *The American Scene* (1907), an account of his visit to the U.S. in 1904–1905 after an absence of two decades. In their introduction to a selection from *The American Scene* (1907), the editors of *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries* (2005) say, "James, revealing the patrician sensibility of his class, . . . recoiled at the sight of masses of immigrants." James did not recoil at the sight of masses of immigrants. He went out of his way to see immigrants and talk to them. He not only visited Ellis Island, which opened in 1892, but he also walked in the Italian and Jewish sections of New York. He went to restaurants frequented by immigrants, and he observed immigrants chatting and strolling in Central Park.

James was interested in the manners of immigrants—manners understood in the broadest sense. He was curious to see if their move to a democratic and predominantly commercial country had changed them in any way. Having traveled extensively in Italy, James was especially interested in Italians in America. His first encounter with Italian immigrants took place while he was walking in a town on the New Jersey shore, where he was staying for two days as the guest of his American publisher. Seeing Italian immigrants who were working as landscape gardeners, James hoped to chat with them, but they ignored him completely: "It was as if contact were out of the question." If he had met similar workers in Italy, there would have been a conversation "founded on old familiarities and heredities." These Italian gardeners were not interested in idle chatter. They were busy working and making money.

A week or two later, James met an immigrant when he was visiting his brother William in New Hampshire. Walking by himself in the countryside, James lost his way, so he asked directions from a man who had just emerged from the woods. Because the man did not reply, James thought he might be French-Canadian, so he addressed him in French. The man remained silent, so he addressed him in Italian. No reply again. James said in English: "What *are* you then?" This question finally "loosened in him the faculty of speech. 'I'm an Armenian,' he replied, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a wage-earning youth in the heart of New England to be [Armenian]." James is amazed that the man mentions his ethnic identity so matter-of-factly, as if there were nothing out of the ordinary about an Armenian walking in the New England woods.

The encounters with the Italian gardeners and the Armenian constitute evidence for James of "the ubiquity of the alien." This characteristic was especially obvious to James in New York. Riding in an "electric car" (a streetcar), he saw "a row of faces, up and down, testifying, without exception to alien-

ism unmistakable, alienism undisguised and unashamed."

According to James, "the great fact about his companions [on the streetcar] was that foreign as they might be . . . they were *at home*, really more at home, at the end of their few weeks or months or their year or two than they had ever in their lives been before." The immigrants are at home because the U.S. is a "cauldron" of immigrants from different countries. The country was and still is a "a prodigious amalgam . . . a hotch-potch of racial ingredients."

The immigrants feel at home in New York, but James doesn't. He feels dispossessed. "This sense of dispossession . . . haunted me . . . in the New York streets and in the packed trajectiles [the streetcars] to which one clingingly appeals from the streets." But, quite in contrast to the picture *Empire City*'s editors would paint, he doesn't recoil from the immigrants. Indeed, he says native-born New Yorkers "must make the surrender and accept the orientation. We must go, in other words, *more* than half-way to meet them."

It is easy to misunderstand what James means by "dispossessed." He is not saying that these new immigrants are ruining the American character. He completely dismisses the notion of an American character that is based on Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock: "Who and what is an alien, when it comes to that, in a country peopled from the first under the jealous eye of history?—peopled, that is, by migrations at once extremely recent, perfectly traceable and urgently required. . . . Which is the American, by these scant measures?—which is not the alien, over a large part of the country?"

In his remarks on immigration, James is taking issue with the views of many of his friends, who feared that the new immigrants could not be assimilated. In 1895 Thomas Bailey Aldrich, an acquaintance of James who succeeded William Dean Howells as the editor of *The Atlantic*, published his poem "The Unguarded Gates," which begins: "Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,/ And through them presses a wild motley throng." In his *History of the American People* (1902), Woodrow Wilson said the new immigrants were "men of [the] lowest class from the south of Italy, and men of the meaner sort out of Hungary and Poland, men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence." In 1911 William Williams, the Ellis Island Commissioner, said: "The new immigrants, unlike that of the earlier years, proceed in part from the poorer elements of the countries of southern and eastern Europe and from backward races with customs and institutions widely different from ours and without the capacity of assimilating with our people as did the early immigrants." This was also the view of the Dillingham Commission, which presented a lengthy report to Congress in 1910 and 1911. *The New York Times* reported that the commission had shown that "aliens are not being [assimilated], and cannot be assimilated—cannot be, that is, unless some check is placed upon their continued influx."

During the second decade of the twentieth century, the opponents of Eastern and Southern Europe immigration often cast their argument in racial terms. In *The Passing of the Great Race in America* (1916), Madison Grant called for the exclusion of inferior Alpine, Mediterranean, and Jewish breeds as the only means of preserving America's old Nordic stock. In 1922 the *Saturday Evening Post* published several articles about "race" by the novelist Kenneth Roberts, who warned that "a mixture of Nordic with Alpine and Mediterranean stocks would produce only a worthless race of hybrids."

James disagreed with the immigration doomsayers. He thought the "wild motley throng," as Aldrich puts it, would easily be assimilated. "The machinery [of assimilation] is colossal—nothing is more characteristic of the country than the development of this machinery, in the form of the political and social habit, the common school and the newspaper." Visiting Ellis Island, he is struck by "the ceaseless process of the recruiting of our race, of the plenishing of our huge national *pot au feu,* of the introduction of fresh—of perpetually fresh so far it isn't perpetually stale—foreign matter into our heterogeneous system." James, in effect, says that anyone can become a mem-

ber of "our race"—i.e., anyone can become an American.

Assimilation works, but in James's view it has a cost: the Italians he meets in the U.S. are not as charming as the Italians he met on his travels in Italy. "The Italians meet us, at every turn, only to make us ask what has become of that element of the agreeable address in *them*, which has, from far back, so enhanced for the stranger the interest and pleasure of a visit to their beautiful country. They shed it utterly, I couldn't but observe, on their advent, after a deep inhalation or two of the clear native air." Howells, who lived in Italy for several years, agreed with James. He speaks of a "malign change here that has transformed the Italians from the friendly folk they are at home to the surly race they most show themselves here." In his biography of James, Leon Edel says James "was struck by the alienation of the immigrant Italians when compared with Italians in Italy." In reality, James was struck by how *un-alienated* the immigrants are. They are so "at home" in America, where there is "equality of condition," that they feel no need to have the deferential manners they had in Italy.

James says all immigrants are transformed when they come to the U.S. The foreigner "presents himself thus, most of all, to be plain—and not only in New York but throughout the country—as wonderingly conscious that his manners of the other world . . . have been a huge mistake." Fifty years earlier Anthony Trollope made a similar remark about the Irish in America. "The Irishman when he expatriates himself to one of these American States loses much of that affectionate, confiding, master-worshipping nature which makes him so good a fellow when at home. . . . To me personally he has perhaps become less pleasant than he was. But to himself—! It seems to me that such a man must feel himself half a god, if he has the power of comparing what he is with what he was."

What about the Jewish immigrants—Does the machinery of assimilation work for them as well? Many German Jews already were assimilated. Some Christian Americans thought Jews would never become good citizens, but the virulent brand of anti-Semitism that was widespread in late nineteenth-century France—the notion that Jews were a "race" of treacherous cosmopolitans—was not commonplace in the U.S. Henry Adams was the odd man out because he talked incessantly about the noxious influence of wealthy and powerful Jews. When the Dreyfus Affair was boiling over, John Hay said that Adams's obsession with Jews was so extreme that "he now believes the earthquake at Krakatoa was the work of Zola and when he saw Vesuvius reddening the midnight air he searched the horizon to find a Jew stroking the fire." (Zola defended Dreyfus.) If few Americans subscribed to Adams's brand of anti-Semitism, many thought the Jews of Eastern Europe could not be assimilated.

Though clichés about Jewish commercial craftiness occasionally turn up in James's writings, he was not anti-Semitic. In several letters he refers to Jewish acquaintances. In 1877 he writes that "I dined a week ago at Lady Goldsmid's—a very nice, kind, elderly childless Jewess, cultivated, friend of George Eliot etc." In other letters he talks of being a guest at one of the Rothschilds' country estates.

In "The Impressions of a Cousin," a short story written in 1883, James ridicules conventional anti-Semitism. The story takes the form of a diary kept by an anti-Semitic woman. She is a painter who returned to New York after a long stay in Europe, and she is temporarily living with her cousin. The woman dislikes living in New York because the city and its people are not pictorially interesting, but the story is mainly about the interest she takes in her cousin's financial affairs. She fears that her wealthy cousin's financial advisor—a Mr. Caliph—is a crook. Her reasoning is simple: He is a crook because he is Jewish. "I have an intimate conviction that he is a Jew, or of Jewish origin. I see that in his plump, white face . . . in his remarkable eye, which is full of old expressions—expressions which linger there from the past."

The reader soon realizes that the diarist's version of events cannot be trusted. The diarist is totally in the dark about Mr. Caliph, who may or may not be Jewish. The story is not one of James's best because the diarist is te-

dious, but James makes it clear that this nasty, meddlesome, anti-Semitic woman is a fool.

In the 1890s, after the Dreyfus Affair heated up, James was on the side of Dreyfus, but one of his close friends, the French novelist Paul Bourget, was anti-Dreyfus and anti-Semitic. James never broke with Bourget, but in one letter to him he says that he does not understand what is going on in France, adding that in England "we get along well with the Jews" ("le bon ménage que nous faisons avec les Juifs").

In another letter to Bourget, written in English, he talks about "poor" Ferdinand de Rothschild's death, saying that "I have always had a lingering liking for him." The main point of the paragraph is to tell Bourget that the Prince of Wales attended Rothschild's funeral. "What strikes me more than anything else, in connection with his death, is the difference marked between English and French nerves by the fact that the Crown Prince (by whom of course I mean the P. of W.) assisted [attended] yesterday, with every demonstration of sympathy, at his [Rothschild's] severely simple Jewish obsequies." The English royal family does not subscribe to the French notion that Jews are untrustworthy rootless cosmopolitans.

It is a long way from the palace of a Rothschild to a tenement on the Lower East Side. In England James did not know Yiddish-speaking Jews. He was curious about the culture of these new immigrants to America. And he wanted to see if the machinery of assimilation worked for them as well.

On a warm evening in June 1905 James visited the Lower East Side accompanied by several Jewish acquaintances. (Howells probably introduced him to them.) He walked around the area and had dinner with a Jewish family. After dinner James's group "wound up" in a "half-dozen picked beer-houses and cafés." James's first impression of the Lower East Side is a commonplace one: the area is densely packed with people. In one paragraph James uses the word "swarming" three times. He is also struck by the ceaseless activity of the quarter.

Amazed by the "whole spectacle," James ransacks his imagination for an appropriate analogy. "It was as if we had been thus, in the crowded, hustled roadway, where multiplication, multiplication of everything, was the dominant note, at the bottom of some vast sallow aquarium in which innumerable fish, of over-developed proboscis, were to bump together, for ever, amid heaped spoils of the sea." The analogy does not work. Fish don't bump into each other; the allusion to the Jewish nose—the "over-developed proboscis"—is an unfortunate attempt at humor. After comparing Jews to fish, James compares them to worms and fine glass particles. "There are small strange animals, known to natural history, snakes or worms, I believe, who, when cut into pieces, wriggle away contentedly and live in the snippet as completely as in the whole. So the denizens of the New York Ghetto, heaped as thick as the splinters on the table of a glass-blower, had each, like the fine glass particle, his or her individual share of the whole hard glitter of Israel." The comparison to worms makes no sense, and the jump from worms to fine glass particles is confusing. A few paragraphs later, James compares Jews to squirrels and monkeys. The fire escapes of tenements are like "the spaciously organized cage for the nimbler class of animals in some great zoological garden. This general analogy is irresistible—it seems to offer . . . a little world of bars and perches and swings for human squirrels and monkeys." A few sentences later, James says the Jews he sees from the window of the apartment where he is having dinner are "an ant-like population."

Worms, monkeys, squirrels, ants—some observers reasonably conclude that these analogies show that James was anti-Semitic. In my view, the analogies are James's misguided attempt to give the reader a sense of how densely populated the Lower East Side is and how energetic its Jewish inhabitants are. It was ten times as densely populated as the rest of New York.

But if we take these clumsy analogies to be signs of James's anti-Semitism, then why does James say he is impressed by the Jewish immigrants? He speaks of "the intensity of the

Jewish aspect," and the Jewish "reverence for intellect." He notes that the Jews are an "intellectual people." He talks to Yiddish writers. He dashes into "a small crammed convivial theatre," where he sees part of a Yiddish comedy of manners. He admits that he is baffled by Yiddish culture, but he doesn't subscribe to the popular notion—one advanced by Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)—that Jews are obsessed with making money: "Truly the Yiddish world was a vast world, with its own deeps and complexities."

James enjoyed talking to Jewish writers in the cafés of the Lower East Side, but the way they spoke English pained him. The cafés, he says, were "torture-rooms of the living idiom." He thought the new immigrants—Jewish immigrants but other immigrants as well—would radically transform the English language: "The accent of the very ultimate future, in the States, may be destined to become the most beautiful in the globe and the very music of humanity . . . but whatever we shall know it for, certainly, we shall not know it for English."

James was wrong about "the fate of the language," but he was right to argue that Jews, like the Italians, would be transformed by the colossal machinery of assimilation. The Jews of New York, he says, are different from the Jews he saw in the ghettoes of Europe because the Lower East Side is a New Jerusalem compared to the "dark, foul, stifling Ghettos of other remembered cities." In the U.S. Jews have a much greater opportunity to better their condition: "What struck me in the flaring streets . . . was the blaze of the shops addressed to the New Jerusalem's wants and the splendour with which these were taken for granted."

The main point James makes about Jews is that they are similar to other immigrants insofar in that they too think America is a land of opportunity: "The wants, the gratifications, the aspirations of the 'poor,' as expressed in the shops . . . denoted a new style of poverty." It is a new style of poverty because the Jews assume their poverty is a temporary state. James wonders if the Jews are right to be optimistic about their future given "the icy breath of Trusts and the weight of the new remorseless monopolies." He concludes by saying that "their dream, at all events, as I noted it, was meanwhile sweet and undisguised."

Ten years after *The American Scene* was published, Abraham Cahan made the same comment about Jewish immigrants in *The Rise of David Levinsky*: "The scurry and bustle of the people were not merely overwhelmingly greater, both in volume and intensity, than in my native town. It was of another sort. The swing and step of the pedestrians, the voices and manner of the street peddlers, and a hundred and one other things seemed to testify to far more self-confidence and energy, to large ambitions and wider scopes, than did the appearance of the crowds in my birthplace." Moses Rischin, who has written a history of New York's Jewish immigrants, agrees with James and Levinsky: "Despite unsteady and underpaid employment, tenement overcrowding and filth, immigrants felt themselves ineluctably being transformed."

James does not say that the U.S. will become a "melting pot," which was the title of a popular early twentieth-century play by Israel Zangwill. Rather, he argues that ethnic strife is unlikely because the different ethnic groups will be so busy trying to "move up" that they will not be preoccupied with ethnic questions. "The existing order is meanwhile safe, inasmuch as the faculty of making money is in America the commonest of all and fairly runs the streets."

Walking in Central Park on a Sunday afternoon, James noted that the immigrants all appear to be "enjoying . . . their rise in the social scale, with that absence of acknowledging flutter, that serenity of assurance, which marks . . . the school-boy or the school-girl who . . . expects to 'move up.'" Assimilation works:

> It is a drama that goes on, without a pause, day by day and year by year, this visible act of ingurgitation on the part of our body politic and social, and constituting really an appeal to amazement beyond that of any sword-swallowing or fire-swallowing of the circus.

New poems
by Christian Wiman

Native

At sixteen,
sixteen miles

from Abilene
(Trent,

to be exact),
hellbent

on being not
this, not that,

I drove
a steamroller

smack-dab over
a fat black snake.

Up surged a cheer
from men

so cheerless
cheers

were grunts, squints,
whisker twitches

it would take
a lunatic acuity

to see.
I saw

the fat black snake
smashed flat

as the asphalt
flattening

under all ten tons
of me,

flat as the landscape
I could see

no end of,
flat as the affect

of distant killing
vigilance

it would take a native
to know was love.

Neverness

Solitary as a mast on a mountaintop,
some ocean of knowing long withdrawn,

she dittied the days, grew fluent in cat,
felt, she said, each seed surreptitiously split

the adamantine dark, believing green.
It was the town's torpor washed me to her door,

it was the itch existence stranded me on that shore
of big-lipped shells pinked with altogether other suns,

random wall-blobs impastoed with jewels and jowls
sometimes a citizen seemed to peek through,

inward and inward all the space and spice
of her edible heavens.

O to feel again within the molded dough
wet pottery, buttery cosmos, brain that has not cooled;

to bring to being an instant
sculpture garden: five flashlit rabbits locked in black.

From her I learned the earthworm's exemplary open-mindedness,
its engine of discriminate shit.

From her I learned all the nuances of neverness
that link the gladiola to God.

How gone she must be, graveless maybe,
who felt the best death would be for friends to eat you,

whose last name I never even knew:
dirt-rich mouse-proud lady who Rubied me

into a life so starred and laughtered there was no need
for after.

Reconsiderations

Yue Minjun's haunting laughter

by Anthony Daniels

Sometimes short phrases suggest vast hinterlands of meaning. Such is the case with the title of a novel, *Compulsory Happiness*, by Norman Manea, a Rumanian writer now living in the United States. Happiness, of course, cannot be coerced: though expressions of it most certainly can. Manea's title, then, perfectly captures the absurdity and menace of Ceaușescu's Rumania: First destroy the possibility of human happiness and then make everyone smile, laugh, and proclaim their joy under threat of punishment if they refuse to do so. There is no better way for a dictator to subdue his people, to debase them and make them despise themselves.

The Chinese artist Yue Minjun, who has just had his first European exhibition in Paris at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art, has made the smile and the laugh his special subject, just as the still-life painter of the Dutch Golden Age Adriaan Coorte made the gooseberry and the asparagus his.

Yue Minjun was born in 1962 and therefore came to consciousness during the Cultural Revolution; he was adolescent when it was still a very raw memory and when, given China's recent history, the liberalization might still have seemed a cunning trap to catch the unwary and the ideologically unsound. It is hardly surprising that he came to see facial expression not as a window on thought and feeling but as a mask for them, a mask to deceive others and even, when worn long enough, the wearer himself.

Yue's canvases are large—they are definitely not designed for the boudoir—and the colors he uses are bright, the sky for example is always of purest cerulean. But the principal feature of much of his work is the human figures in it, all identical and most often stylized portraits of himself, with precisely the same open-mouthed expression of laughter. The eyes of all the people are tightly shut by the extremity of the laughter, as if the latter served the dual purpose of disguising real thoughts and emotions and of shutting out the world around them because it is too painful to observe. Yue Minjun belongs to a school of contemporary Chinese painting called Cynical Realism, an obvious reference to the Socialist Realism that was obligatory within living memory. The impact of the sum of his work is greater than the impact of its parts.

That there is nothing of hilarity or amusement in the laughter he depicts. Rather, his works are full of desperation and terror which are signalled in more than one way. Expressions are uniform, as in the figures in the paintings, only where there is fear or intimidation, by whatever force or for whatever reason. Where there is freedom, there is difference; uniformity implies coercion, whether it be political or other. We should be ill-advised to adopt the complacent view that such uniformity can be produced by, or exist in, only totalitarian regimes; for in our own increasingly over-regulated, fearful, and risk-averse societies, where in many places we fear to say what we think and even have begun to fear to think what we cannot say, the mask of uniformity is beginning to cover our faces.

Yue pictures suggest a world in which mental, if not of physical, cloning is being attempted.

A second signal of the mirthlessness of the laugh depicted by Yue is the situation in which the figures in his paintings are laughing. For example, he re-works Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, replacing all the figures in Delacroix's picture by his own dressed identically *à la chinoise* in white t-shirts and simple blue shorts, all—including the dead in the foreground of the picture—with the same laughing expression and with the eyes hermetically sealed. The dead have died laughing. It is as if Yue were commenting on the willful blindness of men even as they acted in a situation of the greatest historical importance.

In a similar vein is his reworking of Manet's *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian*. In this picture, the men to be executed wear underpants only; they too are laughing uproariously. We do not see the entire faces of the firing squad, but the little we see signifies that they, too, are laughing heartily, and are identical to the men they are to shoot. Another identical figure has turned away from the scene, presumably the man who is to give the order to fire, and he is holding his stomach in an attempt to control his bladder as he laughs uproariously. The background is formed by one of the walls of the Forbidden City.

The picture is enigmatic, however, for the firing squad that takes aim holds no guns. Is this all a charade, then, and is that why all the participants are laughing? But even if it is a charade, it is a deeply sinister one in the context: namely that of a recent history in which millions of people died by violence and many millions more by political directive in pursuit of mad ideas already known to be disastrous when implemented. The charade is about as amusing as would be that of an extermination camp; the identity of those to be shot with the firing squad suggests the arbitrary nature of fate of ordinary men in a totalitarian dictatorship; and the fact that people are constrained to laugh at the imaginary reenactment of executions of themselves (if that is what the picture depicts) suggests likewise that the dictatorship, at least that over minds, has not yet passed.

Not quite all of Yue's pictures, however, are of laughing clones. One, for example, called *Memory*, shows the back of a man's head from which the top has been removed like a boiled egg. A small Mao swims, laughingly, inside the skull; the liquid in which he swims is of an uneven pink color and consistency, suggestive of a mixture of blood and liquefied brains. This is a reminder, if we needed it, that successful brainwashing rests upon a firm foundation of violence. The picture also suggests that it is not so easy to disembarrass a mind of Mao—who delighted to colonize the minds of hundreds of millions of his compatriots—once he has entered it. After all, Mao's portrait still hangs above the Gate of Heavenly Peace.

Two paintings are particularly remarkable, and very different from the others, in which unexpected absence is more powerful than presence. The first is Yue Minjun's re-working of Jacques-Louis David's famous painting of the death of Marat. It is an exact copy of David's, except for one important detail: the bath is empty. Yue calls it *The Death of Marat*, but what the emptiness of the bath suggests is not the death of the man but of his ideals, so-called, and perhaps of their emptiness, certainly of humanity, from their very first enunciation. Marat was, of course, a Maoist *avant la lettre*; or perhaps I should say, Mao was a Maratist.

The second is a re-working of Dong Xiwen's famous picture *The Founding of the Nation*, painted in high Socialist Realist style in 1953. In this picture Mao reads the declaration of the founding of the People's Republic from the Gate of Heavenly Peace. In the far distance, in Tiananmen Square, are the ranks of the masses, with forests of huge red flags; in front of Mao are the upright microphones. Beside him to the left, and very much less prominent, but still recognizable, are the other leaders of the Revolution.

In Yue's reworking, the masses are still there, flags flying, as are the microphones, but Mao and all the other leaders are missing. The podium is empty. Here too the emptiness of rhetoric is powerfully suggested: its emptiness is of value, not of effect. No one

who witnessed the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution could possibly doubt the effect of rhetoric upon the real world. And every Chinese would know that *The Founding of the Nation* has existed in seven versions, each new version having to expunge or reinsert one of Mao's companions in the Revolution according to Mao's favor or disfavor of the day. To have emptied the podium of them all, then, lock, stock, and barrel, was to pass a powerful comment upon the Chinese Revolution itself and its enterprise from the very beginning. One admires the artist's courage in doing so, given that the present leadership is in apostolic succession to Mao, a succession that makes him undisavowable even while policies are pursued that are completely different from his and in such flagrant contradiction with his ideas, that have been comprehensively refuted by experience, such that not even the greatest dialectical subtlety can produce a Hegelian synthesis. No wonder that people have to wear facial expressions as a mask, including that of laughter; perhaps, after all, there is something funny, or at least absurd, to laugh at in the situation. The exhibition was called *L'Ombre du fou rire*, the Shadow of Uncontrollable Laughter.

The exhibition raises, at least in my mind, two theoretical questions. Yue's work, despite its compositional skill, is striking rather than beautiful. In an interview published in the catalogue, he specifically denied the wish to create the beautiful; for him to do so would be to ignore, avoid, or evade the ugliness of the modern world, it would be a kind of treason to reality. But the world has always had its ugliness. If the creation of beauty is irrelevant, or worse still a moral evasion, until such time as the world becomes free of its imperfections, then nothing beautiful would ever have been, would be now, or will ever be created. In other words, Yue Minjun has not quite freed himself of utopian modes of thought. To adapt slightly Lord Macaulay's famous dictum about freedom: "Many thinkers are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition that no people ought to pursue beauty till the world is free of ugliness. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story who resolved not to go into the water till he had learned to swim."

The second question that the exhibition raised in my mind is the degree to which it is necessary to know an historical, social, and political context in order to appreciate at least some works of art (as Yue Minjun's works indisputably are). What would his work mean to those who knew nothing of Mao, Marat, Manet, Maximilian, and Dong Xiwei?

Editors' note: Readers are reminded that *The New Criterion* does not publish during July or August. In the meantime, we invite you to visit our website at www.newcriterion.com to keep up with events on our weblog, *Armavirumque*.

Theater

Getting into their pants

by Kevin D. Williamson

I would like to give *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* the rave review I am sure it deserves, but I did not see the entirety of the second act and would not feel quite right about reviewing a show I had not seen to completion. By now, many of you will have heard that I became, in a way, a part of the show after a confrontation with a particularly obnoxious cellphone addict whose little glowing screen was lighting up the darkened theater in my vicinity. The short version: I asked her to cease and desist, she responded with obdurate rudeness, and I then snatched the phone out of her hand and send it flying toward the side rear exit. Exit, pursued by theater security. Perhaps not the best expression of the cool critical attitude, but enough is enough.

The story made the papers in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, and London. One producer offered me a lifetime of free tickets to his shows, a well-regarded Broadway playwright offered a "Bravo!," and the *New York Post* suggested that I run for mayor. A very heartening response, though I do not see elected office in my future. Two thoughts: First, a two-and-a-half-hour opera based on *War and Peace* is probably not the best place for somebody with a limited attention span. Second, theater managers must become more assertive about the plague of cell phones. They should take a cue from the Texas-based cinema chain Alamo Drafthouse, which, in addition to tweeting merrily about my justifiable phonicide, maintains a strictly enforced policy of ejecting those who use telephones or talk during films. We will have exactly as much rudeness as we tolerate.

The triumph of pop psychology, both Freudianism and the contemporary psychotherapeutic variety, has been a remarkably corrosive cultural force. While psychological ideas become more fanciful as they traipse across the cultural landscape, that fancy is rooted in the discipline of psychology itself, which inclines heavily toward excuse-making: Tiger Woods is not a remorseless hound but a "sex addict," and "obedience defiance disorder" has worked its way into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. So loose are the intellectual standards of the discipline that Allen Frances, a former chairman of the *DSM* committee, took to the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* to confess his sins: "Our panel tried hard to be conservative and careful but inadvertently contributed to three false 'epidemics'—attention deficit disorder, autism, and childhood bipolar disorder. . . . The recklessly expansive suggestions go on and on." Over-adventurous psychology is the premier expression of the postmodern tendency to conflate the prescriptive and the descriptive and the category for the things within the category, as though the entire variety of human experience could be reduced to something like Newtonian mechanics. Everybody is an analyst: Every ex-husband is a psychological abuser, every flighty woman a victim of bipolar disorder, and every garden-variety rat-fink and office bully elevated to the lofty rank of sociopath.

Bad for society, to be sure, but absolutely horrific for the theater, which has endured a plague

of literary psychologizing and an epidemic of over-explaining. We endure lovingly cultivated neuroses and back stories that substitute for character. Ironically enough, this high-culture psychological malady was expertly dissected by the poppiest of pop psychologists residing at the opposite end of the literary spectrum, Thomas Harris in *The Silence of the Lambs*: "Nothing happened to me . . . *I* happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviorism. . . . You've got everybody in moral dignity pants—nothing is ever anybody's fault." Hannibal Lecter, social critic. Thomas Harris is a barely competent novelist, but the phrase "moral dignity pants" deserves a long life.

The best playwrights get their characters out of their moral dignity pants to expose that shocking something that can be glimpsed but never explained. As T. S. Eliot famously observed, the psychologically minded have long been fascinated by "Hamlet and His Problems," to a much greater extent than Shakespeare ever seems to have been. It is the same lack of a satisfying psychological explanation that makes a Willy Loman or a John Gabriel Borkman interesting. Three recent plays go about addressing that question in very different ways, with varying degrees of success.

Orphans, Lyle Kessler's recent Broadway revival, is a nearly perfect little play, a seminar in the art of not saying too much. Being a work of some quality, it was almost certainly destined to commercial failure, and indeed it was announced that the play would close early. The production had been troubled from the beginning, with the cinema star Shia Labeouf having been cast in the three-man drama and then replaced, with the cause of his departure being attributed to those inescapable "artistic differences," in this case apparently a difference of opinion on the question of whether Mr. Lebeouf can act. (Given that he seemed overburdened by the dramatic challenges of the third *Transformers* movie, to say nothing of *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, I have my doubts about his ability to carry one third of a serious play on his own. But then again, I have been surprised before.)

Orphans is the story of Treat (Ben Foster), a thug living in a rundown north Philadelphia neighborhood (corner of Camac and Spencer for you Phillyologists) with his younger brother, Phillip (Tom Sturridge), a grown man rendered childlike by a mental or psychiatric condition that is explained only in part. Treat makes his living conducting journeyman muggings and similar street crime in the nearby parks and public places, and his main recreation is tormenting his brother, sometimes gently, sometimes ungently. One evening he spots Chicago dandy Harold (Alec Baldwin) drinking alone in a bar; his interest piqued by his mark's fine silk suit and briefcase, he decides to stage a ransom kidnapping of the schnockered traveler. Harold is an orphan, and he believes that he has found some lost, kindred souls. He raves drunkenly and sentimentally mumbles about "Dead End Kids," the Depression-era street urchins whose cinematic appeal made Samuel Goldwyn a mint in the 1930s, and soon finds himself tied to a chair while Treat rifles his briefcase for clues to friends, family, and other possible ransompayers. Treat is disappointed: Nobody is very much interested in coming to Harold's rescue.

Treat has bitten off rather more than he can chew—almost inevitably, given his own limited capacities—which he quickly discovers when Harold (an admirer of Houdini) shakes off his bounds and produces a previously undiscovered pistol. But Harold does not have vengeance on his mind. Rather, he wants to put the boys on his payroll. "You're a man of violence," he tells Treat with a kind of high-spirited evangelical salesmanship, "and I admire that." Treat resists at first: "You're my kidnapping victim!" he whines at Harold, more hurt than enraged that the older man seems unwilling to play by what Treat had thought to be the rules of the game. But the next act finds Harold firmly in control of the little household in north Philadelphia: Treat has become a sort of Harold Jr. in a Pierre Cardin suit, fetching his master's newspaper and itching for a promotion to real criminal work. Harold takes things slow and easy, cooking bouillabaisse for his orphans and making obscure maneuvers with a bundle of stock certificates.

But the avuncular Harold has disturbed the delicate balance of the family. When Treat

produces an extra-large bottle of Hellman's mayonnaise—one of his little brother's culinary obsessions—he smolders quietly when Phillip informs him: "I don't have a taste in my mouth for it anymore. I'm actually sick and tired of Hellman's. I have a taste in my mouth for other things, Treat." The proximate cause of this palatal alteration is Harold's corned beef and cabbage, but there is much more on his mind than food. Phillip, we learn, may not be as damaged as he seems. His main problem seems to be Treat, who has convinced him that the outside world holds such dangers—disease, allergens, villains—that he cannot leave the home in which he has been a virtual prisoner his entire life. The presence of Harold has suggested a world beyond, the many promises of which are represented by a pair of yellow loafers presented to him by his new caregiver. Phillip had previously gone barefoot or had clomped around in unlaced sneakers, unable to tie them. The yellow loafers are in fact ruby slippers.

A number of critics faulted *Orphans* for failing to be able to decide for itself whether it is a broad comedy, a story of claustrophobic menace, or a pathos-heavy exploration of the things that divide two abandoned brothers and the things that bind them. My own experience of the play suggests that this unevenness is not a defect, but a delight. The play's first half feels like it might develop into a screwball caper, its second half takes a turn into serious domestic drama, and its conclusion, admittedly sentimental, manages to feel both unexpected and inevitable. Little or nothing is resolved, but the unhappy home on Camac Street stayed very much on my mind for days afterward. There is a sense in which all of the characters are simply situational—neither Treat nor Harold seems to be especially wicked by nature, though they are, as Harold repeatedly affirms, violent men. Which is true, but they are also schmucks, making do with such talents and appetites as Providence has bestowed. They are rats in mazes, of others' construction or their own, but they are not entirely robbed of moral agency: They can commit monstrous acts, but they can also love. The intertwining of those tendencies is handled with such skill that the audience will not see the hands at work, which is an indication of real competence.

Perhaps the highest praise I can offer is that *Orphans* is so good that one can leave the theater forgiving Alec Baldwin for being Alec Baldwin, though I made sure to steer well clear of the stage door on my way out, lest the spell be broken and reality intrude upon Mr. Kessler's lovely little creation. This unloved production deserved a wider audience.

Jekyll & Hyde is another unloved revival, the original being the opening act of Frank Wildhorn's career in musicals, which is not universally admired. *Jekyll & Hyde* has a vague odor of critical contempt about it—Mr. Isherwood of the *Times* calls Mr. Wildhorn's work "the crabgrass of Broadway"—though Robert Cuccioli won an Outer Critics Circle award, a Drama Desk award, and a Tony nomination for his leading role in the original 1997 Broadway production, if that means anything to anybody.

Perhaps there is a kind of black PR at work here: Reviving something regarded as awful by the high-minded has a certain built-in marketing edge. (The musical originally opened in Houston, and beyond my own Lone Star chauvinism I offer the charming *Lysistrata Jones* as evidence that a musical's opening in Texas is not the equivalent of a film's opening in January.) Having rather enjoyed the revival of another once-despised musical, *Carrie* (*The New Criterion*, April 2012), I settled into my seat with something approaching an open mind.

I suspect that *Jekyll & Hyde*'s poor reputation has a great deal to do not with the musical itself (though it has its wincingly bad moments) but with two famous video recordings of it: one with David Hasselhoff in the leading role(s), another starring Sebastian Philip Bierk. Who is he? Mr. Bierk is better known as Mr. Bach—Sebastian Bach—the splendiferously golden-tressed singer from definitive 1980s hair band Skid Row, five young gentlemen from New Jersey who minted a sultan's pension with a single D-minor riff in the last twilight of the Reagan era.

One might make the same criticism of *Jekyll & Hyde* that some critics made of *Orphans*: It does not quite know whether it wants to be a comedy or a more sober expression of sound and fury signifying $125 plus parking. Mr. Hasselhoff, who has spent the last thirty years battening upon the

public fever for banality as a sort of parody of himself, cannot help but make everything he is in comedy. Put him in *The Pinners' Play*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a staged reading of the complete works of Kierkegaard—it's comedy. Not necessarily funny, but funny-leaning. My viewing of his performance in *Jekyll & Hyde* suggests that he has far more contempt for the work of Mr. Wildhorn than Mr. Isherwood could muster.

Mr. Bach—and I do feel silly writing "Mr. Bach"—is deadly earnest in the role, and simply deadly as well: The show's musical climax is a confrontation between Jekyll and Hyde, meaning that the lead in effect sings a duet with himself. You can imagine the many ways in which that might go wrong, but you cannot imagine as many as Sebastian Bach did. The quick swings back and forth between the two characters would strain the voice of a very accomplished singer and the talents of a very accomplished actor. Mr. Hasselhoff was ridiculous in the performance, but he knows his game: When he dies, it will be with a tongue-in-cheek smirk. Not so Mr. Bach.

The current production surmounts that problem with a technical solution. Constantine Maroulis, an *American Idol* winner, plays the lead, and the director had the good sense to film him singing the Hyde part of the duet and then to technologically voodoo that into a very large dressing mirror on the stage, which is dramatically and musically an immeasurable improvement on previous incarnations of this play.

In that, the scene is emblematic of the director/choreographer Jeff Calhoun's entire approach: to present this ridiculous mess with as straight a face and as much technical excellence as can be had. That goes farther than you'd think: Mr. Maroulis cannot act—his Jekyll sounds like a Dickens character as presented by the cast of *South Park*—but his singing voice is adequate, and he can throw a black cloak about his shoulders with suitably satanic suavity. He is paired with Deborah Cox in the female lead role, the prostitute Lucy Harris, and she has an absolute machine of a voice: dead on, never a catch or a reach for a note, volume on demand as though she had a knob in her back turned all the way up when necessary by some unseen stagehand. The *Rent* mics are a bit distracting in the midst of all the production's dark Victorian finery, and one wonders why Ms. Cox did not simply dispense with hers, so big and even was her voice, so superfluous the amplification of it. The accompanying music is very slickly produced, with very tight orchestrations that emphasize the faux-baroque Bach-'n'-roll elements in the music, the occasional electric guitar a reminder that what we have here is in fact a very expensively produced adolescent fantasy that you probably should feel vaguely ashamed for enjoying.

The lyrics have some crashingly awful moments, and they are strangely repetitious—a repetitiousness not obviously born out of lack of skill or invention, but giving the impression that the writer was attempting to achieve some sort of psychological effect and falling woefully short. I laughed aloud at a few moments that were not cues for laughter.

I have no objection at all to fantastical spectacle, which is what *Jekyll & Hyde* aspires to, though it does not quite achieve it. Unhappily, it has little else to recommend it, dramatic substance least of all. The crude moral dualism of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella here is of course rendered even more crude, and there is a distinctly modern element of what we might call pharmacological determinism in the presentation, the romantic notion of the drug that acts as a muse to the addicted artist. Stevenson's conception of evil is that of an element, present in the world in some proportion determined by natural law, like silicon in the Earth's crust, waiting to be mined. Mr. Stevenson's book has always seemed to me a relatively straightforward addiction parable, and Mr. Wildhorn's Hyde is a character who would have been right at home in New York City during Sebastian Bach's heyday: a ruffian who shoots up and then goes rampaging around the park assaulting women. He is not an especially interesting fellow. The attraction of being Hyde—the raw, animal joy of Hyde's lust for life—is sung about a great deal, but it is never convincingly shown. One spends much of the play reflecting that Dr. Jekyll could have saved himself a good bit of trouble by getting himself a rakish bowler and discreetly frequenting Lucy's establishment. Perhaps it is difficult to appreciate Jekyll's constraints in an

age in which very little fruit is forbidden—The most interesting part of Jekyll's dilemma, in my mind, is his need to insulate himself from Hyde as a matter of social convention, but if Hyde were walking the Earth in 2013, he'd probably be a famous and powerful man, a CEO or a senator. He just isn't evil enough for our times.

I enjoy Stevenson as a kind of antique Mickey Spillane rendered venerable by an Everest of seventh-grade essays. Mr. Wildhorn's work is not to my taste, but it is worth noting that one of the musical's numbers, "This Is the Moment," has had a life beyond the show, which is more than most Broadway composers can say. And compared to what I have seen of earlier versions of the musical, this seems to be a case in which taking oneself too seriously turns out, perversely, to be a virtue.

Mike Bartlett's *Bull*: *The Bullfight Play*, on the other hand, might well have been titled *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde and Mr. Hyde*: Its universe consists exclusively of predators and prey. It has none of the inventiveness of *Orphans*—everything happens about as badly as you expect it to happen—none of the high spectacle of *Jekyll & Hyde*, only a set that consists of an office lobby cordoned off like a bull-fighting ring ornamented by a single water cooler, a cast of four (three specimens of predator, one specimen of prey). It has some skilful acting, though such pleasures as the play has to offer will be best appreciated by those with a taste for the lowest form of sadism: office bullying. What is does have is an interesting moral thesis: The predators are not driven by evil (I am not sure evil exists in Mr. Bartlett's imagination), or even, in the final analysis, by such familiar motivations as self-preservation, greed, hunger, lust, etc. They are simply fulfilling a biological function: culling the weakest member of the herd.

Bull is *Glengarry Glen Ross* in one act: Three workers have a job in the morning, but only two will have a job in the afternoon. There is never any doubt about who will fall to the picadors: Tony (Adam James) is slick and posh, Isobel (Eleanor Matsuura) is sexy and cruel, the boss (Neil Stuke) is the boss, and Thomas (Sam Troughton) is bespectacled, weak, insecure, gullible, graceless, uncool—dinner, in a word. The play is presented as part of the 2013 Brits Off Broadway series at 59E59 Theaters, which sometimes puts on very good shows in very tiny spaces. Here, that adds something: The standing-room audience crowds around the stage like pagans watching a gladiatorial display (well-mannered, Upper East Side, just-off-Park-Avenue pagans, to be sure.)

The performances are uneven: Mr. James acts like a man who is acting, and I can never quite tell whether playing an absolutely superficial man is very easy or very difficult; one has no trouble allowing him to be Tony. Ms. Matsuura is not quite so graceful, though part of that is the playwright's shortcoming: He makes the poor choice of having her explicitly explain the biological origins of the abuse she heaps upon poor Thomas, when those would have been better expressed indirectly—better as literature, and better as performance, too, given that Ms. Matsuura delivers the lines as though reading from a biology textbook. As errors go, making the subtext the text is a common enough one, but it quite nearly ruins *Bull*. Nature gives us no explanation for her cruelties, so why the hell should Isobel be so chatty?

Mr. Troughton's performance was most intriguing: I hated him and found myself wishing that the bullies would just make an end of him and then perhaps go do something interesting. That's a neat trick on Mr. Bartlett's part—give him that. The rest of the play may feel like it should be a subplot to a much more interesting story, but to manipulate the audience into passively approving of the cruelty lavished upon Thomas is a crafty little feat, not too bad at all for a one-act play. Not the sort of thing you're going to throw bouquets over, but worth a silent *bravo* when you realize what's been done to you.

Bull is a pairing of sorts with last year's *Cock (The Cockfight Play)*, which applied a similarly sneaky/obvious touch to a love triangle. (The ladies and gentlemen of *The New York Times* declined to print the title of that play over Mr. Brantley's review.) Promising stuff, but I find myself wishing for something more substantial, and suspecting that Mr. Bartlett might not be up to delivering it.

What we have, then, is two votes for nature over nurture vs. one for nurture over nature. We haven't given up good and evil for behaviorism—we've given it up for nothing.

Art

The new old museum

by Karen Wilkin

The past six months or so have been a fine time for museum renovations. This spring, in Amsterdam, a restored, refurbished, and improved Rijksmuseum reopened after ten years of intense effort, countless delays, and vast expenditure. And late in 2012, in New Haven, the Yale University Art Gallery emerged in a new, expanded incarnation—an ensemble of three very different, now suavely linked buildings. Two neo-Gothic edifices, the 1866 Street Hall and the 1928 Old Yale Art Gallery building, have been joined to the sleek 1953 Louis Kahn building, itself beautifully brought back to Kahn's original intentions in 2006. The good news is that both the Rijksmuseum and Yale got it right.

The Rijksmuseum has been restored and rejuvenated by the Spanish architectural firm Crux y Oriz. Courtyards have been reclaimed and roofed with skylights, allowing a flood of daylight to enliven a vast, pale stone entrance atrium created by digging down thirty feet—a major undertaking in a soggy coastal city. Divers apparently had to be used in construction. (This is not unique. Amsterdam is currently building a subway system, burrowing under the pilings of old houses in water-saturated ground and provoking, depending upon whom you talk to, enormous anxiety about possible damage to the urban fabric or enormous pride in the Netherlands' developing a specialized technology that can be profitably exported.) In another striking change, a once awkward, claustrophobic public passage between the courtyards has been preserved—protests about losing it delayed the project at one point—now turned into a "bridge" over the atrium, with views into it through ample windows. Exhibition space has been dramatically reorganized. At the lowest level, in vaulted galleries, medieval through Renaissance art is evocatively installed and handsomely lit against walls painted a dark stony grey. One flight up, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works are showcased. The next level is dedicated to the Rijksmuseum's greatest strength, Dutch paintings of the Golden Age—celebrated works by Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Jan Vermeer, Peter de Hooch, Gabriel Metsu, Salomon and Jacob van Ruisdael, and many more of their distinguished colleagues, along with "little masters"—all luminous against walls almost as dark as the sober black clothing favored by dignified seventeenth-century burghers. Half a flight up from the seventeenth-century galleries, we find an unexpected space devoted to sculpture, mainly clay *bozzetti* for public decorations, including those on Amsterdam's elegant seventeenth-century City Hall, now the Royal Palace. These are lit by big windows overlooking the Museumplein, the park-like expanse outside, flanked by the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk, which is devoted to modern and contemporary art. Throughout the Rijksmuseum, the mainly excellent illumination is a mix of state-of-the-art lighting technology and daylight from skylights and windows, while display cases of non-reflective, astonishingly transparent glass,

among other marvels, are notable features in new installations designed by the French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte. The results will delight the public and, for the most part, make curatorial mouths water.

Only a tiny fraction of the museum's million or so works are on view, according to Frits Scholten, the Rijksmuseum's Senior Curator of Sculpture, who generously gave me a preview of the building during the hectic weeks before the official opening. But, thanks to exhaustive curatorial reviews of the immense holdings in preparation for the reinstallation, the fraction now on display includes rarely exhibited items from various divisions of the museum. In the medieval galleries, for example, Scholten pointed out a rather bizarre moose or elk antler, decorated with elaborate carving and suspended like a trophy. Previously ignored, the puzzling object's distinguished provenance led Scholten to new research that revealed the antler's important connection to other works in the collection. Upstairs, too, among the Rijksmuseum's most iconic displays, there are discoveries to be made. Objects of various kinds punctuate the painting galleries, usually placed so as not to interfere with the works on the walls, and sometimes enlarging our sense of the period. It's instructive, for example, to see prime specimens of elaborate seventeenth-century haut bourgeois furniture among portraits of the people who lived with such pieces; everything we've ever read about prosperous, mercantile Golden Age Holland comes to life. Maritime paintings, including some of the always surprising "pen" paintings—essentially crisp contour drawings on canvas—are enhanced by the presence of an immense model warship and a large piece of a British flagship taken by the Dutch. Even more exciting is a group of works by the too-little-known Michael Sweerts—more than I recall ever seeing at once at the museum. Sweerts, a Fleming who worked mostly in Rome in the 1640s and 1650s, left only about forty paintings, arresting images whose firm structure, broad handling, and moody Caravaggesque lighting announce their difference from the work of many of his peers. The Los Angeles County Museum has Sweerts's largest, most complex canvas, but the Rijksmuseum's current display of half a dozen or so examples, including several interestingly conceived depictions of cardinal acts of mercy, was a delight to encounter.

The glory of the museum remains, of course, the Gallery of Honor, with its solemn procession of chapel-like spaces filled with Golden Age masterworks. At the end of a broad central corridor, where it has always been, is Rembrandt's sublime *The Night Watch* (1642), the one painting in the reconceived installation that was returned to its usual place. If we can shift our focus away from the treasures in the "chapels" or, what is more difficult, away from Rembrandt's glorious evocation of a crowd of prosperous men moving through darkness—a miracle of subtle characterizations, expressive textures, and transparent shadows—we will find more surprises, even here, in the museum's traditional heart. The elaborate floral, filigree decorations on the upper parts of the Rijksmuseum walls, part of the building's original conception when it was completed in 1885, were painted over in the 1930s. Now they have been painstakingly recreated (elsewhere a terrazzo floor and some murals have also been restored), returning to the galleries a degree of lavish detail that can seem peculiar to eyes accustomed to white boxes. The effect is less strange to anyone familiar with, for example, the more or less contemporary Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum or parts of London's Victoria and Albert, but the jury is still out on the effect of the restored décor. Rembrandt can hold his own and, as far as I can tell, so can just about everyone else in the Gallery of Honor. And the rest of the building is an unalloyed delight.

So is the "new" Yale University Art Gallery. We still enter through the lobby of the Louis Kahn building, which continues to house Asian, African, and Indo-Pacific art, plus part of Modern and contemporary art and design, as well as temporary exhibition space, a drawing study center, and galleries for European art. Those collections have never

looked better. The additional space gained by the renovation of the adjacent buildings allows the works installed in the Kahn building to breathe, while everything in the new galleries, whether large contemporary works or intimate examples of decorative arts of the past, is displayed in a similarly generous, effective way. From every level of the Kahn building, you can move seamlessly into the first part of the new space—the Old Yale University Art Gallery, handsomely reconceived by Ennead Architects. Almost without realizing we've done so, we find ourselves in well-proportioned, well-lit galleries. Transitions between the two buildings are marked by architectural fragments that alert us to the decorative elaborations of window frames, stair railings, and other survivors from the old building. We have to change levels to reach Street Hall, at the east end of the new complex, a necessary interruption in the flow of gallery space dealt with via a chic glass elevator and several convenient stairways. If we make the effort to get to Street Hall, we are rewarded. In the galleries devoted to American art before 1900, we find a small but notable collection that includes everything from a Ralph Earl portrait to prime works by nineteenth-century Luminists, from uncompromising Thomas Eakins efforts to sentimental Victorian potboilers. These rooms, with their painted wainscoting, dark walls, and generous skylights, are somewhat eccentrically proportioned, their layout a little convoluted, but somehow it all seems right for the period and enhances the exhibited works. In the same way, the clean, updated spaces of the Old Yale Art Gallery building are equally appropriate for the post-1900 American works on view: first-rate examples by Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and their colleagues, plus an impressive number of zingers by Stuart Davis. These handsome galleries, where modernist classics and contemporary works are elegantly displayed, merge calmly with the adjacent spaces in the Kahn building where earlier European modernism is installed. In addition, a new sculpture terrace, along Chapel Street, on top of the Old Gallery building, complements the lower level sculpture court at the far end of the Kahn building, once cannibalized for office space but reclaimed for its intended use during the 2006 restoration. All this and a series of Sol Lewitt wall drawings exemplifying most of his dominant concerns, from floating lines to unnamable geometric configurations to stacks of color. (Yale has the Lewitt Archive and trains people to execute his drawings according to the directives he provided.) No wonder Jock Reynolds, the museum's director, has been beaming every time I've seen him since last October.

Perhaps the most luxurious gain is a suite of exhibition galleries occupying most of the top floor of all three buildings. The opening show, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, celebrates Yale's extraordinary holdings of works documenting the activities of that extraordinary New York organization: a pioneering artist-driven association devoted to advanced art and unconventional thinking. The Société Anonyme—roughly "incorporated"—played a vital role in keeping alive the flame that was ignited by the 1913 Armory Show at a time when America was not known for its enthusiasm for vanguard art. Founded in 1920 by the artists Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, it predated the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art by nine years and prefigured the museum's mission to showcase adventurous new work and foster appreciation of international modern art in this country. The Société was perhaps most influential during the 1920s and '30s, but during the three decades before it officially dissolved in 1950, it organized more than eighty exhibitions, produced more than thirty publications, and hosted more than eighty five public programs designed to enlighten and educate. After 1923, when an artist made a gift of four paintings, the Société began to collect, in order, we are told, to create "a permanent record of the group's endeavors." Eventually, through gifts and purchases, a collection of over a thousand works was assembled, described by the exhibition's wall text as "a time capsule of modern art practice from 1920 to

1940." Most of this important hoard came to Yale University, with a first group of works donated by Dreier and Duchamp in 1941—which spurred additional gifts to the Société from several artists, including the organization's co-founder, Man Ray—and a second installment given in 1953 by the Katherine S. Dreier Bequest. The illuminating inaugural show in the Yale Art Gallery's new special exhibition galleries has been selected from these munificent gifts.

A portrait of the organization emerges from the paintings, sculptures, and works on paper exhibited in *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, reinforced by vitrines with letters, publications, photographs, press cuttings, and other memorabilia. A portrait also emerges of Dreier, a name known to anyone interested in the formative years of American modernism but who has remained a relatively shadowy figure. Now she is visible as a remarkable personality. We are introduced to the Société's ambitions (and Dreier's taste) by an approximation of *its* inaugural exhibition, evoked by a selection of works actually exhibited at the time, along with equivalents of others from the collection. As the wall texts remind us, the show set the tone for the organization's future by means of the "stylistically democratic and international tenor of the group's curatorial enterprise." We are also told that the artists included were chosen by the Société's founders because they "exemplified modernist zeal and creative vision." This selectivity was in marked contrast to the inclusive attitude of the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition, open to any artist who paid the six dollar entry fee. Duchamp and Dreier were both on the planning board of that show, but Duchamp resigned from the organization when it rejected his submission of his readymade *Fountain*—the urinal signed "R. Mutt, 1917." Some of the founders of the Society of Independent Artists, however, were associated with the Société Anonyme; New York's vanguard art world in 1920 was small and dedicated.

The recreated show includes such fine examples of advanced European art as Francis Picabia's spare descriptions of imaginary machines and a crisp, spotty and dotty Juan Gris still life. America is represented, in part, by Morton Livingston Schamberg's and Patrick Henry Bruce's prismatic abstractions, and an enormous, luminous, Cubist-inflected vision of the Brooklyn Bridge by Joseph Stella. Not surprisingly, there's a good deal of Man Ray, here in his "I'll try anything" mode, and several elegant geometric abstractions by Jacques Villon (one of Duchamp's brothers). A machine aesthetic seems to prevail but, according to the wall texts, the show also included a Vincent van Gogh, a Constantin Brancusi, and a Duchamp "glass," now dispersed to other institutions. (Dreier owned five Brancusis, which she gave to different museums; Yale received an elegant yellow marble bird [1919] on its original carved base, installed later in the show.) There's also a fairly dreadful, large, sentimental gathering of stylized nudes, *Island of Peace* by the German painter Heinrich Vogeler. (To judge by this and other more overtly modernist—but not always more inspired—works in the collection, Dreier, who came from a prosperous German-American family and spoke German well, seems to have had a weakness for Northern European art with spiritual overtones; unfortunately, it wasn't always by Wassily Kandinsky.)

Sections devoted to solo exhibitions organized by the Société provide a sense of what a powerful force the organization was, especially in the years before the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. There's a wall of first-rate Kandinskys—he was included in group exhibits in 1920 and 1922 and then given his first American one-person exhibition in 1923. The selection ranges from intensely colored, brushy paintings, from 1909 and 1910 that pulse in and out of reference, to sharply delineated geometric abstractions from the 1920s. Paul Klee—solo show in 1924—is similarly well represented, as is Fernand Léger—1925. The little Léger studies for major paintings, made in 1918 and 1919, are positively delectable. The odd-ball artist, Louis Eilshemius—solo shows in 1920 and 1924—was a particular favorite, it seems, presented like a home-grown Henri Rousseau. Apparently Eilshemius stopped painting

because of the unwanted attention generated by the Société's interest.

One of the organization's most ambitious efforts was an exhibition held at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926, with, we learn, more than 300 works by more than 100 artists from nineteen countries, chosen with advice from a wide range of international artists. Like the Société's inaugural exhibition, this amazing undertaking is approximated by a mix of actually exhibited and equivalent works. Among the high points is a glowing Arthur Dove of wavering, concentric circles; painted in 1936, it wasn't included in the Brooklyn exhibit, but it's good to see it. Another highlight is Marsden Hartley's rock-solid plant in a pot, a standoff between Picasso and Yankee hard-headedness. Duchamp is represented by a large machine that rotated glass plates for optical effects. Max Ernst, Albert Gleizes, Giorgio de Chirico, Jean Metzinger, El Lissitzky, and Joan Miró are among the best known of the Europeans in this section—the 1924 Miró, not shown in Brooklyn, is a typical, glorious, subtly inflected expanse of the period, a sheet of luminous yellow crossed by exquisitely delicate drawing and lettering. Constructions by Antoine Pevsner expand the conversation. A group of often arresting abstractions by a surprising number of obscure Germans, Belgians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Icelanders, and Norwegians offers testimony to both the diversity of the vanguard in the 1920s and the Société's international reach.

The strongest evidence of the Société's significance (and of Dreier's prescience) is the exhibition's wealth of outstanding works by modernism's stars: textbook Piet Mondrians, unexpectedly wide-ranging works by Kurt Schwitters, splendid Jean Arps, an exuberant Umberto Boccioni still-life, like a two-dimensional echo of his *Development of a Bottle in Space*, one of Arshile Gorky's mysterious *Nighttime, Enigma, and Nostalgia* drawings, and a spectacular 1931 abstraction by the polymath John Graham. Not surprisingly, there's a lot of Duchamp. Surprisingly, there's an elegant relief by Suzanne Duchamp (a sister) and a pretty good, Kandinsky-influenced painting by Dreier herself. And much, much more. But while the collection is a remarkable document of avant-garde aesthetics in the U.S. before World War II, there are also gaps; we look in vain for adventurous young Americans, such as David Smith, who were finding their voices in the 1930s, or for some of the more established modernists, such as Stuart Davis.

The exhibition catalogue, edited by the Yale University Art Gallery's Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Jennifer R. Gross, with contributions by a roster of distinguished art historians, is informative and a good read. Witness the chapter "Art as Experience: Katherine S. Dreier and the Educational Mission of the Société Anonyme," by the gallery's Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Susan Greenberg. Dreier turns out to have been an astonishing, progressive, activist woman from an astonishing, progressive, activist family. She sounds like she should look like one those independent, stylish career women portrayed by Katharine Hepburn in 1930s movies, so it's startling to encounter, early in the exhibition, a blown-up photograph of Dreier seated in "the library of her Connecticut estate," with her friend Duchamp, who has just repaired his *Large Glass*, seen front and center in the elegant, conventional room. A long horizontal Duchamp "proto-combine" painting, included in the Yale show, hangs above the bookcases. Duchamp is casual and elegant in paint-stained pants, sweatshirt, and sandals. Dreier looks like a dowager in a 1930s *New Yorker* cartoon. Who knew?

Exhibition notes

"Richard Serra: Early Work"
David Zwirner, New York.
April 12–June 15, 2013

Though organized by a commercial gallery, this museum-quality show is the third in an important series of recent Richard Serra exhibitions that have greatly deepened our understanding of this artist's work and achievement. The first, MOMA's 2007 retrospective, offered a broad overview of his career as a sculptor.

Three years later, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Richard Serra: A Drawing Retrospective" explored the artist's career as what can only be described as a "graphic sculptor." Hard up on that comes this show, which zeroes in on Serra's formative years in the late 1960s, which began with the rough-edged (literally and figuratively) "process pieces" and ended with the "Prop" pieces. As such, it recreates the period that saw Serra emerge as a fully mature artist, the moment when he turned "sculpture" from a noun into a verb.

The show consists of twenty-four sculptures, the earliest from 1966 and the latest dated 1969–71; Serra's famous 1967 "Verb List," a kind of artistic manifesto; and five films from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the best known of which is perhaps *Hand Catching Lead*.

The Chelsea space consists of two large galleries. The first one contains the process pieces: works consisting of *Slow Roll: For Philip Glass*, rolled up sheets of lead; *To Lift*, a sheet of vulcanized rubber positioned on the floor so it looks like an upright cape minus its owner; *Tearing Lead*, a square formed by wiggly lead ribbons with more such strips bunched and billowing from each corner; and *Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure*, a cluster of materials like wood, stone, and steel on the floor but dispersed in a way that looks as if it has just been bisected by a chain saw. These early works were a reaction to Minimalism's austerity and emotional detachment, and what's striking is the extent to which they reflect the lingering spirit of Abstract Expressionism, despite being antithetical to it in so many other ways: the gestural quality of the splayed lead ribbons in *Tearing Lead*, the all-over dispersal of *Base Plate Measure*, and, throughout the work of this phase, an eschewing of the closed contour. Yet there remains something tentative and small-bore about them. They have the quality of experiments or demonstrations rather than self-sustaining works of art.

The adjacent gallery contains a selection of the Prop pieces that grew out of these efforts. These are open form sculptures made by combining sheets of lead—and sometimes pipes—such that they are held together only by their own weight and the force of gravity. Thus, *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* consists of four, four-foot-square lead plates, each one positioned on one edge and leaning against each other to form an open cube. *Equal (Corner Prop Piece)* consists of a same-sized lead plate poised on one edge and held in place by a horizontal lead bar wedged into a corner and poised on a single corner of the lead square. They are especially noteworthy in this context for their embrace of a Minimalist clarity and formal rigor.

Those early process pieces were radical in their use of unconventional materials (rubber, neon, lead), their direct, informal relationship to the viewer (leaning against the wall, spread across the floor), and in the conflation of making and meaning. Yet radical as they were, they remain firmly within the tradition of sculpture as it had existed for millennia in that, like any conventionally carved, modeled, or constructed sculpture, they represent the residue of a process. A series of forming actions was required to create them; at a certain point those actions came to an end; a work of art was the result. A look at the verbs used to describe these works makes this point: The materials in *Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure have been* sliced through; the lead sheet in *Tearing Lead has been* ripped; in other works, the same material *has been* folded and unfolded, rolled or spiraled, just as one would say that Michelangelo's *David has been* carved or that Picasso's sheet-metal *Guitar has been* assembled.

By contrast, it was the Prop pieces that broke decisively with sculpture as it had been practiced up to that time by making process—the act of forming—and the resulting form itself both coincident and continuous. Again, verbs tell the story: The four square planes in *One Ton Prop (House of Cards) are leaning* into each other; the pipe and plane in *Equal (Corner Prop Piece) are balancing*; the large steel sheet that is *Strike is jutting out* into the room. Thanks to Serra's innovative use of weight and gravity in place of welding or other traditional methods of adhesion, the act of forming and the form itself—the resulting sculptural configuration—are inseparable in these pieces. As such, they exist in a kind of continuous present. They are continuously being made, while at the same

time continuously existing as completed works of art—sculpture in the active voice

Two other insights emerged from this show. One was the extent to which the aesthetics of the Prop pieces scramble traditional sculptural vocabularies. *House of Cards* is a volume with no mass but considerable weight—in the form of the four 500-pound lead sheets that make it up. Hitherto a plane had been thought to be a building block of sculpture but insufficient in itself to *be* a sculpture—lacking the requisite substance or dimensionality. Yet in *Strike*, and in other works not included in this exhibition, Serra upends that notion by producing powerful works using a single, uninflected sheet of steel.

The other was how important proportions are to Serra's sculptures. He seems to have paid a lot of attention to sizing individual elements and completed Prop pieces to achieve the ideal one-to-one relationship with the viewer, neither so large as to be overwhelming to him nor so small as to be dwarfed by him. These pieces "look you in the eye," as it were. At the same time, when he does opt for monumental scale, as in the eight-foot-by-twenty-four-foot *Strike*, the single plane is so proportioned that it retains an overall visual tension, like a canvas pulled taut across its stretcher.

The one regret here is the presence of tape on the gallery floor marking off the boundary beyond which one may not approach each Prop piece. It was obviously required by the insurance company (MOMA did the same thing in its retrospective), but it does grievous harm to the works themselves, which in the precarious balancing of heavy pieces of metal are all about establishing a direct, even fraught, interaction with the viewer. The tape boundaries sequester the sculptures into a safe zone separate from the viewer, turning them into the very "museum pieces" from which Serra sought to move sculpture away, beginning with his earliest efforts. Perhaps one day some institution will find a way to balance liability protection with aesthetic integrity and exhibit the Prop Pieces unmediated by barriers. It seems unconscionable that such exciting, revolutionary works should be doomed to being forever displayed in this compromised state.

—Eric Gibson

"Albrecht Dürer: Master Drawings, Watercolors, and Prints from the Albertina" National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. March 24–June 9, 2013

Say this for the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528): he was not lacking in self-esteem. A painter, draftsman, and printmaker of preternatural skills, Dürer depicted himself, at the wizened age of twenty-eight, as Jesus Christ or, at the very least, in the tradition of devotional images. The allusion in *Self-Portrait* (1500), a cornerstone of the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, is unmistakable even as the intent of the picture remains elusive. That Dürer nevertheless risked the comparison speaks to an unapologetic and, as history has proved, well-earned chutzpah. Visitors to "Albrecht Dürer: Master Drawings, Watercolors, and Prints from the Albertina" get a handle on the artist's gift right off the bat. The exhibition begins with *Self-Portrait at Thirteen* (1484), a delicate, if at moments awkwardly delineated, silverpoint drawing. It's paired with a self-portrait, heavier in patina and considerably less animated, by Albrecht Dürer the Elder. Was this an attempt by the father to best young Albrecht or, perhaps, comprehend the son's gift? Whatever the case, the curatorial point is obvious: Dürer was a phenomenon.

Is a phenomenon, if the response of the crowds attending the show is any indication. Huddling around the works, viewers can't look closely enough at the images—because of their small size, sure, but mostly because of Dürer's huge talent. Ensconced, as it is, in the East Wing, the section of the museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art, the exhibition may (as a friend suggested) prompt doubts about the progress of art: Sixteenth-century Northern Europeans had the meticulous intensity of Dürer; we have to settle for the decorative flourishes of Ellsworth Kelly, the subject of a concurrent exhibition at The National

Gallery. An apples and oranges comparison, perhaps, and any museum-goer seeking proof of art's forward march will inevitably be frustrated. But if Dürer the man is history, then Dürer the artist is forever our contemporary, a figure whose virtuosity—at once both clinical and deeply intimate—withstands anything so mundane as time passing.

The exhibition features close to one hundred-and-twenty pieces, a smattering of which belong to the National Gallery, but most are culled from Vienna's Albertina Museum, among the world's great repositories of works-on-paper. The Albertina has a comprehensive collection of Dürer drawings, watercolors, and prints thanks to Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, whose enthusiasm for the artist was boundless: He was not above wielding political influence to acquire Dürers. Rudolf's collection includes Dürer images whose purchase on the imagination extends well beyond the parameters of the art world. Certainly that's the case with *Praying Hands* (1508), an ink-and-gouache drawing of understated elegance and uncanny specificity, and *The Great Piece of Turf* (1503), a watercolor whose botanical accuracy doesn't preclude a fairy tale–like ambiance. Even cursory students of world art will recognize *Adam and Eve* (1904), an engraving seen in a range of proofs, and *Agnes Dürer as Saint Anne* (1519), wherein the title figure is imbued with a sense of resignation distinctly absent from the oil painting for which it was a study.

Arranged chronologically, "Albrecht Dürer" follows the young artist as he tussles with precedent (Mantegna was a touchstone), investigates human anatomy, and indulges in an occasional reverie—a pen-and-ink portrait of his wife, *Mein Agnes* (1494), is haiku-like in its tenderness and informality. Myths and biblical tales are endowed with steely grandeur, and the earthly—a bridge in Nuremburg, a woman dressed for a dance, a squirrel, a friend from Antwerp—is delineated with tight-lipped appreciation. All the while, Dürer's line—wiry and tactile, at times all but ineffable—gains in authority. Among the most arresting works are those done on paper toned a dusky blue, green, or gray. Working with ink and white gouache, Dürer creates images that seem to coalesce from the ether, even as he paradoxically endows them with unnerving dimensionality. The pieces are ghost-like in character, fleeting and evanescent, but unmistakably *there*. The ability to simultaneously pay homage to the tangible and the otherworldly goes some way in explaining the iconographic power of *Praying Hands*. Rarely has faith been embodied with such pith and poetry.

Dürer the rationalist is on view as well. His diagrammatic bvreakdowns of the figure recall Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* (ca. 1490) in their insistence on establishing a logical means by which the human anatomy could be formulated. But Dürer was more than an immaculate technician. Any draftsman beholden to what-meets-the-eye realizes fairly quickly that nature's variety humbles any attempt to codify it. However much Dürer may have been entranced by scientific fact, he was also an engaged sensualist. True, the eroticism informing his ample nudes or, for that matter, filtering through his drapery studies is severe in nature. Dürer isn't Rubens. But whether his burin was weaving an undulating tapestry of cross-contour lines, or his pen nib was skittering across the page in the attempt to capture a rare encounter with a lion, or his chalk was delineating the contemplative features of an African met in Venice, Dürer brought to the subject at hand a fullness of sensation, of experience both tempered and enlivened by reason. "Albrecht Dürer" is both one of those exhibitions that can change a life and, as such, a gift.

—Mario Naves

"The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism"
Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine.
May 2–September 8, 2013

Picasso's *Boy Leading a Horse* (1905–1906) catches your eye immediately on entering "The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism," much as it must have done when it hung in the foyer of Paley's Manhattan apartment. As head of CBS, Paley (1901–1990) transformed a clutch of struggling radio stations

into a communications empire that he headed from 1928 until his last years. His life with his wife Babe kept reporters busy, chronicling his mercurial managerial style and her fashionable march through the society columns. Paley's interest in art began with a trip to France in the mid-1930s, and he quickly acquired many works with the help of the agent (and later publisher) Albert Skira, including the Picasso brought in 1936 to a Swiss ski resort for Paley's inspection. Paley spent many years on MOMA's board and his gift of art filled many gaps in the museum's collection. William Rubin, the MOMA director emeritus, observed that Paley's preference for modernism over Old Masters "came naturally to a young man whose achievements and wealth arose from new technologies."

The Portland exhibit opens with an impressive group of Cézannes and Gauguins, two of which were Paley's first purchases. (He bought Cézanne's *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat* [1875–1876] and the iconic *L'Estaque* [1879–1883] in 1935 from the artist's son.) *Milk Can and Apples* (1879–1880) is an essential painting in which Cézanne explores platonic forms in subtly astonishing ways. Classic harmony is there but overtaking it is tension from a series of opposing forces—the receding cool colors and the advancing warm tones, the jagged peaks of the napkin against the rounded forms of the apples, and the tenuous sense of monumentality achieved by a flimsy square of linen.

The Seed of the Areoi/Te aa no areois (1892) depicts Gauguin's thirteen-year-old native mistress Tehura as a Maori Venus. That Gauguin's imagination found in Polynesia stimulation of both an artistic and libidinous nature is well-known. Perhaps more instructive is the juxtaposition of this Tahitian work with one from 1888, *Washerwomen*, in which a curved frieze of women in Arlesienne costume bend over their work on the banks of the Roubine du Roi. Order and a sense of disengagement prevail in both works, yet there are perplexing elements such as Tehura's essentially decorative status (as ritual object, as lover, as false Arcadian) and the two truncated faces at the lower left of *Washerwomen* across which the artist has blithely signed his name.

Modernist rivals Picasso and Matisse face off with a group of works both iconic and surprising. The high cubism of Picasso's *The Guitar* (1919) and the cacophonous *Architect's Table* (1912) define a movement and a milieu. *Nude with Joined Hands* (1906), a Rose period portrait of Picasso's mistress Fernande Olivier, shimmers like an afterglow. It's irresistible to compare the warm modeling of the flesh and the decorously placed hands with the cool symbolism and coy ennui of the nearby *Boy Leading a Horse*, also from the same period. A trio of lovely Picasso drawings reminds us of the Spaniard's acute eye and elegant draftsmanship.

Matisse is represented by six works, the most unusual of which is *The Musketeer* (1903), a Velázquez-inflected portrait of an actor whose costume glitters with iridescent accents. Three portraits of women—the indolent *Odalisque with a Tambourine* (1925–1926), the characterful *Woman with a Veil* (1927), and the energetic *Seated Woman with a Vase of Amaryllis* (1941)—show Matisse working through characteristic themes of color, form, and charged intimacy. In *Woman with Anemones* (ca. 1919–1920), intimacy takes on a quieter tone with a focus on proportion and arrangement.

The works displayed in the gallery on "modernism's idiosyncrasies" include paintings by John Kane, Georges Rouault, Alberto Giacometti, and Francis Bacon, a motley selection that has surprising affinities. The technique of each seems to rely in varying degrees on distortion and distance, that is, the gap between execution and interpretation. In *Industry's Increase* (1933), Kane, a self-taught artist and art establishment outsider, becomes an unlikely proponent of American boosterism. For Rouault, distance underlies the isolation of the marginalized, the devout, or, in the case of *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* (1925), the iconoclast. Giacometti uses distance counterintuitively. *Annette* (1950) liberates a portrait of the artist's wife from pictorial tradition by elongating the figure and obscuring detail under layers of schematic lines—the effect is one of centrifugal forces peeling away the specific to reveal only presence.

The two Bacon triptychs, *Study for Three Heads* (1962) and *Three Studies for the Por-*

trait of Henrietta Moraes (1963), are classic examples of what the artist called "exhilarated despair." With these bloated, twisted faces, Bacon turns the venerable tradition of portraiture inside out, making what we see more like flashes glimpsed through the slits of a zoetrope than objects of aesthetic veneration. Once past the discomfort of the distortion and violence done to these faces, you realize how painterly, even reserved, he is, capturing human complexity in manageable small portions.

In the last gallery, a trio of luminous Vuillards from 1893 and 1894 illustrate the artist's lifelong exploration of memory as a key to perception. In addition, there are exceptional works by Degas and two delightfully acerbic portraits by Toulouse-Lautrec. The imperious *Mme. Lili Grenier* (1888) leans back in a wicker chair with a defiant jut of her dimpled chin, a shock of red hair falling over her left eye. It's difficult to say which is more impressive, Lautrec's paint handling or the incisive depiction of his subject's personality.

A wealth of detail surrounds *M. de Lauradour* (1897), the most telling of which is a pair of pink slippers tossed on the bed—has the gentleman just taken his pleasure or is he anticipating it? Lauradour, a red-bearded dandy with, so the story goes, the tongue of a stevedore, slouches in a wicker chair, surrounded by stacks of canvases, a paper lantern, and a wall of prints. An open shutter looks out onto the Paris boulevard. He might be in a brothel or Lautrec's studio or the artist might be conflating the two for an extra frisson.

The exhibition also includes sculpture by Émile-Antoine Bourdelle, Aristide Maillol, and Gaston Lachaise. A suspended vitrine houses small-scale casts of Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais* (modeled 1884–1895) and gives us a bird's-eye view of a work that is better appreciated as a monumental outdoor tableau.

The non-representational works from the Paley Collection did not travel. While it would have rounded out the impression of Paley as a collector of modernism to have seen Robert Motherwell's *In Black with Pink* (1966) or transitional works by Clyfford Still and Jackson Pollock, it might have compromised the strong coherence of this exemplary exhibition.

—Leann Davis Alspaugh

Editors' note: We'd like to remind our readers that all of our art coverage is accompanied by images online at www.newcriterion.com.

Gallery chronicle
by James Panero

Forgive me if I do not rejoice in what *New York* magazine has called the "Year of Koons." "Jeff Koons Is the Most Successful American Artist Since Warhol," announced the recent headline, which continued, "So What's the Art World Got Against Him?" With exhibitions now on view in Chelsea at both David Zwirner and Gagosian, and a highly publicized retrospective coming in 2014 to the Whitney Museum, the answer to that question is clearer than ever.[1]

The large Gagosian show rolls out the Koons hit parade. Included are three of his ubiquitous spit-polished "balloon animal" sculptures in "high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating" (as the gallery informs us), an inflated riff on the "fecund Venus of Willendorf," and several Photoshopped paintings that continue the artist's obsession with potency and fertility crossing over into the pornographic.

Yet it is the Zwirner show of his most recent work that best reveals the forces underlying Koons's program. Here is a series of oversize multiples of mainly classical sculptures slavishly reproduced in white plaster—Apollo Lykeios, Crouching Venus, Antinous-Dionysus—mixed with exacting simulacra of everyday objects. Attached to each is a blue glass "gazing ball" of the type found in downmarket garden design. The sculptures, sold in a series of three, are said to cost up to $3 million each. "At these prices," the *New York* writer Carl Swanson assures us, "they qualify as affordable." Indeed.

Koons would have us believe that he is the perfect family-loving, post-Pop imp, misunderstood by all but the most erudite of oligarchs. Yet this latest series of butch classicism shows him less the heir to Warhol or Duchamp and more a descendent of Arno Breker, the artist who earned his reputation as "Hitler's favorite sculptor." Breker came to define the fascist state's steroid style with work such as 1939's *Die Partei* and *Die Wehrmacht*, a slick pair of oversized bronze figures that flanked the carriage entrance of Albert Speer's Reich Chancellery.

This is not to suggest that Koons is interested in any particular brand of politics other than the cult of Koons. Still, through a combination of Kultur, Kinder, and Volk, he turns out products that are totems of power masquerading as works of art, all to appeal to the patronage of thugs. With an unseen labor force of over one hundred assistants, he uses mass manufacturing to process demotic iconography into objects that are both fetishistic and camp. The prices that surround them, not to mention the Praetorian Guard of gallery security that Gagosian attaches to them, conveys a superman-superiority and a Nietzschean contempt for the imperfect. Add to this an insipid New Age philosophy that speaks of "walking out of Plato's cave" and the "removal of anxiety and the removal of

1 "Jeff Koons: Gazing Ball" opened at David Zwirner, New York, on May 8 and remains on view through June 29, 2013. "Jeff Koons: New Paintings and Sculpture" opened at Gagosian Gallery, New York, on May 9 and remains on view through June 29, 2013.

all judgments," and you have the full Koons. "He says if you're critical," the dealer David Zwirner informs us, "you're already out of the game." An artist who brooks no dissent has a totalitarian vision.

The ubiquity of the Koonskampf is troublesome enough. The aping of perfection to the point of perversion has also had a chilling effect on much other art. The unpolished imperfections that give art its human soul have once again turned untouchable, even degenerate, to much of the cultural elite.

Fortunately, just as this over-polished, oversized, and over-prized art has come to define the new salon aesthetic, an alternative style has emerged on the margins to embrace the imperfect, the provisional, and the intimate. In the case of "Andrew Seto: Lazy Reader" now on view in Brooklyn, the art is underground, literally, in the back-room basement space of Theodore:Art, a gallery illuminated with industrial fluorescent lighting that could not be further from the imperious mega-dealerships of Chelsea.[2]

Since she opened shop at 56 Bogart Street, Stephanie Theodore, the gallery's owner, has used her venue in particular to introduce British artists to Bushwick. Yet almost all the artists she exhibits share a sense for what I would call the Morgantown Touch. This is an approach to art that is anti-monumental—what the critic Sharon Butler has called a "new casualism"—and reflects much of the art that is created and exhibited near the Morgan Street subway station and its surrounding neighborhood. It should be mentioned that more of this style will be on display for the seventh iteration of Bushwick Open Studios, the must-see grassroots event that takes place in the neighborhood over the first weekend in June.

Born in Edinburgh and a one-time student at the New York Studio School, Seto now works out of East London. His small, improvisational paintings combine organic energy with crystalline structure. The compositions all build out in different ways, most often from a center point on the canvas through dashes and triangles layered wet-on-wet in oil. All have an inviting, tactile quality, with a rigor tempered by insouciance. I liked the title painting, *Lazy Reader*, for the way Seto locates this shape in its own abstract space. The addition of a horizon line gives the structure additional depth. This is art at a human level, unashamed of its faults and endearing in its imperfections.

James Little, a painter like no other, is back at June Kelly Gallery.[3] This time, before the opening of the exhibition, I made a point of visiting his studio in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, Little studied painting at New York's Syracuse University through its Afro-American Studies Fellowship. During his time there in the 1970s, he was able to cross paths with two of the school's most famous art-world graduates, Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer. Influenced by both critics, Little has now gone on to push his compositional forms through a decades-long study of the process of painting.

In her catalogue essay for the latest show, Karen Wilkin writes of the "ravishing physicality of Little's paintings . . . orchestrations of geometry and chroma to delight our eyes and stir our emotions and intellect." Reading the paintings from left to right, Little employs a rhythmic sense of shapes, colors, and value to energize his forms.

A labor-intensive wax medium, which he developed himself, gives the work its signature molten finish (reproductions always do these pieces an injustice). The process requires constant adjustments and an attention to detail. Without studio assistants, Little's hand is at work each step of the way. As I learned through my visit, much of his studio space, as well as much of his time, is dedicated to the creation of his paints. To ensure purity and consistency, he sources his own turpentine and oil. Glass jars of various formulas line the studio. As a final step after mixing the pigments, Little adds heated beeswax to create

2 "Andrew Seto: Lazy Reader" opened at Theodore:Art, Brooklyn, on May 4 and remains on view through June 16, 2013.

3 "James Little: Never Say Never, Recent Work" opened at June Kelly Gallery, New York, on May 16 and remains on view through June 21, 2013.

an encaustic that is poured in several layers on a horizontal canvas. The silky finish of the surfaces, combined with the precision of the lines, adds to the work's attraction.

Because of the time he puts into each canvas, Little may create only four large paintings a year. Four such paintings now make up the heart of the exhibition at June Kelly. And each have four quadrants of forms, arranged horizontally, with chevrons and zigzags sandwiched between vertical bars of color that move the eye up and down while scanning left to right.

Little draws from a long history of pattern-making, from non-Western sources to Renaissance tile work to neon street signs. Additional African influences come through in the titles, such as *Maasai Re-Construction* and *Zulu Boogie-Woogie*. These names should serve as subtle reminders that as collectors seek out a younger generation of cartoonish "identity" artists, true trailblazers such as Little continue to contemplate the same issues in far more profound and lasting ways.

This work may not serve as political tokens for power-brokers. In its range of expression and feel, it refuses to play it safe. Fortunately, there are still dealers like June Kelly—who managed the artist Romare Bearden for over a decade before his death—dedicated to a diversity of artistic expression that James Little represents.

Most readers will know the name of William Meyers through his photography column for *The Wall Street Journal*. Fifteen years ago, this native New Yorker took up his own photographic project to record the life of the outer boroughs, the music of New York, and what he calls Alternate Manhattan. Now on view together at Nailya Alexander Gallery, "William Meyers: New York, Look & Listen" brings the high-contrast and noir moodiness of Weegee, the great street photojournalist, to the city of today.[4]

In *Co-Op City, Bronx* (February 4, 1999), perhaps the best image of the show, Meyers uncovers the symmetry and abstract form of a school bus depot at night. The lines of busses and lights glow and recede in a hallucinatory spiral. *West End Avenue Looking South from 100th Street* (February 1, 2009) is classic single-point perspective, with two cars passing in parallel on the street and the darkened roofline cascading down on either side to the center of the image. *Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn* (May 12, 1998) foregrounds a sun-bleached park bench filled with children, with the planks of the boardwalk and lines of the sand leading off into infinity.

Balanced against these tight compositions, Meyers maintains a sense for unexpected moments. The bucolic backyard hammocks of *Woodside, Queens* (July 31, 2005) are interrupted in the upper corner by the rush of a train. Two grinning fishermen in *Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn* (July 1, 2001) hold up their catch. The accordionist in *Klezmer Musicians, Williamsburg, Brooklyn* (July 12, 2005) is found in a moment of reverie.

Not every image sparkles. Some of the shots feel like assignment work, lacking that special hook, or are overly interested in arty effects. The size of the photographs, eleven by fourteen inches, also feels overly conventional, neither particularly intimate nor monumental.

KlezFest, Sholem Aleichem Cultural Center, Bronx (December 30, 2012), with four women singing and holding hands in a circle, is a shot of pure joy. Here is Meyers at his best, with the feel of genuine city life coming through in its fullest expression.

I have on occasion closed this column with the recommendation of a single work of art. While every painting in Don Voisine's third exhibition at McKenzie Fine Art deserves attention, *Step To* (2013), oil on wood panel, forty-four inches square, left me thunderstruck.[5] Voisine is a master of formal control, of blacks and mattes, shapes and colors all moving against one another. With its buttery border, white arrows pointing in, and black X stepping out, *Step To* is an animating force. This painting of the summer is a delight to see, a comfort to feel, and a reminder that art is meant to live.

4 "William Meyers: New York, Look & Listen" opened at Nailya Alexander Gallery, New York, on May 8 and remains on view through June 8, 2013.

5 "Don Voisine" opened at McKenzie Fine Art, New York, on May 3 and remains on view through June 9, 2013.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Isabel Leonard, the budding American mezzo star, gave a recital in Zankel Hall. Accompanying her was a Romanian pianist with the distinctive name of Vlad Iftinca. I have said that Leonard is "budding," but the truth is she has budded. She has already appeared on *Sesame Street*, like Renée Fleming, Plácido Domingo, and Marilyn Horne before her. That's stardom.

Her program in Zankel Hall was half-Spanish and half-American. (In remarks from the stage, she mentioned that her mother is from Argentina.) The Spanish songs were familiar to anyone who attended recitals by Victoria de los Angeles, the late and great soprano. A critic said at intermission, "I half expected Isabel to bring out a guitar" (as de los Angeles used to do). Leonard was in splendid form, both technically and musically. She has no end of poise. And she sang with purity, clarity, and charm. A prayer by Falla had amazing tenderness. And an habanera by Montsalvatge featured some delicious humming.

On the American half were three new songs, by Jennifer Higdon, Glen Roven, and Ben Moore. Roven set Emily Dickinson's "Wild Nights," as Lee Hoiby once did: Leontyne Price had huge success with that song. Leonard was excellent in English, as she had been in Spanish. (English is a challenging language to sing in, even for native speakers.) A Ned Rorem song, "What if some little pain," had particular honesty of communication. And in a Cole Porter number—"Where, Oh Where"—Leonard sang two high B flats. The first one was shaky. I think she sang the second one to make up for it.

At age thirty or so, Leonard seems to be at her zenith. She is full of "dynamism," to use a word that Rorem once used about Price. After the recital, I posed an indiscreet, almost verboten question to an acquaintance: "How much of an audience's response to Isabel has to do with her looks?" (Leonard makes Audrey Hepburn look pitiable.) In any event, she is a superb singer. It is quite possible that a person's self-confidence is bolstered by physical attractiveness. But I should leave such questions to the psychologists.

The New York Philharmonic gave a concert whose conductor was David Robertson and whose soloist was Pierre-Laurent Aimard, the French pianist. They are critics' darlings, these two. But I must not snark: I have darlings of my own, as we all do. Aimard first played a Mozart concerto, the late A-major one. He had a poor outing. I will confine myself to the Adagio: which was about as ugly as you could ever hear from a professional.

Aimard and Robertson moved on to a new work, and that is a big reason for their status as critics' darlings: They champion modern music. The new work was, is, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, by Tristan Murail. He calls it a "symphonic concerto for piano and orchestra." Murail is a Frenchman born in 1947. He studied with Messiaen. Later, he taught at Columbia, and now he teaches at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Murail is an exponent of "spectralism." This is a compositional school that has to do with the computer analysis of sound.

I would call *Le Désenchantement du monde* an example of "sound design." That's a phrase coined, as far as I know, by a friend of mine. Murail's piece is sometimes kaleidoscopic, sometimes a bleakscape (to use a coinage of my own). It often makes an interesting racket. But does it add up to music? Music of a kind, to be sure. Either you succumb to a piece like this or you don't. The same is true of minimalism, much of it. I did not succumb on this occasion—and I think Murail is too generous with himself where length is concerned. But anyone can see that he is a gifted and learned man.

Over at the Metropolitan Opera, they did Handel's *Giulio Cesare*—though you may not have been able to tell from the production. In the pit was Harry Bicket, the Baroque specialist from England. The overture did not go well. It started with a wretchedly botched entrance, and thereafter was cramped, whiny, and airless. We seemed to be in for a long, long night. But Bicket proved respectable, and sometimes he was stylish: as in the opening of the aria "Se pietà di me non senti," when he had the orchestra surge and heave.

Natalie Dessay, our Cleopatra, sang that aria like a teenager doing a pop song. For much of the night, she was slight and uncertain. But she also had some polished moments, and she acted and danced up a storm, as we have come to expect. David Daniels, the acclaimed countertenor, was Caesar, or Cesare. At first, he seemed diminished: diminished in sound and technical ability. But as the evening wore on, he sang more like himself. Having a very good night, all through, was another countertenor, Christophe Dumaux, singing Tolomeo. He brought off his part with panache. Our two mezzos were Patricia Bardon and Alice Coote (Cornelia and Sesto, respectively). They elevated the proceedings—with their lushness, good sense, and all-around class.

The production, new to the Met, is the brainchild of David McVicar. I believe the production is supposed to lampoon the British Empire. (There's a daring tack.) It is also a campy farce: part *Soul Train*, part *La Cage aux Folles*, part other things. It is the kind of show in which an ancient wears sunglasses and takes a golf swing with an umbrella. There is also much physical abuse—torture—in this show, which is a modern fashion. I will pose my usual question when it comes to "imaginative" productions: Does the director like the opera? Or is he trying to mock, undermine, or transform it? I don't know the answer, in this case. I do know that audiences have liked or loved the show, which I can well understand: I enjoyed watching it myself. It has a lot of fun in it. But I'm not sure it's *Giulio Cesare*.

Into Carnegie Hall came the Staatskapelle Dresden, for two concerts. The Dresderers were led by their principal conductor, Christian Thielemann. Their first concert was all-Brahms—beginning with the famous, much-loved *Academic Festival Overture*. Famous and loved as this piece is, it is not programmed much, in my experience. Too familiar from concerts long ago and recordings? Thielemann conducted the piece with confidence and authority—he is a leader. But the overture was a little sober, without its true mirth.

Then Lisa Batiashvili joined the orchestra for Brahms's Violin Concerto. My colleague Fred Kirshnit and I once joked that we could write "pre-concert reviews." There was no reason to go to the concert; you could read our reviews beforehand. And yet, the concert world is full of surprises, which is part of what makes it wonderful. Before this night's concert, I predicted to friends, "Batiashvili will play the concerto beautifully—even spiritually—but it will be small-scale. It won't be big enough." I was wrong. It was beautiful, spiritual—and plenty big enough. There should have been more sound at the end of the first movement, but that is a minor complaint.

Thielemann ended the concert—the printed program, I should say—with the Fourth Symphony. In the second movement, the orchestra's sound was poor, and the horns struggled, as is their wont, and right. The third movement, that shout of joy, was very good—just as Brahms ordered. There was an encore, another shout of joy: the prelude to Act III of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. This was the Dresdeners' best playing of the night. They were assured, articulate, spirited. I would have welcomed the rest of the opera.

The next night, Mitsuko Uchida took the stage of Carnegie Hall, for a recital. The veteran pianist still has the deepest bow in music—though she is now rivaled, I think, by the young pianist Daniil Trifonov. Uchida began with Bach, some pieces from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book II. She tended to thump or hit the notes. The effect was mechanical. You could virtually see every hammer strike. But she took obvious pleasure in her Bach, and this helps an audience take pleasure too. She then played Schoenberg's *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 19. And she played them with supreme delicacy and grace. This told us something: that she played her Bach the way she did because she wanted to, not because she had to.

The rest of her printed program was devoted to Schumann. First, *Waldszenen*. These scenes, "forest scenes," include "Hunter in Ambush," "Haunted Place," "Friendly Landscape," and "The Prophet-Bird." In Uchida's hands, this last piece was truly *un oiseau exotique*. Uchida played the entire set with Mozartean taste and childlike simplicity. Her playing was descriptive. What I mean is, you could hear the scenes—see the scenes—in Uchida's playing.

She next played Schumann's Sonata in G minor, and that, I'm afraid, was too small. It must be bigger, stormier. But Uchida was in her element in the *Gesänge der Frühe*, or *Songs of Dawn*. This is late Schumann, very seldom programmed. Uchida found the sublimeness in these "songs."

The adoring audience wanted encores, and Uchida played two—first, a sonata by Scarlatti, that in D minor, K. 9. It was a study in delicacy and grace, positively Haskilesque. Finally, she played Mozart, a composer she dearly loves (as do we all). This was the Andante cantabile from the Sonata in C, K. 330. I regret to say that she was precious, handling the notes with sugar tongs, instead of going ahead and playing them.

After their night off, the Dresdeners returned to the stage for one piece: Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 (in the Haas edition, for those keeping score at home). Their initial entrance was lousy. And their sound, once more, was subpar. Thielemann, though, moved the music along, conveying urgency and intensity. He did not dawdle inappropriately. The opening of the second movement, the Scherzo, ought to tingle with anticipation. You should barely be able to sit still in your seat. From these forces, however, it was nothing special. And the movement at large was workaday. But Thielemann must be credited with sharp dynamic contrasts, and smart bits of rubato.

The third movement, the slow movement, requires some floating: some beautiful floating. This, the orchestra was not up to. And I scribbled the following note in my program: "ww's ugly as hell." I'm afraid the woodwinds did not produce an admirable sound. The cellos did, however, in their unison playing. Thielemann started the Finale like a house afire. And he went on to shape the movement intelligently, convincingly. The final notes were eccentric—unusually, kind of confusingly slow. But they were not ineffective.

At the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert conducted an all-American program. It began with an OOMP, i.e., an obligatory opening modern piece. It also began with oomph: with a new piece by Christopher Rouse, *Prospero's Rooms*. The title does not allude to *The Tempest* but to a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death." Rouse has composed a winning ten-minute ride.

The piece begins low, slumbering, and stirring—the dragon in *Siegfried*? It soon becomes phantasmagoric, to use a word habitually applied to Berlioz. I also thought of *Bluebeard's Castle*, the opera by Bartók. Rouse's piece builds demonically, noisily, and excitingly. I look forward to hearing it again (and if I had a nickel for every time I've typed those words in these pages—I'd have, what, twenty cents?).

Second on the Philharmonic's program was Bernstein's *Serenade*, which is to say his violin concerto, really. The soloist was Joshua Bell. He was at his best, and so was the conductor, Gilbert. For one thing, they blended Bernstein's jazz and classical elements beautifully. Bell was nimble and stylish, making his sweet Kreislerian sounds. Gilbert was alert

and clean—well-nigh immaculate. This was an exemplary performance of the *Serenade*, a work I regard as one of Bernstein's strongest, in the classical division. I still think the last movement is harmfully long.

After intermission, we had an extravaganza, the Symphony No. 4 of Ives. Gilbert, typically, proved an adept manager of affairs. He is undaunted by big and complicated pieces. He leads them with calm, a calm that comes from preparedness, I think (and ability). Sensibly, he had an assistant conductor on hand to help him: a second conductor on the stage, who took charge of some of the forces, at tricky junctures. This conductor has the amazing name of Case Scaglione. More amazingly, he appeared in traditional concert tails—as though he were Stokowski in 1932 or something. Here is one conductor who evidently doesn't go in for the de rigueur black Mao suit.

This was a good period for Ives symphonies, by the way: In Carnegie Hall, Leonard Slatkin conducted his Detroit Symphony Orchestra in all four of them.

Maurizio Pollini has taken to playing recitals on Sunday afternoons, Horowitz-style. At least he does so in Carnegie Hall. On a recent Sunday afternoon there, this senior statesman of the piano played a program of Chopin on the first half and Debussy on the other. His Chopin consisted of a prelude, two ballades, four mazurkas, and a scherzo. In general, he suffered from some stiffness—stiffness of execution and stiffness of expression. Yet there were some electric moments. Debussy was represented by his *Préludes*, Book I. The last of these is "Minstrels." If I had not been in the hall, I would not have believed that this piece could be played with so little enjoyment.

Pollini played three encores, beginning with a Debussy étude. Then there was a Chopin étude—the "Revolutionary." Then came the third ballade of the afternoon, Chopin's No. 1 in G minor. That is an exceptionally long piece for an encore. And, you know? Pollini's playing in these encores was his best of the whole day. He was freer, more accurate, more musical. I have been saying this a lot lately: "The encore was the best part"; "So-and-so really came alive in the encores." This is a phenomenon that requires some analysis, and maybe an essay of its own.

Not long after Pollini gave his recital, Richard Goode arrived at Carnegie, for an all-Beethoven recital. Goode is another senior statesman of the piano. And he did the trick of playing the last three Beethoven sonatas. This does not quite make a program, so he filled it out with a group of bagatelles, which preceded the final sonata (Op. 111). Goode used music, which is to say sheet music, on this evening. There is precedent for this—in fact, Goode is in fine company: that of Hess and Richter, for example.

Goode played his Beethoven sensibly. He was sensible in his tempos, sensible in his phrasing, sensible in almost everything. Have I made him sound boring? I don't mean to. Admirably, Goode did not try to make the music profound, knowing that it is profound already. He was content to let the music speak for itself. Op. 111 had an unusual share of clinkers, i.e., missed notes. But at least they let you know you were not listening to a studio recording.

Among Goode's teachers was the late, great Serkin, and I wish to mention a phenomenon: Students do not necessarily play like their teachers. There is much to praise Serkin for, and much to praise Goode for. But Serkin, for all his virtues, was often tight and jabbing, guilty of severely misplaced accents. Goode is very obedient to the musical line, with scarcely an accent out of place.

Keeping with tradition, he did not play an encore after Op. 111, music so transcendental that it must be the last word. I have a memory of some tradition-breaking. In Carnegie Hall about ten years ago, Thomas Quasthoff sang some of the profoundest, holiest music there is: Bach's "Ich habe genug" and "Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen." He then told the audience there must be no encore after these pieces—but went ahead with an encore. "Ol' Man River."

Evgeny Kissin, too, played Op. 111, in his own Carnegie Hall recital. This was the concluding piece on the first half of the program; so it could not be the final word. But at least there was an intermission before more mu-

sic was heard. The program began with a Haydn sonata, followed by the Beethoven. After intermission, there were four Schubert impromptus. A friend of mine commented, "The program suggests young Kissin is moving into middle age." The only showpiece on the program was the last item, a Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody.

The Haydn was the Sonata in E flat, Hob. XVI: 49. In the first movement, Kissin did very little of the thumping that once marred his playing. He was fairly sparkling and limpid. The middle movement was big and rather dramatic, but still Haydnesque. The Finale was just a little boxy and square—but it had its humor at the end, and I think Haydn would have loved it, the whole performance. As for Op. 111, it began arrestingly. Never have I heard this sonata begin with such command and drama. The Arietta did not begin well, in my judgment. Kissin was plodding, doing some of his thumping. I could see every bar line. But gradually the music did its job of transcendence.

It was in the Schubert that Kissin really shone. The impromptus were inward, musical, Schubertian. I thought to myself, "An immortal. Kissin has joined the ranks of the immortals." The Hungarian Rhapsody was the twelfth one, in C-sharp minor. And Kissin played it thrillingly. There was pandemonium in the hall. Can anyone in music, outside of opera, cause such pandemonium? A fellow critic of mine suggested Lang Lang. I'm not sure about that. And I'm not sure that anyone in opera can outdo Kissin in pandemonium.

Only once on this evening did Kissin disappoint, I think. That was in his first encore, the Melody from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, in the arrangement by Giovanni Sgambati. Kissin was as blunt as possible, thumping and jabbing. A lyrical line was out the window. But this was an evening to remember (as the word "immortal" more than suggests).

The pandemonium around Kissin is in part fueled by his stage presence—or so I suspect. He is very formal, a throwback to previous generations. He doesn't "reach out" to an audience with remarks from the stage and so on. He doesn't "let his hair down"; he keeps it up. He "reaches out" to the audience with his playing. On this occasion, while the frenzy was in progress, a woman handed up to him, not a bouquet, but a teddy bear. Kissin smiled warmly. Holding that teddy bear, he continued to bow, with his usual dignity and formality.

Let's end at the Metropolitan Opera—with Poulenc's masterpiece, *Dialogues des Carmélites*. We had a Frenchman in the pit, Louis Langrée. He and the orchestra were somewhat shaky, not least in their entrances. And the score did not quite transfix, in my view. This was the first *Dialogues* of the run, and I imagine subsequent performances were better. Also, I have very high standards for this conductor, and the Met orchestra. Speaking of high standards, the woman with whom I began this chronicle, Isabel Leonard, portrayed Blanche. She deserves to be gushed over for what she did in this opera, but let me say simply that her French was practically as natural as her Spanish and English.

Patricia Racette was Madame Lidoine—a.k.a. the Second Prioress—and she demonstrated her usual combination of strength and lyricism. Erin Morley was endearing as Constance. Elizabeth Bishop was an excellent Mother Marie, with unforced power. The veteran mezzo Jane Shaulis was touching in the small role of Mother Jeanne. *Dialogues des Carmélites* is not without men, and I will mention one of them: the tenor singing the Chevalier de la Force, Paul Appleby. He was fresh and apt.

Now we come to Felicity Palmer—Dame Felicity Palmer, who did her Madame de Croissy, the First Prioress. I have said before that this may be the best portrayal in opera today, along with Ferruccio Furlanetto's Philip (in *Don Carlo*) and a few other portrayals. "But the First Prioress is an easy role to impress in," you might say, "with all that dramatic God-questioning and dying." You would have a point. But the role can be overdone, underdone, inadequately done—and Dame Felicity gives an abiding lesson in it.

The media

Theories of relativity

by James Bowman

Perhaps it is one of the less obvious consequences of the credentialism which is the bane of our era that even quite ordinary people seem to have been persuaded that, in order to be taken seriously, they must think and talk and write like intellectuals. Every self-respecting media commentator, for example, now approaches the news as the Doctor in Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* does the symptoms of his eponymous patient: as redundant confirmation of his preconceived diagnosis. "*Oh! meine Theorie!*" he cries triumphantly. Nor, in the present case, is it just the media pundit's own intellectual vanity to which we owe his theory. Those he writes for expect it of him. Along with the news, they want some explanation of why things happen and what they mean at the same time. And, as such theories tend to fall into one of two broad classifications more or less corresponding to conservative and progressive political tendencies, all this theorizing tends to increase the already existing tendency for the media to fragment along partisan lines.

That, in itself, might not be so bad, but the increasing moralization of partisanship over the past half-century or so has made its own baneful contribution to the process. That is, the belief on both sides that the political struggle is not just between different political philosophies or visions of the good society but between right and wrong or even good and evil has meant that the rival theories and their theorists are (to say the least) often a little lacking in rigor. And whatever weaknesses may appear in their theories—particularly the theories about the theories that they attribute to those who are in opposition to their own theories—are not always quick to be noticed by those who are predisposed to believe in them.

That, at any rate, is one theory about how it is that theory these days is so often unpersuasive and so often outruns the facts—as in the briefly notorious post by David Sirota on Salon.com in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing in April: "Let's hope the Boston Marathon bomber is a white American," he wrote, bizarrely. Well, while we're wishing, why not just wish the bombing never happened? The idea is no more absurd. There's not much to be said in defense of such an idiotic conceit, but one thing that might be is that Mr. Sirota's real purpose was not so much to put forward a half-baked theory of his own—though he's pretty sure something must be linking all the white male loners who murder randomly in schools, colleges, or movie houses, even if he's not entirely sure what it is—as it was to deprecate at least some of the half-baked theories that would have been treated by their holders as having been confirmed should the bombers turn out to be—as in fact we learned they were, sort of—Islamicist jihadis.

I say "sort of" because the story of the Chechen Tsarnaev brothers, in the opinion of the FBI, "doesn't fit with the pattern of radicalization" familiar from earlier terrorist outrages. What does this mean? How can we make their evil deed fit in with a larger idea about why things happen? The most persuasive theory that I read was that of Peter Watson, author

of *The Age of Nothing: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God*, in *The Times* of London who called the brothers "Nike terrorists"—that is, terrorists who "Just Do It" without any serious religious or ideological foundation of belief but simply as a "lifestyle choice." The trouble with that theory is that it's not terribly useful *qua* theory. Lifestyle choice terrorists, unlike the Islamic jihadis, can presumably pop up anywhere at any time and for any reason—not only without leaving a trail to help the police catch them and forestall their atrocities but also without giving very much in the way of satisfaction or sense of vindication to either side of the political divide with a theory waiting to be confirmed.

I have a suspicion that this will prove true of most theories: that is, that the most accurate of them will also be the least valuable to those in the media—which sometimes seems to mean almost everybody in the media—whose chief interest is in scoring political points against those who disagree with them. But there I go, pushing my own hypothesis. "*Oh! meine Theorie!*" cries the doctor. "I shall be immortal!" For the worst thing about all this promiscuous theorizing is that you can't escape it. Even if you try resolutely to refuse proposing any theory of your own, you are likely to have one imposed on you by the theorists of the other side, eager to refute it and the more likely to do so in that they have invented the thing themselves for that very purpose. My view is that that style of argument—making a straw man to take the place of those you dislike only to knock it down—is more common on the left against the right, but that's only my theory, if not an unsupported one.

Let's consider a couple of examples. I have written before about the supposed theory of "trickle-down economics," in this connection—a theory invented by its detractors in the bizarre form of an attribution to those they don't like of a belief in gravity. In the theory world, perhaps, things may trickle *up*, but in any case the "trickle-down" theory has no avowed adherents but only those who are skeptical of the benefits of government intervention in the economy who are unfortunate enough to have had this belief in economic gravity attributed to them by their political opponents. Those standing far downstream from the money-source with their mouths open, waiting for it to reach them, are understandably disposed to believe the assurances of those who regard the trickle as insufficient or even non-existent and who promise them a place further up. Unless they can come up with a better offer, those who doubt the government's ability either to create or to redistribute wealth would do better to renounce trickle-downism preemptively.

The latest such straw man theory is that of "austerity," which has taken a hell of a beating in the press since I wrote of it here a few months ago (see "Herb Stein's Law" in *The New Criterion* of January, 2013). On that occasion, I mentioned the work of the economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff of Harvard, who never set out to champion an economic elixir called "austerity" but merely to provide some specifics for the commonsense proposition that the more the government has to pay to its bond-holders the less money will be available in the economy as a whole for the sort of productive investments necessary for economic growth. But when some other economists from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found an error in the Reinhart–Rogoff arithmetic—whether this error was material in arriving at the magic number of 90 percent of GDP as the point at which the debt level makes the economy go all wobbly is still a matter of dispute—the discovery won them far more attention than their original paper did. Suddenly, at the very moment when their theory was widely proclaimed to have been discredited along with all those of a conservative persuasion who had ever cited them (as I did) in arguing for even a quite modest degree of fiscal restraint, Reinhart–Rogoff found that they had become the "theorists of austerity."

The anti-austerians were quick to press their advantage. *J'accuse!* they cried. "So, did an Excel coding error destroy the economies of the Western world?," asked Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman in *The New York Times*. "Austerity doctrine is exposed as flimflam," claimed Katrina vanden Heuvel in *The*

Washington Post. "How much unemployment did Reinhart and Rogoff's arithmetic mistake cause?," screamed the headline in *The Guardian* to an article by Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. "This is a big deal," wrote Mr. Baker, "because politicians around the world have used this finding from R&R to justify austerity measures that have slowed growth and raised unemployment." Therefore, presumably, and not only in his view, the alleged theory of austerity had no leg left to stand on. What another *Guardian* writer's headline referred to as "all this economic sadomasochism" imposed by Britain's Liberal-Conservative coalition government over the past three years could be safely junked in favor of yet more debt-financed stimulus.

The European experience was often cited by American critics of austerity like Professor Krugman, who never seems to tire of making post hoc ergo propter hoc arguments attributing the dire condition of (especially) the southern European economies of Greece, Spain, and Italy to the austerity medicine which has been administered to them in the hope of curing it. Even in Britain, the much derided austerity measures of the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, will have increased the debt by 75 percent over that inherited from the profligate Labour government of the Blair–Brown era, which increased the size of government in Britain by 53 percent. Meanwhile, real cuts (assuming they happen) will by 2017 amount to only 2.7 percent of that much larger behemoth. This is what the media consider sadomasochistic austerity.

That's one measure of the extent to which "austerity," like "trickle-down," has became something that nobody wants to be associated with—not even Ms. Reinhart and Mr. Rogoff, who published a piece in *The New York Times* disavowing any connection between their theory and the conservative proponents of austerity who had been wont to make use of it (as I did) to bolster their warnings about unsustainable levels of debt:

> The politically charged discussion, especially sharp in the past week or so, has falsely equated our finding of a negative association between debt and growth with an unambiguous call for austerity.
>
> We agree that growth is an elusive goal at times of high debt. We know that cutting spending and raising taxes is tough in a slow-growth economy with persistent unemployment. Austerity seldom works without structural reforms—for example, changes in taxes, regulations, and labor market policies—and if poorly designed, can disproportionately hit the poor and middle class. Our consistent advice has been to avoid withdrawing fiscal stimulus too quickly, a position identical to that of most mainstream economists.

Austerity? Good heavens, no! I tell you, I do not know the man. Yet one may seek in vain for the man or woman whose call for austerity *is* unambiguous and who *does* advocate a too-quick withdrawal of stimulus. The latest plan by Representative Paul Ryan—the avatar of austerity to Professor Krugman and the only named conservative from whom the on-line appendix to the Reinhart–Rogoff oped sought to dissociate their own theory—calls for a balanced budget in ten years and envisages in the mean time a growth in spending of 3.4 percent a year. The Ryan "Path to Prosperity" proposes spending $41 trillion in ten years as compared to the $46 trillion proposed by President Obama. Call that frugal if you like, but it's hard to make the case for it as "austere."

Of course that didn't stop the media's increasingly vocal anti-austerity tendency from attributing to their imaginary enemy a desire drastically to cut or even abolish government spending. Mark Blyth, author of *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, thought he could safely transition from "Dangerous Idea" to "Delusion" in an article for *Foreign Affairs* where his savage attack on his straw man was assisted by a survey of the last century's economic history in which every bad decision made by governments during that time—and what a lot of them there were!—was attributed to "austerity," which we are to suppose is the same "doctrine" (as its opponents call it) guiding Representative Ryan. Reviewing Professor Blyth's book in *The New Republic*, Ruy Teixeira raised the stakes by calling austerity not just a dangerous but "a pernicious idea." And little wonder, too, when he also has

before him *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills* by David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu.

But is austerity an "idea" at all, in the sense that these writers mean it—let alone a "doctrine"? Being in the business of economic magic themselves, these writers imagine that those they oppose must be in the same line. They have their "doctrines" and "ideas" aplenty, all of them promising to make everyone prosperous and happy, so that those who are perverse enough to oppose them must have corresponding "ideas" and "doctrines" designed to make everyone poor and miserable. But austerity, like war, is not a pernicious idea. It is a pernicious necessity. And, also like war, it affords us only the option of embarking on it now or later. Usually, in both cases, now is better than later. There is a considerable overlap, too, between the anti-austerity faction of today and the anti-war faction of a decade ago. That may be why the tendency of their arguments is so often similar. Both, that is, engage in the straw man technique noted above. I have here to hand the latest mailing from the libertarian Cato Institute, for whose work I generally have a lot of respect. Yet in it, the president and chief executive officer, John A. Allison, tells me that "many on the Right accept the neoconservative definition of American Exceptionalism which seems to amount to praising our ability to defeat any nation of our choosing (and they seem to have a long list) on the field of battle."

Really? Who are these many on the Right? Who, indeed, are these neoconservatives whose extraordinary ideas are accepted by them? Can he name even one? But if you are trying to raise money, as Mr. Allison is, the media myths of the Iraq War era, in which a bunch of crazy neoconservatives waged a "war of choice" in the Middle East for no better reason than that they could are apparently long-lived enough still to serve his cause. Cato has a better plan, you see. Don't go to war. Genius! It's just like the Krugman plan for the economy: Spend lots more borrowed money and generate all the growth you'll ever need to pay it back some day in the future. What's not to like? You would have to be the sort of fool or knave he imagines the "austerity" party to be to oppose him.

The more important similarity between the anti-war and anti-austerity partisans lies in their common tendency to make a false dichotomy between the status quo and, if not perfection, at least an ideal state approaching it, and align themselves with the latter. Thus they talk of the policies of their opponents as not "working"—as if those policies, like their own, were part of a utopian project to make the whole world *comme il faut* and not merely the best option available to them to forestall a disaster of one sort or another. "Look here," they cry, bringing their newest *Theorie* into the marketplace of ideas. "We have designed a system which will create peace and prosperity for everyone, and what have our opponents to offer in its stead? A system which instead promises war and penury only short of destitution in the short term and no promises for the wonderful world beyond that which we have in store. You would have to be insane"—another word that could be found popping up from time to time in connection with the austerity debate, as it did with the war debate before it—"to choose their system over ours."

"But, but . . . ," we default austerians may stammer, "we *have* no system. Not even austerity, such as it is, is a system but rather what we consider to be the best of a very bad lot of alternatives with no promise of anything but avoiding ruin, or something approaching it. Moreover, we are skeptical of the capacity of any system to produce the ideal world promised by the theories of the utopians on the other side. Neither peace nor prosperity can come from a theory or a system but only from people working in their own self-interest either to produce more, in the one case, or to make others afraid of them, and so unwilling to go to war against them, in the other. The arguments, in other words, are not on all fours with one another. But the view of the media, in need of simplicity and not too scrupulous about where they find it, tends to be that both sides must be proposing a path to happiness and that, therefore, if the one path does not lead to happiness, and in double quick time, then it's time to try the other one. That's my theory, anyway, and I'm sticking to it.

Verse chronicle

Collateral Damage

by William Logan

If a poet sidles up to you and whispers that he's been writing song lyrics, take my advice and run like hell! You might be fleeing the next Irving Berlin; but odds are the fellow's one more deluded soul who thinks lyrics and poetry have something to do with each other. Paul Muldoon is a man of many hats—Pulitzer Prize–winning poet, poetry editor of *The New Yorker*, president of the Poetry Society in Britain, professor at Princeton, and author of some of the quirkiest, most devious, crossword-puzzle-complicated, head-turningest poems of the past thirty years. He's clever in ways that almost give clever a good name. Still, a few years back, at about the time that middle-aged gents go nuts over Miatas and flock to high bridges where they tie themselves to bungee cords, he started a rock band and began scribbling lyrics. A small volume called *The Word on the Street* is the result, and his publishers have thought it wise to inflict it upon the unwary.[1]

Muldoon rarely does things by halves. He'll write twenty-one poems on old record albums or "90 Instant Messages to Tom Moore" and look as if he's just warming up. This isn't a poet's natural competitiveness gone awry; it's something darker, like a need to beat all comers in a dozen different events in *The Guinness World Records*. That this book of lyrics is as skinny as a kid with rickets suggests that the poet feels he's trespassing on dangerous ground—if so, he should have obeyed his instincts.

1 *The Word on the Street*, by Paul Muldoon; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 76 pages, $23.

Muldoon has perhaps the most capacious imagination of any poet living—he thrives on challenge, and his poems have secretive forms that spur him to great (if sometimes pointless) acts of invention. Yet he can't seem to write with the ease a song requires, to write as if the words had an emotional gravity that drew them together. At best they possess a mocking cynicism that compliments the reader who gets the point:

> Julius Caesar was a people person
> He knew how people felt
> He knew it took a little coercion
> When the people were the Celts.

This is simple, elegant, and savage. The anachronism of "people person" suggests all the ways the present tries to interpret the past, while concealing a judgment that irony isn't deep enough to cover. Auden would have been delighted. (If you like your highbrow references mixed with camp, Muldoon will give them to you in spades—*Blade Runner*, Elizabeth Bowen, Antabuse, Johnny Depp, the Big Bopper, *Oedipus at Colonus*, Botticelli, and Clint Eastwood don't even begin to exhaust them.)

The vivid or striking moments in these lyrics are so rare, however, it's almost useless to look for them. When he's not offering doggerel of a depressing sort ("The men who dreamed up the airplane/ We know they were next of kin/ Wilbur Wright rounded out Orville/ They came through thick and thin") or bludgeoning

rhymes ("We know behind the wolf bully/ Is a sheep with a pulley/ And its arguments get woolly"), Muldoon is noodling about like a man on an air guitar:

> I wish you'd lose at least one layer
> Of your obstinacy
> Even a mule's a team player
> Though its desk's a lot less laden
> Tonight Death Valley seems to run
> From Bleecker to Broadway
> You're hauling borax by the ton
> While I pay and display.

Its desk's a lot less laden! Tennyson would have wept. ("A mule's a team player" is a joke, but not a good joke.) The poet's Rubik's Cube—ingenuity is not the main problem here, but it's a problem—Muldoon simply can't help adding the filigrees and furbelows that in Cole Porter's hands would have been droller than droll. Instead we get "I flagged behind my flagon" and "it's kinda inconvenient/ To meet in a convenience store" and "She put her horse/ Before the cartel." Sidesplitting. These seem less those acts of genius in the language that the poet happens upon than simply muscling the words with a schoolboy smirk.

Song lyrics and poems work in such divergent ways, it's not surprising that a man might be the master of one and the fool of the other. We don't expect that Ira Gershwin, Moss Hart, and Oscar Hammerstein could have written good poetry; and there's no reason to suppose that Wallace Stevens or Ezra Pound or Marianne Moore could have supplemented their incomes by dashing off Tin Pan Alley tunes. Miracles happen; but it's a lot more likely that a man will write a good poem than a good lyric, even if he has an infinite number of monkeys and an infinite number of typewriters behind him.

Song lyrics can be entirely artless or devilishly contrived, composed by some magician of the word or just some putz; but whatever they are they need music to make them art, and without music they're just love without money. "Sha-na-na-na, sha-na-na-na-na" and "Do-wah-diddy-diddy-dum-diddy-do" and "Ob-la-di, ob-la-da" make perfectly wonderful lyrics, but on the page they look like gibberish. Cut out the tune, and lyrics are just words that look annoyed. With the exception of the blues—highly charged by image and wit, with a sprinkle of salaciousness added—I'd rather read the Des Moines phone book.

You'd like to think that Muldoon's lyrics could be redeemed by music; but I've listened to his old band, Rackett (which he dryly calls a "three-car-garage band"), and Wayside Shrines, his newer one. Alas, on stage the songs are almost unsingable. It's no use telling Muldoon that he's tone deaf—what boy in the past fifty years hasn't wanted to pick up a guitar and join a rock band? Being good at it isn't the point.

Matthew Dickman's poems go off like a bottle rocket. *Mayakovsky's Revolver* is stuffed with hyperactive lines, unrelenting trivia, and a devil-may-care manner that's better at the rueful absurdities of life than at the tragedy to which he's drawn.[2] Dickman has become a master of Frank O'Hara lite (he shares O'Hara's ADHD, and little else)—gorging on the detritus of modern culture, cheerful in their buffoonery, his poems are sweetly unserious and often out of their depth:

> only maybe the books are not
> what's saving me anymore. Maybe now
> it's reruns of *The Donna Reed Show*
> or the Marx Brothers
> or movies about people who are funny
> all the time. I keep watching the same rap
> video on YouTube.

Dickman has charm to spare, and a teasing cheekiness that's hard to dislike—yet you wonder if life should be as dull as this. When I've read too much of such vacant mental stocktaking, I remember what Coleridge did one afternoon when *he* was bored—he wrote "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison."

Even when Dickman stumbles upon an interesting idea—say, a man building an effigy of his absent lover out of her clothes—he tends to

2 *Mayakovsky's Revolver*, by Matthew Dickman; W. W. Norton, 93 pages, $25.95.

overwhelm it by jabbering on like O'Hara in his worst poems, and even some of his better. The title ("Weird Science") cheerfully refers to John Hughes's wet-dream movie of the Eighties, and the ending ("I will hold you up and kiss you/ where your mouth hurts because it's new and was only a handkerchief") almost redeems the junk it took to get there. Still, if all a poet wants is to be as good as Billy Collins, he has rather limited ambitions.

Dickman is capable of poems far more devastating, but he can't go at them without dropping some of his illusions. Occasionally there's a density of reference and invention, a little blizzard of off-beat observations; and suddenly the poem moves into a higher gear. Such passages reveal the poet he might be if he weren't in the grip of some hipster method of throwing lines together. (Has no one yet called this the Brooklyn School?) Dickman's a sophisticate who plays dumb, which is never very appealing—it's too much like slumming.

When he doesn't try so hard to come off as a feckless dope, Dickman can give a terrifying picture of modern life (modern love seems beyond him). The long elegy for his older brother is mostly a failure (dragging in Mayakovsky, or his revolver, doesn't help much), but one scene is worthy of Pinter. The boy's father

> talked about Costco the night of my
> brother's cremation and how
> pumpkiny the pumpkin pie was
> though he bought it in a frozen pack of
> twenty. Just like a real bakery,
> he said, you just throw it in the oven,
> he kept saying that, you just throw it in the
> oven, you just throw it in the oven.

I can't help but sympathize with the man in his need for chitchat, his beautiful use of the word "pumpkiny," his wish to deflect attention from the horror of his son's cremation, only to make it more horrible. His nervous remarks raise the ghosts of the Holocaust. These lines bear all the longing, the regret, the impossibility of communication in a family that has suffered.

Dickman is elsewhere never quite as confident, or confiding. He has a taste for freakish similes and mischief-making metaphors, and he's not at all bad at them: "the blue smoke/ crawling out like a skinny ghost from between my lips," "She carried her hands around/ like two terrible letters of introduction," "the way/ blackberries will make the mouth/ of an eight-year-old look like he's a ghost/ that's been shot in the face." They're a showoff stunt, more often than not, and a license for the goofiness that doesn't serve the poet particularly well. I'd like to think that he's paying homage to the Auden of the Thirties, but mostly these seem like half-price Raymond Chandler. Some are simply tasteless ("my tongue/ like a monk in wartime, awash in orange silk and flames"), and one or two probably violate the law in some states ("Your ass is a shopping mall at Christmas,/ a holy place . . . ./ Your ass is a string quartet").

Dickman is happy taking a subject and simply riffing on it: Pavese, a dead goldfish, King George III, canopic jars. Then he slaps on a cutesy title. (He deserves a copy editor who would teach him the difference between "O" and "oh," and rap his knuckles when he writes "they have swam" or "shinning stars.") If you were kind, you'd say he pursues relevance through irrelevance—and perhaps he does, or perhaps he just doesn't give a damn.

Jane Hirshfield's soft-hearted, soft-headed poems are just the thing for readers scared off by that grim, insensible thing, modern poetry. (That would mean most readers not of a flinty sort.) Hirshfield has her fans. I missed *Come, Thief* when it first appeared and am glad to catch up with the paperback.[3] If *The New York Times* calls the book a "deep well full of strength and wisdom," heck, it must be some pumpkins.

Hirshfield writes as if all the world were an allegory waiting to happen. Take her thoughts on Sappho:

> The poems we haven't read
> must be her fiercest:
> imperfect, extreme.

3 *Come, Thief*, by Jane Hirshfield; Alfred A. Knopf, 96 pages, $25, $16 (paper).

> As it is with love, its nights, its days.
> It stands on the top of the mountain
> and looks for more mountain, steeper pitches.
> Descent a thought impossible to imagine.

It's hard to see why Sappho's lost poems would be imperfect and extreme—or fiercer than the fragments we possess (some are a touch acidic). The comparison to love looks more inflated and ponderous the longer you linger, yet you can't say there's nothing to it—like mountain climbers, lovers take foolish risks, long for new passion out of reach, suffer desire meaningless when fulfilled ("enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight," someone or other wrote). The first lines, then, are less a statement than the delusion of a lover never satisfied.

Hirshfield is clever to have packed so much into so little, to have such deft control of modest resources. Still, in its plain-clothed diction, its tidy summary, its highflown thoughts on descent, the poem seems too pat. Hirshfield writes in shorthand, in sentence fragments that sometimes deliver more than they promise, in a soothing babble both heartfelt and irritating. She loves abstractions, but they're never blooded—they're just loose baggy monsters wetted down with tears.

> What some could not have escaped
> others will find by decision.
>
> Each we call fate. Which Forgetfulness—
> sister of Memory—will take back.
> Not distinguishing necessity from choice,
> not weighing courage against betrayal or luck.

I like her flow chart of fate, her invocation of the Greek notion of Anangke (Necessity), her recognition of the occasional inconsequence of courage (it's a notion out of Montaigne); but the argument is as subtle as a dump truck. Hirshfield tries to sound profound without bothering to work for it. You might say her mind is more discriminating than her poems.

Come, Thief comes larded with Zen wisdom hardly worth queueing for ("Call one thing another's name long enough,/ it will answer," "A window is only a window when stepped away from"), often with a lethal coat of sappiness: "Your ordinary loneliness I recognize too as my own," "I don't know what time is.// You can't ever find it./ But you can lose it." The inner gimbals of Hirshfield's poems have been heavily influenced by the balance and weight, the Balanchine choreography, of haiku; yet, like so much haiku in English, her imitations sound precious: "On the dark road, only the weight of the rope./ Yet the horse is there." (Hirshfield has more animals under contract than Aesop—in the opening poems, there are squirrels, jays, a hummingbird, an ant, a donkey, a horse, a dog, a billy goat—then I lost track.)

You sense her affinity with Sharon Olds and Louise Glück, poets who have carved out fiefdoms in that great realm of the damaged, the one a scenery-chewing diva and the other a poster child for wounded souls—but, where Olds's poems are brazen as billboard advertisements, Glück's are tough-minded and darkly narcissistic. Hirshfield is, by contrast, just a mild, touchy-feely poet with an occasional gift for wry humor:

> In the nursing home, my friend has fallen.
> Chased, he said, from the freckled woods
> by angry Thoreau, Coleridge, and Beaumarchais.
> Delusion too, it seems, can be well-read.

Perhaps this friend also appears in the poem about Alzheimer's that follows. ("'How are you,' I asked,/ not knowing what to expect./ 'Contrary to Keatsian joy,' he replied.") The guy should do stand-up.

Hirshfield takes seriously the minor business of life; but she wants to browbeat the poor reader, reminding him that torture is very, very bad, and the Holocaust positively wicked ("anything becomes familiar,/ though the Yiddish jokes of Auschwitz/ stumbled and failed outside the barbed wire"). Whenever she starts talking like an adjunct lecturer in semiotics, you feel sorry for all the cats and dogs and billy goats that have to listen. Someone somewhere is always getting injured by philosophy. The animals are just collateral damage.

John Ashbery celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday last year, but he's still cranking out poems

like a combine harvester that turns, not straw into gold, but wheat into Wheaties, or wimples, or whales.[4] Few poets have possessed such facile invention or bizarre imagination—either Ashbery is extraordinary (as in some ways he is), or he's hit upon a magic formula that will let him toss off poems long into his dotage. Hardy would have been jealous.

> The drive down was smooth
> but after we arrived things started to go haywire,
> first one thing and then another. The days
> scudded past like tumbleweed, slow then fast,
> then slow again. The sky was sweet and plain.
> You remember how still it was then,
> a season putting its arms into a coat and
> staying unwrapped
> for a long, a little time.

You have to love a poem that starts like this, with its diligent jostlings of language, its pinball-carom images, its humble-jumble diction. Ashbery loves American English as much as Whitman did, and his lines shift from Goths to Gothic in a flash. The first sentence might be his *ars poetica*.

The poems in *Quick Question* look lazy—the sentences are alert but arthritic, often ending with a flat-footed turn. Yet there's almost always more going on beneath the surface—I suppose tumbleweeds can scud, but what's important is the unstated alliance between the tumbleweeds present and the clouds absent (tumbleweeds are far more comical). Ashbery is rewriting Romantic puffery for the depressive modern. The half-overdressed season might be Keats's Autumn, now a woman who has changed her mind and stands there, unable to stay or go.

Ashbery is cleverer than he seems, but his critics are too clever by half, or three-quarters. He has attracted more willful and perverse scholarship than almost any modern poet, while readers—those who don't simply throw brickbats—remain delighted by a language that doesn't behave as it should. (The trouble with most other avant-garde poets is that they have no sense of humor—or, worse, that they think they're funny.) Ashbery's poems often suffer from a rare neurological disorder, able to recall the sentence just written, but not the one before that. They live on, almost making sense; and readers return for the promise of meaning infinitely delayed.

I love the abstract platonic Ashbery more than the real thing. His last dozen books have been more or less the same—he could write this stuff till doomsday, much of it guff, but some pinched with the sorrows of age:

> Invariably the fabric is chafed,
> the wood aisles feathery to the touch
> as though autumn had fallen off the truck again.
> Are these animals to be prized for their musk
> or will the kids imbibe us, recognizing each
> toy as a distinction, something to be shelved
> and consulted when distracted, at some kind
> of grand
> occasion or event no one recognizes anymore?

Is this about a holiday no longer much celebrated or the writing of poems? Perhaps it's a little of both. (Ashbery's most memorable poetry has often been about poetry.) His poems are now infused with an *ubi sunt* melancholia made no more comforting by his wry little touches. He's a poet the way Frank Gehry is an architect—he prefers that poems look like twisted wreckage, twisted but beautiful. Ashbery has always been an aesthete (therefore suspicious to an avant garde that thinks aesthetics toxic), but of a peculiar kind. His poems live on ruin, busted memory, and the vague sense of an apocalypse soon to arrive, or perhaps already here—it's not surprising that Auden chose his first book for the Yale Series of Younger Poets.

There's nothing in these poems that Ashbery readers haven't seen a dozen times over. He's an old stager, taking one more turn—reading *Quick Question* is like seeing Sarah Bernhardt in *her* great age, a ghost of herself and yet still Bernhardt. His patter has become a bit leaden ("In my mature moments I was robotic like you"), his turns of phrase creaky ("Because if it's boring/ in a different way, that'll be interesting too"), and his titles have, as usual, been tacked on apparently at random. Still, he makes

4 *Quick Question*, by John Ashbery; Ecco, 110 pages, $24.99.

me laugh when he refers to the Rake's Progress Administration or claims that something has been "stepfathered in." "Is it all doggerel and folderol?" he asks. The question confesses nothing and confesses all.

A lot of young poets write as if they didn't want to think very hard—Ashbery has made not thinking an art. (A minor poet is a major poet with something major missing.) The new poems have a subdued moral edge, half joked away; but some of his valedictory remarks now sound like valedictions, not just whistling in the dark. In an alternate universe, subject to a different physics, Ashbery might make perfect sense, his every lacuna a rift of ore (literary critics there would scratch their heads over the unaccountable nonsense of Lowell and Bishop). Few American poets have rendered American life so richly, or done it more ridiculously. Ashbery ought to be declared a national treasure, like baseball cards, or Edsels, or Oreos.

Adam Fitzgerald's messy first book is full of flash turns, a few extraordinary phrases, and a lot of blather. A poet who titles his book *The Late Parade* labels himself a Johnny Come Lately, while mocking his tardiness a little.[5]

> To write about one thing, you must first write
> about another.
> To speak of the death of King Charles V,
> you must first speak of the Hồ Chí Minh
> Dynasty.
> To understand the rotund ministries of, say,
> moonlight,
> you must first be blind, and understanding
> fencing.

You must know about fencing, presumably, because you'll be stumbling around in the permanent dark. Any poet who can write a phrase like the "rotund ministries of . . . moonlight," however off the point his poems, is worth watching. There are phrases elsewhere that display this complicated imagination to advantage, whenever he stops trying to be John Ashbery, Jr.

Fitzgerald has a devilish way of throwing a poem together, modulating from the colloquial to the preciously poetic and tossing in Victorian poeticisms along the way ("o'er," "fore'er," "'tis"—metrical makeweights rescued from the grave). I'm not sure how much irony is attached. Fitzgerald is a magpie, as Lowell often was, willing to take his influences broadly; yet something is lost as well as gained—the poems have a fatal lack of character and a strangely manic style.

> It was a shock. A shock for everyone. Not
> exactly a killing
> to be had, but from a zoneless dust, a
> millioned doodads
> of pinkish/beige crumbcakes built in stuccoed
> stone, you
>
> could almost taste the ageless warrens; baronial
> hodgepodge
> shroomed on hill-jammed streets; the bay's
> smoky pines
> wrestling for the stiff swim trunks of ancient
> summertime.

That's a fair portrait of Naples, but the frivolities of "zoneless" and "millioned" and "shroomed" and much else overwhelm the rest. I like "shroomed," a reminder that American towns sprouting up overnight along the transcontinental railroad were called mushroom towns—I like it, but it's distracting. The stiff swim trunks are harder to parse; but I suspect he's slipping the drying trunks of modern summers (stiff from salt water) onto the Naples of two millennia ago, a playground for the Roman rich—Pliny the Elder had a villa nearby and died in the explosion of Vesuvius.

If Fitzgerald never learns to underplay his effects, the reader will starve to death chewing wood pulp. The poet is full of phenomenological doubt inherited, or thieved, from Ashbery, and is infatuated by what sound like off-cuts from *The Bridge*—"the pedal-steel graves covered in nosegays and eelskin," "those dental waters/ oft-ringing." It's not that you can't make sense of such lines; it's that the labor is scarcely worth the reward.

5 *The Late Parade*, by Adam Fitzgerald; Liveright, 112 pages, $23.95.

The reader has to work his way through the occasional nod to the *OED* ("hypethral") and a lot of language too hip for its own good ("a tad ghetto," "goof magentas," "bake-a-thon," "mojo," "gulag-y years," "can-opened night"). Still, I love a "flossy shiv of sea-holly," am glad to know "tombstress" (a cemetery sculpture of an angel or goddess), and pledge to use "über-mundanity" with only a trace of embarrassment. I'm grateful to Fitzgerald for The National Museum of Vastness, for "remorse code," for "a boy in jockstraps is a joy forever" (though why is he wearing more than one?). For the rest—the sentences that outstay their welcome, the lines easy to write and impossible to speak ("like a gilt slit/ on bodily macadam where cockscombs spill.// The sun pronates to my left, akimbo")—I hope he doesn't get praised too highly, because it's easy to be seduced into repeating your flaws. The best poems arrive early in the book; once the poet is infected by Ashbery, it's Ashbery all the way down.

Fitzgerald with a dose of tranks is better—there's a touching pantoum that begins all ajumble but comes to a confident and compelling close. When he's not shooting off flare guns, he gets to the business of writing without so much mannerism.

> Some peaches were gathered in your name,
> and that was enough beneath panels of
> trick moonlight, parsing out phrases from
> clouds, asleep like a Subaru in the suburbs.

The poem is cheerfully titled "Vowels and Continents." The Fitzgerald lurking in the shadows, more conventional but not shy of feeling, giddy but not bouncing off the walls, doesn't grandstand so furiously, or wearyingly.

This turbocharged book is full of arrogant charm, but it's disappointing that the poet has done so little with so much—it's easy to quote his bad lines, there are so many of them, and tough to find his good ones. He's already been compared to Hart Crane by that dashing old blowhard, Harold Bloom, who will compare anyone to Crane at the drop of a hat. If Adam Fitzgerald now seems like another Ashbery clone or Crane wannabe, that's no mean accomplishment, but it's hardly enough.

Anne Carson has revisited the characters in her most idiosyncratic book, *Autobiography of Red* (1998), a portrait of the boyhood of Geryon, a red-winged monster with issues. Though the monster appears briefly in the *Inferno* as a puddle-jumper ferrying Dante and Virgil downward to the Circle of Fraud, he has little role in postclassical literature. In *Red Doc>*, Geryon is simply called G.[6] His sometime lover Herakles, recently discharged from the army and suffering a bad case of PTSD, is now known as Sad But Great, or simply Sad.

The poem begins with dialogue deliciously *in medias res*:

> Goodlooking boy wasn't he / yes / blond /
> yes / I do vaguely
> / you never liked
> him / bit of a
> rebel / so you
> said / he's the
> one wore lizard
> pants and
>
> pearls to graduation / which at the time you
> admired /
> they were good pearls

This description of the young Sad has the right-angled turns and deadpan humor of Beckett. Carson is a take-no-prisoners kind of poet. She loves finding a breach in the classics that lets her imagine worlds that are a mash-up of ancient Greece and the present day.

The Herakles of myth stole the cattle of Geryon as one of his labors, in the version of Apollodorus going as far west as the straits of Gibralter. Carson's poem is cast mostly in long narrow columns—if these are meant to remind us of the Pillars of Herakles (as the arms guarding the straits are still known), it's a fairly dopey idea; but some of Carson's best ideas sound dopey. The slightly disjoint narrative is occasionally interrupted by passages labeled "Wife

6 *Red Doc>*, by Anne Carson; Alfred A. Knopf, 171 pages, $24.95

of Brain," seemingly by the author's alter ego. The poem judders along in fits and starts, its flat-bottomed prose helter skelter, studded with far too many references to Proust and the Russian surrealist poet Daniil Kharms. The minor characters include Ida (part of an odd threesome with G and Sad), Io, Lt. M'hek, CMO (a chief medical officer), and 4NO (Air Force code for medic), with high-minded dross thrown in, like a play titled *Prometheus Rebound*.

Carson's poems rarely seem calculated or designed—they're slapped together by whim, or what passes for whim. About halfway through *Red Doc>* you realize that, like *Autobiography of Red*, the poem will be much less than the sum of its parts—but then the parts aren't much to begin with. *Autobiography* was suggestive in exploring the adolescence of an outsider—it was hard not to see Geryon as the late embodiment of a long list of teenage loners, a Holden Caulfield for the age of video games. *Red Doc>* (the computer designation for her text file) has much less reason to exist.

The trouble with sequels is that they're sequels. The *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* are brilliant poems, but no more than Dante's versions of *Die Hard 2* and *3* (same hero, different adventures). Who has ever fallen in love with *Paradise Regained*, when Milton has killed off everything appealing about his antihero, Satan? When Carson gives way to her inner lecturer, the poem takes a little nap:

> You
> know the Carthaginians
> liked to use oxen for night
> fighting. I'm talking about
> Hannibal I'm talking about
> the battle of Ager Falernus
> 217 BC. Like tanks but
> more frightening. They'd
> tie lit torches to the horns
> and stampede them toward
> the enemy.

This is riveting enough, but her disquisition on the mechanics of Geryon's flight would have stopped the Trojan War cold. At one point we get six pages on rations—an interminable list of the things followed by more than you need to know on the subject. Too much of the poem is just Carsonian stratigraphy, grinding down through private musings too often dull as dirt. There's no subject so interesting she can't make you sorry.

Where *Autobiography of Red* used a volcano as its centerpiece, *Red Doc>* meanders toward a glacier (later there's a volcano, too) where Carson finds her inner Pynchon—there's a colony of ice bats as well as an ice garage called Batcatraz. This homage half to Batman, half to Superman's Fortress of Solitude (she must also have read a few issues of *Hellboy*) is the most exhilarating and inventive in an otherwise leaden book. Eventually the poem comes to the hospital where G's mother is dying. *Red Doc>* might have been titled *The Hardy Boys and the Secret of the Glacier*.

This sequel is not so much a tale as a series of blackout sketches. English poetry has probably not had since Pope—and certainly not since Eliot—a poet so drenched in the classics or so capable of breathing the musty air of ancient texts as if it were the pure serene. Unfortunately, Carson's full of dippy, adolescent notions that probably go down better from the podium, where being inert with your own fancy is not a disadvantage. Her characters have all the emotional range of department-store mannequins, and not intelligent mannequins at that.

I read this disturbing poet, with her original and disconcerting mind, with the same unease as I read late Geoffrey Hill, or minor T. S. Eliot. But just as it's possible to underrate poets working in an out-of-date style, it's the lot of readers to overrate what seems brand spanking new. Perhaps Carson is a poet whose idiosyncrasies can be forgiven—and whose weaknesses will one day be thought strengths. Still, in the middle of *Red Doc>*, when she apparently doesn't have a clue where the poem is going, Carson is a poet standing in the desert without a map.

Books

The aristocracy in democracy

by Harvey C. Mansfield

In 2008, The French critic Lucien Jaume published an interpretation of Alexis de Tocqueville that won a prize from the Académie Française. An English version by the eminent translator Arthur Goldhammer has now appeared, which is a second recommendation.[1] The book's subtitle, "The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty," reveals that it takes up a worthy and understudied topic in today's theorizing about democracy—which amounts to a third recommendation. To put it more plainly and aggressively: Can a democracy sustain itself without the help of its rival, apparently its enemy, aristocracy?

M. Jaume does not raise this question directly. His book studies Tocqueville through Tocqueville's French contemporaries. On the basis of a letter in which Tocqueville says that, in writing *Democracy in America*, he always had his own country in mind, M. Jaume concludes that he was not writing about America except as a way of addressing the French. M. Jaume therefore studies what he calls the "intellectual and ideological landscape of French liberalism," also including anti-liberals, combining Tocqueville's context with an "internal reading" of his book to show how he addresses French critics even if he does not name them. M. Jaume's internal analysis selects important passages but does not follow the movement of Tocqueville's argument as it unfolds. It divides the "new political science" that Tocqueville says is needed for a new world into the roles of Tocqueville as publicist, sociologist, and moralist. For M. Jaume, democracy is not the new world, encompassing everything, that it was for Tocqueville. Nor was America the location of the new world that Tocqueville thought to be the future of France and Europe, and not their obstreperous, backward cousin.

In the same spirit of confidence, M. Jaume criticizes Tocqueville for trying to "grasp too many things at once," and says further that he was "partial," "unfair," held a "myth," carried "intellectual baggage," "contradicted himself," and other such disparagements. M. Jaume's book excels in the introduction of figures in Tocqueville's lifetime, now forgotten, such as Frédéric Le Play, Silvestre de Sacy, Abel-François Villemain, Louis-François Villeneuve-Bargemont, and Alexandre Vinet. He also considers the more familiar names—reactionaries such as Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, eminent monarchists such as Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes and François-René de Chateaubriand, as well as the stalwarts of nineteenth-century French liberalism Benjamin Constant and François Guizot. Acting from afar and through intermediaries are the great figures of Pascal, Montesquieu, and Rousseau—whom Tocqueville mentions as having read from every day without intermediaries and in rather naughty violation of the protocol of M. Jaume's intellectual history.

1 *Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty*, by Lucien Jaume, translated by Arthur Goldhammer; Princeton University Press, 356 pages, $35.

Tocqueville too did not raise the question of democracy's relationship to aristocracy directly, but he treated it in several ways in his masterpiece *Democracy in America*. M. Jaume is right that the book is not simply about America, but it is, as the title says, about democracy *in* America, where Tocqueville found an "image of democracy." Democracy has its own logic, its own penchants—for example, that it "naturally" prefers equality, for which it has a "passion," to liberty, for which it has a "taste." America, too, has its own features, for example its township government and its two races of blacks, made slaves, and reds, excluded and oppressed but left free. The first is an advantage for democracy, the second not. Tocqueville wanted to discuss democracy as a practical whole, not just its principles; he also wanted to discuss America in the light of its universal significance, not only for France, as the vanguard of the democratic revolution. So he wrote about democracy as it is in America, as America is.

To be a practical whole and not just a principle or set of principles, democracy must deal with those aspects of human nature that are not or do not seem to be democratic. In America, democracy dominates society; using Tocqueville's term, America has a democratic social state, and democracy is moving toward ever greater equality. The democratic majority in due course always gets its way. But there are aristocratic features to American democracy: the rich, the masters and slaves of the South, the Indians on their reservations. In classrooms today one will often hear objections that Tocqueville overlooked obvious inequalities when he called America a "democracy." But he does not overlook them; he explains them, showing how democracy treats surviving aristocratic features that it has not tried or is not able to eliminate.

M. Jaume is, unfortunately, among those who interpret Tocqueville's attitude toward aristocracy as "nostalgia," supposing that he yearned for its return even while thinking it to be impossible. But the unrealism of nostalgia that this view attributes to him is better understood as his thoughtful realism, for aristocracy has its roots in human nature just as much as, though differently from, democracy. Even in the democratic age that he pronounces "irresistible," aristocracy must be reckoned with. Tocqueville, always so conscious of human convention, does not often refer to "human nature," as in an attempt to state universally what all humans have in common. There is nothing like the individualistic "state of nature" that the seventeenth-century philosophers of liberalism used as the beginning and foundation of their political thought. He speaks instead of a "social state" as the "first cause" from which he reasons. He frequently contrasts democracy to aristocracy as different wholes, each by itself, almost as if there were not one but "two humanities." Any attempt to combine them as in the classical mixed regime he declares to be a "chimera."

Yet democracy in America has certain features that date from aristocracy but are now democratized: the notion of rights that originated in the willingness of feudal nobles to stand up against the monarchy; juries of one's peers, once fellow nobles, now fellow citizens; democratic associations that arise through the "art of association" rather than, but in imitation of, the feudal responsibilities of a single aristocrat; the devotion of lawyers to the traditions of the law; religion that restrains human excess while connecting heaven and earth. Moreover, these inheritances from aristocracy are grounded in the intractable nature of democratic peoples that makes them desire to rule themselves rather than be ruled by others. This is an assertive impulse contrary to aristocracy that resembles the very desire to rule that constitutes an aristocracy. Intractability is the untaught basis on which democrats build the constructions of self-government—in America ranging from the spontaneous cooperation of the township to the theoretical artifices of the American Constitution (whose Federalist framers Tocqueville praised as a party of aristocrats).

On top of these aristocratic sources of liberty Tocqueville points to the possibility of greatness in democracy (mentioned but not developed by M. Jaume). The desire for greatness, with the disdain for the people that

accompanies it, is the overall character of aristocracy in Tocqueville's description, while honest, comfortable democracy suffers from its own normal defect of mediocrity. But in the practices of self-government Tocqueville finds in America, democracy achieves the character of "political liberty" that constitutes its greatness and gives Tocqueville's liberalism its special flavor. Even the grave defects of American democracy mentioned above are used to illustrate the requirements of political liberty: the willingness to adopt the white man's civilization found in blacks but not in Indians, and the fierce love of liberty found in Indians but not in blacks.

M. Jaume refers to Tocqueville's use of classical style in writing as opposed to democratic floridity, but he does not discuss the two most prominent themes in *Democracy in America*: political liberty (or self-government) and greatness. Tocqueville ends his book by looking at politics from the standpoint of God, in which democracy and aristocracy appear as two aspects of one whole. This standpoint is available at least dimly to a legislator or political scientist like Tocqueville, because it uncovers God's intellect rather than piously accepting God's mysteries (for Tocqueville, God's providence in bringing democracy is not hidden, as M. Jaume has it, but apparent in history). But God's standpoint is not available to most human beings, because their partisanship prevents them from seeing the whole impartially, thus forcing them to construct their own partial wholes, typically democracy and aristocracy as Tocqueville contrasts them. That is why he says that there are almost—don't forget the "almost"—two humanities in the two regimes and that a mixed regime is a chimera—though a necessary one in his own mind! Paradoxically, the desire of partisans to make their favorite part, the few or the many, into a whole makes compromise with the opposing part seem unnecessary as well as unwelcome.

M. Jaume understands the "aristocratic sources of liberty" differently. Rather than study the substance of the matter to see where democratic liberty comes from, he looks at how Tocqueville might have picked up his thoughts from sources among his contemporaries and so how he might have been or was read by them. This emphasis on the context in which he wrote and thought willy-nilly takes the focus away from the readers Tocqueville may have intended to reach and from the effects he may have wanted to produce. A writer of his elegance and intelligence has the power to create his own context. Surely one of his intended audiences was his fellow aristocrats, particularly those who suffered, unlike himself, from nostalgia for the old regime of the French monarchy. He would want those readers to abandon their hopes and to accept the irrevocable character of democracy as a "providential fact" (a critical phrase from the Introduction to *Democracy in America*) and then turn their energies to the making of a strong constitutional democracy in France, whether a monarchy or republic. Under a democracy, liberty can be gained or lost, and if it is gained it will be because of its "aristocratic sources" prudently democratized.

With M. Jaume's method, Tocqueville's thoughts become "commonplaces," always contextual and never creative. One of them is the phrase "social state," but the way in which Tocqueville uses the phrase, as the "first cause" of America, is far from a commonplace of his or any time. But M. Jaume does not care for first causes. In a different way Tocqueville does not either, though he seems to like that rather metaphysical expression. He called himself "a new kind of liberal," and he wrote his book on democracy, which is also a book on liberty, in the context of America. This is the context that Tocqueville saw for himself, not the one imposed on him by his time. The context of America that he studied and visited precedes and illuminates the context of France in which he lived and for which, in part, he wrote. Of course he read the many contemporaries that M. Jaume describes and discusses, and M. Jaume has written a good book in the category of contextual studies, from which anyone can learn relevant facts of his life and thought useful for understanding him. It does not, however, show a path leading toward that understanding.

Catholicism, 3.0

George Weigel
Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the Twenty-First-Century Church.
Basic Books, 304 pages, $27.99

reviewed by George Sim Johnston

In *Evangelical Catholicism*, George Weigel lays out an agenda for the Catholic Church for the new millennium. The book is not just for Catholics since it addresses a general spiritual crisis. Western culture has reached an inflection point along the curve predicted by Nietzsche. After generations of chipping away at its Judeo-Christian inheritance, the West now openly embraces what Weigel calls a "debonair nihilism." Our elites are not simply agnostic but "Christophobic." Moral norms, once universally accepted, now have to explain themselves. Ideas such as truth, goodness, and beauty are dismissed with a dry little smile. The result is a vacuum with consequences that Nietzsche understood but our sunny nihilists in the academy and media do not. Weigel argues that the modern Church has fashioned a Christian humanism that is a potent antidote to the negations of postmodernity, one that can engage even the non-believer.

If it is going to be a creative force in modern culture, the Catholic Church has to make internal changes. More precisely, it has to recover its deepest evangelical identity. Weigel's book lays out an agenda for what he calls "deep" Catholic reform. It touches everything from the liturgy to moral theology to the way bishops are chosen. It involves going beyond the sterile ecclesial debates between "liberal" and "conservative" that have been such a distraction since the Sixties. It is a call for Catholics (and all Christians, for that matter) to recover the sense of the Church as mission rather than simply a structure that hands out norms and sacraments. Weigel argues that Counter-Reformation Catholicism, which did good service for centuries, must give way to an Evangelical Catholicism and that this transition, while far from complete, has actually been going on for some time.

To understand where the Church is today, Weigel begins with its response to the Protestant revolt in the sixteenth century. To correct the abuses that rightly angered Luther, great reforming popes like Pius V (1566–72) read the riot act and did everything they could to strengthen the Church as an institution. This meant tightening management, encouraging the military discipline of religious orders like the Jesuits, and emphasizing the clarity and precision of Catholic doctrine. The Counter-Reformation Church was a great spiritual and cultural achievement; it produced mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, along with the baroque splendors of Bernini and Palestrina. But it did not have the elasticity needed to engage the modern world that began with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

The onslaught of modernity on the Church was relentless. The industrial revolution saw a general migration into the cities, and it seemed that the moment a French or Italian peasant stepped off the rail car in Paris or Milan he lost his faith. At the other end of the social spectrum, leading intellectuals made it their business to destroy the Catholic Church—*écrasez l'infâme*, crush the infamous thing, in the stinging words of Voltaire, who at least was grateful for his Jesuit education.

Ideas have consequences, and the new philosophy's aggressions turned bloody with the French Revolution. Thousands of priests were murdered in France. Troops of the Directory arrested Pius VI, who died in captivity. His successor Pius VII was kidnapped by Napoleon. In 1848, when another revolution was sweeping through Europe, Pius IX's prime minister was stabbed to death and the pope had to flee Rome in disguise. In 1871, the Archbishop of Paris was executed by agents of the Paris Commune. In subsequent decades, modern democracy kept coughing up rabidly anticlerical politicians like Émile Combes, who closed all the Catholic schools in France, in some cases giving the nuns only a few minutes to pack up and depart.

There was a tendency in the Church to respond to these attacks by withdrawing to a fortified position and hurling down anathemas on the modern world. But by the mid-twentieth

century, Catholic thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Henri de Lubac found this fortress mentality exasperating and counterproductive. Even earlier, there was Leo XIII, who began a twenty-three-year pontificate in 1878 and, as Weigel correctly points out, ushered the Church into the modern world.

Leo possessed, in the words of one historian, "a political genius essentially constructive." With enormous tact and patience, he steered Catholics through the persecutions of France's Third Republic and Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. He understood that the old ways no longer worked and that the Church had to come to terms with the modern world. His great encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("Of the new things") laid the foundation of modern Catholic social thought, which bore great fruit in twentieth-century Europe. (The architects of the "economic miracles" of Germany and Italy after World War II, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi, were devout Catholics steeped in the Church's social doctrine.) Leo also inaugurated the Church's careful embrace of the "historical-critical" approach to Scripture, which remains a perilous enterprise given the cold fury with which some modern scholars go about deconstructing the Bible.

Despite the hiccup of the anti-modernist campaigns under Pius X—harsh in retrospect, but not entirely unwarranted—twentieth-century popes followed Leo in gradually steering the Church out of its Counter-Reformation shell and into a more positive engagement with the modern world. The culmination of these efforts was the Second Vatican Council. The hermeneutical key, if you will, to the Council appeared in the document *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that "Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself." The statement distills an attractive Christian humanism, which Weigel claims is the basis for a new evangelization.

It is not a statement likely to be found in the old neo-scholastic manuals, which tended to treat the faith primarily as a list of propositions. The truth about ourselves is ultimately not a proposition but a Person, who himself is defined by total self-donation. Hence, another line of the Council, which became a kind of leitmotif for John Paul II: "man can fully find himself only through a sincere gift of self." If it is true that we have a "law of gift" inscribed in our being, then the way to human flourishing is through self-gift and not egotistical assertion. In contrast to the false humanisms of the past century, the Church proposes that we find ourselves by going outside ourselves.

If the writings of John Paul II could be summarized with the word "gift," in the case of his successor Benedict XVI, it would be *logos*, the creative rational principle spoken by God that informs all creation. Benedict insists that we are reasonable beings and that our intellects can locate important truths that are not subject to whim and manipulation. Weigel points out that when the Catholic Church weighs in on issues like abortion or euthanasia, it now generally uses non-dogmatic arguments "drawn from the grammar of reason, which is (or should be) accessible to all, whatever their theological location."

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in the paradoxical situation that the Catholic Church is the last major institution to champion the full use of human reason. This would not have surprised G. K. Chesterton, a lover of paradox, who said that often the purpose of authority in the Church is to save reason in the world. Chesterton also pointed out that when reason becomes untethered from truths, which are above (but not against) reason, it starts to devour itself. Hence, we see the Continental Enlightenment reaching an inevitable terminus of nihilism and relativism. Weigel suggests that a primary mission of the Church is to assist the West in a recovery of wisdom, still a dirty word among Anglo-American pragmatists and French deconstructionists.

Weigel proposes another essential task, which is the recovery of beauty. "One of the signs," he writes, "of the emergence of Evangelical Catholicism over the past six or seven decades has been a renewal of theological interest in beauty as a means of apprehending the divine. In a disenchanted world, the enchantment of the beautiful is a rumor of angels, a hint of the transcendent—a pathway

to God." He proposes Gregorian chant as a kind of "universal Catholic musical grammar," echoing modern Church documents that have been willfully ignored by liturgists.

The sad fact is that after Vatican II there was an eruption of mediocrity in the Church. On Sundays, many Catholics sing suburban jingles which sound like the B-side of a Debby Boone album and are notable for a plethora of first-person pronouns. But under the influence of Benedict XVI and theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar, there is at least the beginning of a "reform of the reform" aimed at turning Catholic art and liturgy back to mystery and transcendence.

Weigel's book is rich with insight, and I hope it will be read in Catholic chanceries. But, as he points out, real change in the Church will probably come "from outside the formal structure of Catholic life," mainly grass-roots movements. There is a pattern in Church history: The papacy has a way of recognizing new spiritual impulses—the Franciscans, Jesuits, Opus Dei—and encouraging them, while the Church's middle management struggles to keep up. It is a good sign that even though *Evangelical Catholicism* was written before the election of the new pope, Francis gives every indication of thinking—and more importantly living—along the lines limned in this superb book.

Long live the queen

Ben Downing
Queen Bee of Tuscany:
The Redoubtable Janet Ross.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 352 pages, $28

reviewed by Brooke Allen

The most indelible portrait of the British colony in Florence has probably been E. M. Forster's in his 1908 novel *A Room with a View*: Vicars and spinsters exchanging guarded pleasantries over the tea-table; earnest culture-seekers who won't venture into Santa Croce or the Uffizi without their Baedekers. Twenty years later, Aldous Huxley, who lived in the city for several years, described it as "a third-rate provincial town, colonized by English sodomites and middle-aged lesbians," the colony itself "a sort of decayed provincial intelligentsia."

Neither assessment is quite fair. The British community in Florence took root in the 1840s and reached its apogee in about 1910, at which time it was recorded that some 35,000 British subjects resided there: one-seventh of the city's total population. Famous Anglo-Florentines of the early period included major poets, like Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Walter Savage Landor, and equally important visual artists, such as William Holman Hunt and Horatio Greenough. In 1867, a young English couple, Henry and Janet Ross, arrived in Tuscany and took up residence at a farm named Castagnolo, later moving to a *castello* in nearby Settignano called Poggio Gherardo—the setting, some say, of the first four days of *The Decameron*. The Rosses became key players in Anglo-Florentine society, and Janet, who outlived her husband by a quarter of a century and spent a total of sixty years in the region, became the unofficial doyenne of the colony—"the redoubtable Janet Ross," as many called her. It is a phrase Ben Downing has chosen as the subtitle of his new biography of this gifted, domineering, colorful character.

It is said often enough that so-and-so "knows everyone," but in Ross's case the cliché actually comes close to the truth. Her parents were well-connected intellectuals (both Janet's mother, Lucie Duff Gordon, and her grandmother were serious writers and translators), and Janet was exposed to literary heavy-hitters from an early age. As a small child she bossed around the likes of Thackeray, Dickens, Carlyle and Macaulay, all friends of her parents. As a girl she was loved, hopelessly, by the older George Meredith, who wrote her wistful letters.

In 1860 Janet married Henry Ross, a businessman and adventurer who had helped the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard to excavate Nimrud and Ninevah. Ross had recently traveled and worked in the Black Sea region and in Mesopotamia, and at the time of the couple's marriage he was in business in Alexandria—not yet the seedily entrancing

metropolis of Lawrence Durrell, but a stuffy colonial outpost. Janet escaped it whenever possible for the far more romantic, "oriental" Cairo, where she lived a more adventurous life than was customary for British wives, touring the Suez Canal while it was being built with her new friend Ferdinand de Lesseps and participating in impromptu horse races with a local prince and his band of Mamluk retainers. In fact, her horsemanship so impressed one local sheikh that he made her a proposal:

> Oh lady, by Allah, thou ridest like ten *bedaween*, and Saoud [her groom] tells me thy conversation is such that thy husband would not need to go to the coffee-shop for entertainment or knowledge. When tired of thy white master come to the tent of Mohammed Hassan. By the head of my father, O lady, I will stand before thee like thy mameluke and serve thee like thy slave.

But Janet was as interested in business as in pleasure, and when Henry was made Alexandria correspondent for the London *Times* in 1863, she took on the responsibility of writing the articles herself. This was supposed to be a secret—they were published under Henry's byline, after all—but some suspected the truth. "I read the *Times* Alexandria correspondent diligently," the faithful Meredith wrote from England, "and catch the friend's hand behind the official pen." Before long the Rosses ran into trouble. Henry's business came close to bankruptcy, and the *Times* Alexandria correspondent was accused of conflicts of interest. Eventually the couple decided to forestall any further losses and left Egypt, arriving in Italy in 1867. Janet was at that point twenty-five.

It was, as Downing writes, "the beginning of the end of the heroic phase of the colony." Elizabeth Barrett Browning had died in 1861, her husband three years later. Mrs. Frances Trollope, the acid-tongued critic of America and mother of the novelist, had expired in 1863, Landor in 1864. A pity, for it would have been interesting to see how the redoubtable Mrs. Ross dealt with the even more redoubtable poet—Downing notes, "'I strove with none, for none was worth my strife' runs the first line of his best-known poem, but nothing could be further from the truth, for he locked horns with nearly everyone." But there were still luminaries, and Janet immediately befriended one of the foremost, Holman Hunt.

"In recent years," Downing tells us, "the cult of Florence has largely been supplanted by the cult of Tuscany," its acolytes seeking nirvana in Chianti or other areas of the Tuscan countryside. The new ideal is bliss on a hilltop, pressing one's own oil and making one's own wine. It was not always thus; the Anglo-Florentines of Janet's day in no way aspired to join the *contadini* in their rustic labors. In this area, as in others, she was something of a pioneer. Poggio Gherardo, like other large estates at the time, was run on the *mezzadria* system, a form of sharecropping. Janet took the unconventional step of declining to hire someone to manage the estate and instead to run it herself as *padrona*, sometimes even pitching in alongside the farm laborers. She prided herself on her agricultural skills and on every successful harvest. "In her participatory enthusiasm, her preference for the rural, her esteem for the peasantry and its traditions, and the fact that she wrote about all this—she was the first to do so—she was a prototypical figure," comments Downing, and she wrote well-received articles for the British press on such subjects as "Vintaging in Tuscany," "Oil-Making in Tuscany," and "Virgil and Agriculture in Tuscany." Janet might also be given credit for kicking off the Anglo-Saxon love affair with Italian cuisine: Her *Leaves from Our Tuscan Kitchen*, published at the turn of the twentieth century, appears to have been (along with Dorothy Daly's *Italian Cooking*) the first Italian cookbook in English. Curiously, Janet never actually *made* any of the recipes: "I know nothing about cookery," she admitted in one of her autobiographical books, "never having even boiled an egg in my life, though I *do* know if a dish is good or bad."

Over the years Janet became part of the landscape, an object of obligatory pilgrimage to new generations of distinguished visitors. Henry James, who spent three days at

Poggio Gherardo, claimed to have admired Janet's mind, while characteristically qualifying his praise: "But I am not so sure of Mrs. Ross's mind as of her eyes, her guitar, and her desire to sell you bric-à-brac! She is awfully handsome, in a utilitarian kind of way—and an odd mixture of the British female and the dangerous woman—a Bohemian with rules and accounts." Mark Twain, who spent two seasons in the area, valued Janet's company and her help in setting up his household. Bernard Berenson was a close neighbor and friend. Kenneth Clark, a young protégé of Berenson's during Janet's last years, was fascinated, calling her "a well-known terrifier" and "the most completely extrovert human being I have ever known." Virginia Stephen (later Woolf) was not altogether charmed; "old ladies," she wrote after a visit to Poggio Gherardo in 1909, "when they are distinguished, become so imperious."

Janet *was* imperious, to an extent that may alienate readers. Downing has given us a vivid and fascinating picture of the rich social world she inhabited, but not everyone will grow fond of Janet Ross, despite her many admirable qualities. One senses a ruthlessness and narcissism that is not always attractive. Downing admits that her coldness towards her only son, Alick, is difficult to explain. Her mother was a widely loved, almost saintly woman, yet Janet does not appear to have been much moved by her death. And while she generously took in and virtually adopted her niece Lina, her behavior over the young woman's marriage was inexcusably churlish. The two women's relationship stayed close in spite of everything, but Lina's comments after Janet's death deserve consideration: "Her life has been a starved one—its apparent fullness has consisted mostly of façade-dazzle."

Janet died in 1927. She had lived long enough to witness Mussolini and his blackshirts, but not, thankfully, the full horrors of fascism. British Florence regrouped in the postwar years and lived on, if in a rather diminished style, until the end of the century; Downing dates its ultimate demise to 1994, the year Harold Acton, John Pope-Hennessy, and Joan Haslip all died. Acton's house, La Pietra, and Berenson's, I Tatti, are now owned by NYU and Harvard respectively. Poggio Gherardo is owned by a small Catholic order and is a home for boys. Downing describes seeing there, on a recent visit, a picture of the Virgin Mary with a motto beneath: "io sono la padrona di questa casa"—I am the mistress of this house. Suppressing a smile, he reflects on the irony: "I could easily imagine Janet's reaction to this new padrona."

Big, fat, Greek weddings

Ruby Blondell
Helen of Troy:
Beauty, Myth, Devastation.
Oxford University Press, 320 pages, $29.95

reviewed by Sarah Ruden

I got hold of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in the mid-Seventies, during my early teens, and I wore out my copy. I could tell straight off that some chapters were ridiculous: Housekeeping could not, for instance, become a "Comfortable Concentration Camp." But such excesses seemed part of the book's friendly thematic drive. Here was someone—the only person I knew of, in fact—seconding my dream of joining the first generation of women at a fully open Harvard. I did go on to do that, and I've always known that my bread is buttered on the side of Friedan's Second Wave feminism.

But the Third Wave, which had already sloshed in when I arrived in Cambridge, never inspired anything in me but suspicion and irritation. Even though I've been living with the movement for thirty years as a print junkie, today I had to look on Wikipedia to try to make sense of it, and that normally terse and level-headed source was no real help.

The Third Wave includes but apparently isn't limited to (I cut and paste here) queer theory, anti-racism and women-of-color consciousness, womanism, girl power, post-colonial theory, postmodernism, transnationalism, cyberfeminism, ecofeminism, individualist feminism, new feminist theory, transgender politics, rejection of the gender-binary, and sex-

positivity. (As links to other Wikipedia articles, an unusual number of these terms produced pleas for clarification and documentation.)

These ideologies are, as precisely as I can identify them, claims of ineffable specialness and irremediable injury; they are more a collection of cults than a basis for public policy debate. For that, even the starkest traditionalist has to give credit to the Second Wave's calls for equal opportunity. A number of its leaders said, "The changes I want/need/deserve will be good for both me and society as a whole in the long run, because . . ." Most of their successors say, "Wheeee! It's ME!" and "Hell, it's you."

The Third Wave does everything it can to take away the means to talk about anything interesting and useful, such as ethics, religion, culture, the law, history, biology, psychology, and politics, and a keen discussant like myself wants to shriek more loudly than any bouffant and corseted mother of five ever did over an upset bucket of Mop & Glow. The effects on the academy (in which I'm now a happy vagabond) are among the worst, as interesting and useful statements are the main benefit that ordinary citizens justly expect from disciplines outside the hard sciences.

Ruby Blondell's *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* is not, these days, a substandard book on the feminine, but it suggests the bad effects of Third Wave feminism on intellectual standards. Blondell's in-depth, intricately detailed examination of Helen's persona in Greek literature and art is limited to illustrating the following assertion:

> Helen of Troy is the mythical incarnation of an ancient Greek obsession: the control of female sexuality and woman's sexual power over men. As the most beautiful woman in the world, and the most destructive, she is both the most in need of control and the least controllable.

A polygamous sect in Idaho could hardly come up with such reductive, circular, boring thinking about women. Ancient Greek tradition was much more nuanced, as is clear from the accounts of Helen themselves. She probably entered the culture as a fertility goddess. (Blondell only glances at this persuasive theory.) She had, at any rate, a cult near Sparta, and her story seems to bear out how prone deities were to weird ambiguities and contradictions as they adapted to history and mythology, categories the early Greeks did not separate.

According to archeologists, Troy (near the northwestern coast of what is now Turkey) endured a conflagration and massacre late in the Mycenaean Greeks' ascendancy, around 1250 B.C. Warriors from the Mycenaean kingdoms of the Peloponnese could well have sacked the city, so it is not surprising to find the name of a Greek goddess in the tale, the earliest version of which is found in Homer. By easily imagined steps, this figure could have become a ravished or seduced queen, the indispensable rationale being that she was where she absolutely shouldn't be and needed to be recovered at any cost.

Whatever the facts, Helen is hardly unusual in attesting to the awkwardness of Greek religion as grounds for storytelling. Just to quote some scholarly clichés: Artemis, the virgin huntress, ends up presiding over childbirth; Hera, despite her own scandalously unhappy marriage, is the ritual patroness of the institution. As Blondell points out, Helen, the must-have Greek woman, bears no son—but that likely *didn't* come about because male myth-makers winced at the mere thought of her. A lot of what emerged in mythology isn't even logical, let alone minutely reflective of values at any given period.

To derive any worthwhile notion of what Helen's story "means," you need to look at its treatment in individual authors (keeping in mind that "Homer" is, strictly, not one of them but rather a compendious tradition, parts of which may have dated a thousand years earlier than their first appearance in writing, in the eighth century BC). You also shouldn't be so smug, as a modern woman, that you can't appreciate ancient authors' points of view; or so minutely gender-centric that in effect you mime analysis without the benefit of data: There's no "about" women if you can't get your mind off some putative essence of them, and you can spend pages and pages just padding around a purely commonsensical opinion

like Herodotus', that no abducted woman is worth dying for like cattle.

Absent such distortions, Helen is not such a big deal. Blondell savagely exaggerates her prominence in extant early sources. Two long chapters on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would give a novice the idea that Helen is the prime mover and constant center of attention, whereas in fact she makes only brief, relatively uneventful appearances. And the actual impetus for events in the *Iliad*'s narrow slice of the ten-year Trojan War throws even more doubt on her dynamism. The Greek leaders Agamemnon and Achilles fall out over the right to a stolen girl, Briseis, who like Helen is beautiful and sought after and the nominal object of a rivalry extremely costly in lives—but Briseis, like Helen, all but disappears amid thousands of lines expounding male interactions, including battle scenes ad nauseam. If a woman is so important, then why so little emotional or intellectual involvement with her? I don't mean to suggest jokes about the present-day Greek fleet when I state the obvious, that these men are involved mostly with each other.

In the surviving lyric poetry of the Archaic Period (roughly between the eighth and the fifth centuries), the topic of the Trojan War has a frequency that suits the popularity of Homer, but it looks as if Helen isn't on center stage except once in Alcaeus, once in Sappho, and once in Stesichorus. According to legend, the immortal Helen punished this poet with blindness for an unflattering passage about her; he then recanted, writing that only an image of her had gone to Troy with Paris. The Palinode (now lost except for three lines) was apparently the basis for the story that she waited out the war chastely in Egypt. A detailed extant version is the Euripides play *Helen*.

The heroine's most common function both in Homer and afterwards is as a bitter footnote. The Trojan War was fought "because of Helen" the way the Iraq Wars were fought "because of oil." Well, Greek myth is full of beautiful abducted women, and Canada has lots of oil. In-depth writing about the real first world war, like Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Ajax* (as well as Homer, of course), treats it as a lamentable nexus of human and divine failings, tightening around the ultimate powerlessness of both groups. In the big picture, the likely reason sundry voices declare that Helen isn't really the cause is that the authors think this is true.

In her role as an individual mortal woman, she must usually have seemed to lack even full moral accountability. During the historical period, a husband might kill his wife's corruptor and proudly defend the action in court, but as a rule he only divorced the wife. Sustained and vindictive blame of the woman would have been like torturing the family cow for letting a bandit lead her off and milk her. By this time, the notion that women could be actors in public life was something of a joke. Witness the protagonists of *Lysistrata* and *Women at the Assembly*—and Helen herself, who is behind a lampoon of the uniquely influential Aspasia (Pericles' mistress) in *The Acharnians*; and who is a vehicle for the outrageous rhetorical stunts of Gorgias and Isocrates. In *Helen*, Euripides turns her into an essentially comic figure (*pace* Blondell, who denies this): She and her husband outfox her dense would-be usurper Theoclymenus—partly through her ugly mourning disguise, including cropped hair—and merrily escape homeward.

Conversely, looking into the Homeric Helen's eyes (so to speak) became a profitless literary enterprise, so flatly, repellently amoral and selfish was the only personality the Classical and later Greeks could fit into an empowered adulteress, like the Helen of Euripides' *Trojan Women*. The serious Helen falls away; only in a setting of the authentic heroic age, where she gets points for relative self-awareness, can she convince readers that she has a character (as opposed to just being one, later on).

Helen is not only morally but also personally far less significant than Blondell would have us believe. The premise of women's overwhelming erotic power, or perceived erotic power, lacks substance in this most obvious case. Helen is famously the most beautiful woman in the world, but how much would that have signified in a regime of long dresses and veils for women of position? The rare, mostly vague

or formulaic mentions of her physical features hardly explain her adventures.

The illustrations from Greek art that Blondell provides suggest this same dead end. As a body and face, Helen is indistinguishable from goddesses, other heroines, and ordinary brides and wives. Imagine an editor feeling he has to write MARILYN MONROE under that icon—like a Greek vase painter's label HELEN. Ancient Greek art, in fact, contains very few female (or male) physical imperfections, and these tend to carry quite specific import, as in the case of aging prostitutes or crones. Biologically functional women *were considered beautiful*; and given seclusion and arranged marriages as the unbreakable rules for female citizens, no means even existed for relative degrees of beauty to operate in public except among carelessly, ephemerally exploited slaves and other outsiders.

Blondell mentions one unmarried girl being distinguished in each festival dance troupe, but she must normally have been like the basket-bearer selected for the Panathenaic procession, and other girls given special roles in public ritual: They were powerful families' daughters, who had an impeccable "reputation," which meant that no stranger knew anything about them. The situation was the opposite of Blondell's seeming projection backwards of our relentless public documentation and minute vetting of outward female attractiveness.

Further obscuring the real issues, Blondell groups under the heading of beauty a lot of criteria with no necessary connection to it: pubescence and marriageability, enticing glances, intimate conversation, and rich clothing and accessories—even love with an apparent basis in character and principle. About any distinctive physical allure of Sophocles' Antigone there is not a single word in her tragedy; only the chorus—a typically dim one—attributes her betrothed Haemon's efforts to save her to infatuation with beauty, citing a generic girl's "soft cheeks."

Blondell makes the most sense when she writes that Helen stands for marriage. The traditional story hinges less on Helen's rare beauty than on her remarkable lack of self-restraint or "wisdom" (better: "knowing what's good for you"), the most prized quality in a married or marriageable woman. By the way, Helen *can* manifest brains; in every detailed account, we learn a lot more about how cunning and adaptable she is than about how beautiful: She *engineers* her way back into her luxurious Spartan palace.

In the real Greece, intelligent and tenacious self-restraint secured homes for men and women clear down the social scale. Much more of the burden fell on women, of course, particularly in Athens after it became wealthy and powerful—legitimate birth from two citizen parents was necessary to keep civic rights and privileges, which were so valuable that the accusation of having a sociable or even visible mother amounted to a terrifying threat of demotion. Interestingly, though, Athenian women do not appear to have complained about the restrictions that enforced their chastity; rather, they were reportedly prone to scary umbrage if their men didn't crack down in the law courts. As in all societies, men could never control women unless other women were also keen.

At any event, what control of women had to do with erotic attraction at this stage is hard to guess. Pimps, not lovers, controlled the dolled-up prostitutes on display. At most, beauty was a problem that—wherever it mattered—had been solved primordially by substituting long-term self-interest, law, and ethics for physical charms as sanctioned decision-making criteria.

When I consider the peace and friendship evident in later solutions—Christianity's mutually faithful marriage aimed at spiritual nurture, the American nuclear family with its independence and idealism—I'm exasperated at academic behests to see relationships between the sexes as inherent problems and nothing else. Because the world is imperfect for women, we should withhold any effort even to understand it? Yeah, that'll work.

What would work better is to read literature with sympathy and without condescension. In some of the most beautiful lines of Greek poetry, the Trojan elders in the *Iliad*, as they gaze at Helen, pull themselves away from both bitterness and enchantment, as thinking people tend eventually to do. Right now, they main-

ly want to live, and they wring unhardened hearts as no flowing-haired bimbo ever could. Blondell quotes the lines but—in an almost unbelievable missing of the point—lights only on the middle one, and only to emphasize the power of Helen's beauty:

> There is no cause for blame (*nemesis*) against
> Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans
> for suffering long hardships over a woman of
> such a kind:
> she is terribly like the immortal goddesses to
> look at in the face.
> But even so, though she is the way she is, let
> her sail away,
> And not stay here as a disaster for us and our
> children.

Satanic verses

Pankaj Mishra
From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West & the Remaking of Asia.
Picador, 368 pages, $17

reviewed by Andrew Roberts

Is Western civilization "satanic," as Mahatma Gandhi once contended? The essayist and novelist Pankaj Mishra clearly thinks so, and has written *From the Ruins of Empire* to persuade us that the West is so vile that quite literally any system of government and ethics is superior to it. Fortunately, in the course of his polemic, Mishra so contradicts himself, so overreaches himself, and makes so many errors of fact, that admirers of Western civilization needn't worry that they might be secret Satanists.

Mr. Mishra believes that it was the philosophies of various Asian intellectuals that principally doomed the European empires in Asia in the middle years of the twentieth century. He argues that these philosophies were so superior to the greed and exploitation of the evil Westerners that the power of the white man could not survive the great truths that were being revealed to the Asian masses. One can understand why Asians might want to hear that it was their intellectual dominance, as well as their courage and sacrifice, that freed them, since it would fit into a narrative of heroic history to which all peoples aspire. Yet the facts simply don't fit.

The author holds up two people as the heroes of Asian liberation—the Iranian-born pan-Islamist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) and the Chinese nationalist Liang Qichao (1873–1929)—as the founders of "mass nationalist and liberation movements and ambitious state-building programs across Asia." The other heroes of this book are Hồ Chí Minh, Sun Yat-Sen, Mao Zedong, Rabindranath Tagore, the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, and the Iranian Ali Shariati. However bad the Indian Raj might have been, can it really have been morally inferior—or more unpleasant for its citizens to live under—than the systems created by the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, Al-Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood? In order genuinely to believe that, one would have to be a regular contributor to *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, the *London Review of Books* or *The New York Review of Books*. Mr. Mishra, as it happens, writes for all four.

The author's fundamental lack of objectivity is evident from the way that any Asian in this book—unless he be an imperialist "collaborator"—is presented as sage and commendable, regardless of how bloodthirsty he was, whereas the brightest and best of the colonial administrators are dismissed morally and personally, along the same lines as Mr. Mishra's reference to the "aloof and frequently blundering Lord Curzon." The book opens with Curzon writing about the Japanese victory over the Russian fleet at the battle of Tsushima, with Mishra alleging that the viceroy of India "feared" the result. In fact, the British were delighted that the Russians, who had long threatened northern India, had been humiliated by Japan, which had been Britain's formal ally since January 1902. (Members of the Japanese royal family were even awarded Britain's highest order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter.)

Instead of seeing everything in the racial terms that so colors Mr. Mishra's world-view, Lord Curzon—who was in fact one of the greatest and most intellectually brilliant proconsuls of the era—saw the Japanese victory

in the Realpolitik and geostrategic terms one might expect of a statesman of that time. When Mr. Mishra rightly says that Tsushima excited Turkish, Egyptian, Vietnamese, Persian, and Chinese newspapers, he ought to have added that the victory also excited the British press, not least because the Russians had sunk part of an English fishing fleet in the English Channel on the way to the battle. Yet that wouldn't fit into Mr. Mishra's unrelentingly anti-British narrative. This is taken to its illogical conclusion when the author even goes so far as to welcome the incredibly vicious invasions undertaken by Showa Japan in the 1930s and 1940s, writing: "Japan's conquest of Asia during the Second World War, though eventually reversed, would help detach much of the continent from the weakening grasp of exhausted European empires." With the Japanese killing fifteen million Chinese, countless Koreans, and 17 percent of the entire population of the Philippines in that conquest, Mr. Mishra ought to have added that it was well that it was "eventually reversed," not least by the sacrifice and heroism of the largest all-volunteer army in the history of mankind—namely the Indian Army under the Raj. To treat the horrors of Japanese occupation as effectively a positive political development owing to the anti-Western forces it unleashed shows a somewhat skewed value system at work.

In mentioning the "exhausted European empires," Mishra gives the clue that undermines the basis of his argument that his collection of nationalist and often Communist intellectuals played any significant part in the Europeans' decision to evacuate from Asia after the Second World War. For it was the financial, economic, personnel, and resource near-bankruptcy caused by the two great European civil wars fought between 1914 and 1945 that explains Western withdrawal, rather than some kind of acknowledged moral bankruptcy brought on by the musings of Egyptian, Turkish, Indian, and Chinese thinkers. If any ideas destroyed the European empires, it was those that sprung from within the Western canon itself. The ideas of democracy, equal rights, and the rights of man that actuated the Attlee ministry, which decided to give India self-government, derived from fifth-century B.C. Greece, Magna Carta, the Sermon on the Mount, and the American Declaration of Independence, not from the spoutings of "liberation" theologists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Liang Qichao.

It is part of Mishra's mantra that the West has also left "unexamined and unimagined the collective experiences and subjectivities of the Asian peoples." This flies in the face of many generations of Westerners' demonstrable fascination for what we were permitted before Edward Said to call the Orient. Surely Mr. Mishra must know of the huge numbers of libraries, research institutions, university faculties, museums, and art galleries in the West that are dedicated to nothing other than examining and imagining the collective experiences of Asian peoples? They are testaments to centuries of inter-cultural activity which the author seems to want to see solely through the prism of racial exploitation, but which was in fact far more subtle, nuanced, and multi-layered than that.

Continuing his theme of Western ignorance, Mr. Mishra states that "heroes" already listed, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Liang Qichao, and H̀ô Chí Minh, as well as others that he names, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Kemal Ataturk, and Colonel Nasser, "though unknown in the West, helped make the world we live in." With Afghani and Qichao getting over a quarter of a million mentions on Google in English, Ataturk 377,000, H̀ô Chí Minh 59 million, Nasser 1.4 million, Gandhi 40 million, and biographies and television programs being produced about these people all the time, one wonders where he gets these notions? The mountains of papers compiled by British administrators concerning India in the Indian Office Library and Records section of the National Archives refute his generalizations one by one, but there is no indication of his having visited them.

Of course Mr. Mishra's opposition to imperialism does not extend to the Mughal Empire, which he rightly blames Britain for having destroyed, or to the Qing empire, which he (again rightly) blames the West for having un-

dermined. On one page he denounces Westerners for having pronounced those empires as "sick" and "moribund," yet a few pages later he states that by 1750 "the Mughal Empire, weakened by endless wars and invasions, was imploding into a number of independent states." He never actually addresses the central question of whether it was not better for ordinary Indians to have had nearly two centuries of British-imposed subcontinental peace—excepting of course the brief period of the Mutiny—than a continuation of the "endless wars and invasions" of the Mughal period. Nor does he acknowledge the fact that the true alternative to British rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not some form of perfect Gandhian Hind Swaraj, but rather rule by far more brutal imperialists than the British such as the French, Russians, or Germans.

For Mr. Mishra, there was no qualitative difference between the freebooting exploitation of India of the East India Company up to 1857, and the post-Mutiny Raj of trained and educated, and incorruptible Indian Civil Service officials after 1858. Nor can he accept that there was ever such a thing as genuinely humanitarian interventions by the West, though he does not pronounce on whether the struggles against suttee and thuggee were examples of the Western "cultural arrogance" that he regularly denounces throughout the book. By contrast, when Islam dominated, and attempted to create an umma in a giant crescent from Spain across northern Africa to the gates of Vienna, there is not a word of criticism of this noble cause, or recognition of the human cost involved. (Slave-owning was only criminalized in Mauretania in 2007.)

"Desperate to reform and strengthen the Ottoman Empire against Western threats," states Mr. Mishra, "Kemal Ataturk had, like many Turks, taken Japan as a model, and now felt vindicated." In fact, of course, it was Ataturk who abolished the Ottoman Empire, ended the caliphate, and tried to secularize and westernize Turkey, abolishing the fez and adopting European dress. Yet he is not denounced as an Uncle Tom, like so many people who attract Mr. Mishra's ire, but rather as a ruler whose sole intention was to make a genuinely multicultural experiment work.

Although Mr. Mishra is right to echo Edward Said in his characterization of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt as the first time that East had meaningfully met West since the Crusades, he is quite wrong to assert that the French outnumbered the Egyptian forces at the battle of Pyramids; in fact Murad Bey had 60,000 men, according to Digby Smith's encyclopedic *Napoleonic Wars Data Book*, to Bonaparte's 20,000, so it was in fact the other way around. Similarly, can the wholesale debilitation of China through opium really be blamed entirely on Britain's Indian Empire? It was grown and sold by Indian and British merchants of the Raj, but not bought and smoked by them. One might as well blame Mexico and Colombia for American drug addiction today.

The whole admittedly sorry opium story is told by Mishra in terms of brave Muslims resisting the evil British, while "the Muslims' former subjects—Hindus—seemed to be favored by the new rulers, and were quick to educate themselves in Western-style institutions and assume the lowly administrative positions ascribed to them." The British therefore "entrusted native collaborators, such as the middlemen who expedited the lucrative export of opium grown in India to China, but these tended to be Hindu, Sikh, or Parsee rather than Muslim." The sole reason that the British set up plantations, dug canals, laid roads, and built railways was, according to Mr. Mishra, to better plunder the subcontinent. With all concepts of altruism set aside, and everything told purely in terms of the evil British and their Hindu, Sikh, and Parsee Uncle Toms against the heroic Muslims, Mr. Mishra has reduced a fantastically complex story of two centuries of racial and cultural interaction—usually to great mutual advantage—to a demeaning caricature of all races. With India poised to become a global superpower this century, it is important not to get her history wrong, let alone as wrong as this. Far from sneering at Lord Macaulay's educational reforms,

for example, most educated Indians are delighted that his insistence on the spread of the English language currently puts them in pole position to enter global markets that they otherwise would not have been able to penetrate so successfully.

America, the "puppet-master," is blamed for bringing the horror of 9/11 upon itself because of its "informal empire constituted by military bases, economic pressure, and political coups," but is given no credit for having won the Cold War, thereby saving the world from the threat of revolutionary Marxism–Leninism, which even Mr. Mishra must accept killed many more innocent people than the United States. Instead, he writes of the destruction of the Twin Towers: "It now seems grotesquely apt that the attack was led by a radicalized young man from the slums of Cairo," because the hated West was "the source of so much upheaval and trauma in their lives." Yet by concentrating on Atta's slumland upbringing, Mr. Mishra ignores the central fact about Al Qaeda: that over 70 percent of its top 400 operatives in 2001 came from the upper or middle classes of their societies, many of them college-educated. Arguing that Al Qaeda had "millions of silent supporters" on 9/11, and quoting approvingly a novel in which a character says he smiled when he heard the news, because "my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased," Mishra goes on to discuss "a similar feeling of gratification among Turks in Istanbul."

The anti-American, anti-British, and profoundly anti-Israeli assumptions and statements that pervade this book remind the reader how it is largely just one long roar of hatred and resentment against the West, but particularly against Britain and America, whose hospitality he enjoys—he lives part of the year in London—and whose left-wing journals' craving for self-hatred he obligingly and remuneratively stokes. Normally, if someone makes it patently clear that they hate you, and they will clutch at and twist anything to slander you, you do not invite him into your home and give him well-paid, high-profile jobs. Since that is what the West is doing for Pankaj Mishra, one might indeed suspect that he could be right about how fundamentally decadent Western society has become. But not satanic.

A valley of ashes

Jeffrey Hart
The Living Moment:
Modernism in a Broken World.
Northwestern UP, 167 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Emily Esfahani Smith

In *The Living Moment: Modernism in a Broken World*, the literary critic Jeffrey Hart traces the efforts of a small but influential group of poets and novelists who sought to create a new cultural order following the chaotic aftermath of World War I. Their efforts came together in a new movement whose legacy is still with us today—literary modernism. The cultural fallout of the war—its devastation—was immense. The traditional order of nineteenth-century Europe had been blown to bits. "The First World War inaugurated the manufacture of mass death that the Second brought to a pitiless consummation," in the words of the historian John Keegan.

In his book, Hart presents a close reading of some of modernism's seminal literary works, including T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus.* Literary modernism's contemporary inheritor, Hart declares, is Marilynne Robinson in her 2006 novel *Gilead*. These works are defined by a search for order and meaning in an otherwise broken world. Though modernism may have been revolutionary for its time, Hart points out that it was also traditional "in the search for a principle of order that goes back to the pre-Socratics and then to Socrates himself."

Eliot's poem "The Waste Land," with its "cacophonous voices," is the foundation of literary modernism. The poem, which first appeared in the United States in 1922, captures the cultural mood; in a line near the end of

the poem, the speaker ominously says, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." This dark phrase became "the banner of modernism," Hart writes. The poem itself is a metaphor for the state of Western civilization; it is "full of the fragments of Western culture," with its references to Dante, ancient Greek myth, and the resurrection of Christ.

The bleak disorder of "The Waste Land" gives way to order and meaning in Eliot's later poem *Four Quartets*. There, he ends the poem with the phrase, "And the fire and the rose are one." As Hart notes, Eliot has intellectually and spiritually undergone a Dantean journey from "The Waste Land" to *Four Quartets*—a journey from the fire of destruction to "the rose of love."

The rose is a mystical symbol, and the *Four Quartets* is full of transcendent moments. In the poem, Eliot finds meaning in the moment that wavers "in-and-out of time," the "still point" that is *being*. The modernism of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Mann, and Robinson is also defined by what Hart calls, in the book's title and elsewhere, "the living moment"—the moment at which the world becomes alive in new and unusual ways. Hart quotes the German philosopher Martin Heidegger on this point:

> Celebration . . . is the step over into the more wakeful glimpse of the wonder—the wonder that a world is existing around us at all, that there are beings rather than nothing, that things are and we ourselves are in their midst, that we ourselves are and yet barely know who we are, and barely know that we do not know all this.

The living moment reaches its romantic height in the literature of Fitzgerald, "the prose poet of the golden moment and the pain of its loss," writes Hart. Man's "capacity for wonder," to quote from *The Great Gatsby*, is a theme that comes up again and again in Fitzgerald's literature, and is perhaps most dramatically captured in a passage of his short story "Winter Dreams." "Winter Dreams" tells the story of Dexter Green who, as a young boy, falls in love with the wealthier golden girl Judy Jones. After seeing her one day, Green experiences a moment of ecstatic happiness:

> The tune the piano was playing at that moment had been gay and new five years before when Dexter was a sophomore at college. They had played it at a prom once when he could not afford the luxury of proms, and he had stood outside the gymnasium and listened. The sound of the tune precipitated in him a sort of ecstasy and it was with that ecstasy he viewed what happened to him now. It was a mood of intense appreciation, a sense that, for once, he was magnificently attuned to life and that everything about him was radiating a brightness and a glamour he might never know again.

But by the end, when he learns that Jones's beauty and charms have faded with the years, Green realizes his "capacity for wonder" has also faded: "The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him." Panicking, Green tries to recreate, in his mind, the rapture he felt for Jones—her beauty—as a younger man, but he cannot: "Why these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer." For Fitzgerald, the living moment is tragic by its very nature: it exists for a period of time and then slips away. While some of his heroes, like Jay Gatsby, try to relive it—"Can't repeat the past? Of course you can!"—they are doomed to fail.

For Hemingway, by contrast, the tragedy of the living moment is that it never existed in the first place. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the dreams of the two lovers, Catherine and Frederic, are ultimately confounded by war and death. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the two main characters, Jake and Brett, are in love, but they cannot consummate their relationship because of a war wound that has left Jake impotent. They suffer in their longing for each other and endure their otherwise empty lives.

Hemingway, as Hart points out, may be the most distinctively modernist writer in two regards. First, his sparse prose style "represented something entirely new in American literature." Second, unlike Fitzgerald's lyrical prose, Hemingway's prose is full of strained silences. The "dark emotions" that exist "be-

neath the surface" of his writing reflect the pain, fear, and terror of death. "The style he carefully evolved expressed a way to live in the world and if necessary to endure it."

In Hemingway's prose, silence is the signature of death. In Marilynne Robinson's, silence is life itself—the moment, as Paul Tillich has described it, when "eternity erupts into time." Her novel *Gilead*, which takes the form of a letter written by the elderly Rev. John Ames to his young son, is a meditation on being. Toward the end of the book, the pastor remarks:

> It has seemed to me sometimes as though the Lord breathes on this poor gray ember of Creation and it turns to radiance—for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again, and to look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light. That is what I said in the Pentecost sermon. I have reflected on that sermon, and there is some truth in it. But the Lord is more constant and far more extravagant than it seems to imply. Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it?

The experiences of *being* in these great works are available, Hart concludes, to anyone who has the willingness and the courage to see them. In the *Four Quartets*, another meditation on being, Eliot writes, "human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality." In his poem "Silence," Eliot elaborates: "This is the ultimate hour/ When life is justified/"—and yet, in a Hemingwayesque turn, he continues: "You may say what you will/ At such peace I am terrified. There is nothing else beside." In bringing these existential themes and ideas together, *The Living Moment* is a beautiful reflection not only on the great literary works of the post-war period, but also on the sometimes frightening nature of living itself.

Right at the end

Kevin D. Williamson
The End Is Near and
It's Going to Be Awesome.
HarperCollins, 240 pages, $27.99

reviewed by James Piereson

Anyone who regularly navigates between the private marketplace and the world of government and politics is bound to notice the flexibility, choice, and efficiency offered by the first and the corruption, stagnation, and inefficiency on display in the second. The marketplace is an arena of endless choices among products and services tailored to individual preferences, while governments take advantage of their monopolistic power to offer second-rate services at prohibitive prices. In the private marketplace, companies that do not deliver the goods will soon be out of business, unless they can arrange a subsidy from the government, but in the public sphere citizens have few such choices. They are more or less stuck with their governments and have little capacity to change them in fundamental ways.

That is all about to change according to Kevin D. Williamson, author of this provocative new book, *The End is Near and It's Going to be Awesome: How Going Broke Will Leave America Richer, Happier, and More Secure.* Mr. Williamson, author of the Exchequer column for *National Review* magazine and a widely cited expert on the costs and inefficiencies of public-sector programs (as well as the theater critic for this publication), argues that the era of large-scale government is about to give way to an era of political decentralization as Americans increasingly look for ways to circumvent political institutions by inventing private mechanisms to address areas of government failure. As state and local governments go broke and longstanding federal programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security approach insolvency, Americans will not lie down and die, but instead will draw upon their traditions of liberty and civic engagement to craft new systems of governance that are more flexible and consumer-friendly than the ones to which we have grown accustomed. In this process of change and adaptation, the yawning gap between the public and private spheres will gradually diminish as roles currently filled by the former are taken over by the latter.

Mr. Williamson does not write as a liberal or conservative, though perhaps as a libertarian or communitarian whose preferences do not align neatly with any established political paradigm. While he is certain that the liberal project has reached a dead end, he is not a cheerleader for the free market, since markets do not produce communities (though markets do make room for them); nor does he seem sympathetic to conservative preoccupations with national security and military power. The problem, he argues, is not one of liberal versus conservative politics but rather one that arises out of the highly centralized and bureaucratic character of modern politics itself. The essence of politics, he suggests, is rent-seeking: the organized effort by some to force others to pay above market prices for the goods and services they offer. Rent-seeking groups accumulate over time, and thus create governments that are costly, inefficient, and far more centralized than they need to be to fulfill their basic functions. We are rapidly discovering that these centralized and slow-moving systems can no longer satisfy the new demands for individually or locally tailored choices made available by the revolution in information technology.

The book contains several informative chapters that explain why costs of education and health care continue to go up year-by-year, even as prices for computers, software, and television sets go down (as quality improves), and why large-scale government programs, like Social Security and state and local pension systems, will inevitably go broke. All of these systems are based upon a shell game called "third-party payers"—usually uninformed or isolated taxpayers who are not parties to the immediate transactions and are thus in a weak position to withhold support.

What happens in such a system when we run out of "third-party payers?" Exactly what is beginning to happen today. Entrepreneurs and hard-working citizens are fleeing high tax jurisdictions like California and Illinois, leaving rent-seeking groups behind to cover the costs of their own salaries, pensions, and subsidies. At the same time, some 80 million "baby boomers" will reach age sixty-five over roughly the next decade and are expecting to cash in on the government's promise to redeem the funds they have paid into the Social Security and Medicare systems. The problem is that, contrary to those promises, these are "pay as you go" systems: the funds to pay benefits come from taxes imposed on current workers, and there are no longer enough of these to cover the benefits that have been promised to the "baby boomers." The revolt of the "third-party payer" represents the final crisis of the contemporary regime.

As the regime crumbles, millions of citizens across the country are creating new solutions for failing governmental systems. In the field of education, home schools and charter schools provide alternatives to bureaucratic government schools. Private courts are emerging in some places as alternatives to our hide-bound system of civil justice, and private security agencies as alternatives to established police

forces. Entrepreneurs may at some point develop new forms of currency to facilitate private transactions. This, Williamson believes, represents just the beginning of a process that will explode in the coming years into new forms of civic invention. It is also "how going broke will leave America richer, happier, and more secure" than ever before.

The author is undoubtedly correct to suggest that the American system as we know it is on the verge of an epic collapse. Yet he may be overly optimistic in thinking that something positive and constructive will emerge spontaneously from the ruins of a disintegrating system. He is, as he says, a "short-term pessimist but a long-term optimist." The United States, as it has in the past, will find a way to replace its worn-out system. Let us hope that in the end he will be proved right.

But his own volume highlights one of the fundamental difficulties: Something close to half of our current population of 320 million is dependent on government benefits of one kind or another. Governments pay their salaries and pensions, and underwrite their health-care expenses; thousands of businesses and millions of employees across the country depend upon government contracts of various kinds. There is no doubt that we have been imprudent and irresponsible in making so many of people dependent upon the government without fully weighing the consequences of such an enterprise. Yet if that enterprise is coming to an end, what is going to happen to those millions of people now dependent upon government assistance? Is it likely that new institutional forms will immediately arise to provide them with employment and support? If not, then the transition to the new system that the author envisions is likely to be more painful than he anticipates.

Despite the misgivings of pessimists and crackpot realists, *The End Is Near and It's Going to be Awesome* is a most refreshing volume, written with clarity and passion, presenting new information to the reader, and transcending throughout established lines of political combat. And it may even provide something far more valuable: a pathway into the future.

Notebook

On remembering poems

by Andrew Hamilton

Last December I was playing golf at Patriot's Point, across the Cooper River from Charleston, SC, a course thronged with many sorts of wading birds and compelling views of Ft. Sumter and Charleston's outer harbor where, as Charlestonians like to say, the Ashley and the Cooper Rivers come together to form the Atlantic Ocean. A little green heron of the type that is known in some places as a "Fly-up-the-creek" or "Shitepoke" flew across the fairway some fifty yards in front of me, spraying sheets of excrement. The sight brought to my mind a fragment of verse: "let their liquid siftings fall." I immediately addressed my mental energy to getting the context of the quotation right, a distraction sadly not helpful to my golf game. The context turned out—as is so often the case with remembered crumbs of verse, in my experience—to be wholly inappropriate to the setting, a warm winter afternoon with high cumulus clouds and lots of benign bird song.

"The nightingales," I recalled, "are singing near the Convent of the Sacred Heart,/ And sang within the [something] wood/ When Agamemnon cried aloud/ And let their liquid siftings fall/ To stain the stiff dishonored shroud." Instead of reacting to the striking dissimilarity between my idyllic situation and T. S. Eliot's allusion to Agamemnon's sudden death at the instigation of his wife, I was distracted because I couldn't put a word in the place of [something]. Why couldn't I remember it?

Sigmund Freud might have had an opinion. He once wrote an essay about a young man he encountered on vacation who could not remember the word "aliquis" in a quotation from Virgil. Recognizing the hidden pun, "a liquis" (roughly "no flow"), Freud prodded the young man to confess he was worried because a female friend had missed a period.

I ran through various possibilities. "Hallowed?" "Haunted?" "Tangled?" None seemed right. In the end I had to look up the word I could not remember. It is "bloody." Given my two divorces and several daughters, Freud would have had an unforgiving field day. But Robert Pinsky came to my rescue with an essay entitled "In Praise of Memorizing Poetry—Badly." "Many of us," he declared, "in the imperfect memorizing of a poem, make mistakes" that can be instructive, as he found on experiencing his inability to remember a particular word in W. B. Yeats's "On being asked for a War Poem." Looking up the right word gave him insight into Yeats's poetic skill. By remembering the poem inaccurately, he wrote, "I felt . . . that I had received a creative writing lesson from a great poet."

I am happy to agree with Pinsky. There is no doubt in my mind that "bloody" is the right epithet for the wood where Agamemnon died, even if it had nothing whatever to do with a winter game of golf. While basking in this delivery from uncomfortable Freudian hypotheses, I came across a variant reading of the Eliot line I had remembered. Apparently some versions of "Sweeney Among the Night-

ingales" have "let their liquid droppings fall." My inner editor much prefers "siftings," and I can only hope that when the next authoritative edition of Eliot comes out, "siftings" will be vindicated.

Recently, in an ill-omened moment, a friend suggested I write about my experience of being able to retain a largish number of poems in my memory. I had never given the matter much thought, accepting the phenomenon as an ordinary experience, even something to be suppressed lest my breaking into verse invoke groans and hasty departures.

Ordinary, it seems, is not the case. Few nowadays commit poems to memory, having access to the Internet and Google. I find I have an obsolete skill, like carriage-making or blacksmithing.

It is not a skill I can rely on to produce poetry on demand, however. I find there are lots of ragged edges to this question of remembering poems. Some I have outright; some I thought I had outright until I checked the source. Some I have only as fragments. Something has to prod my memory to activate the recall, like seeing a bird spread its siftings or like writing, in the paragraph above, the words "obsolete" and "blacksmith." No sooner were they on the page than I remembered Hopkins's "Felix Randal the farrier, O he is dead then?"

On the positive side, a good thing about remembering any poem is that I enjoy it many times. And often the taste is just a little different each time, adding to the pleasure of the experience.

But then there is the question of crumbs. The old, dry, stale, tickly cake-crumbs that the Parsee-man put into the hide of the Rhinoceros have their uncomfortable match in the crumbs of partially remembered verse that periodically scratch the mind.

I'm not entirely sure how my odd mental library was assembled. I didn't set out to acquire it. It just happened. I found it easier in college to memorize poems than to analyze them at one sitting. Having them in memory made it possible to mull them over and come to conclusions that eluded me on first readings. By hearing them in my inner ear I could find connections between, for example, the delights invoked in Wallace Stevens's "Botanist on Alp No. 1" ("this ecstatic air") and "No. 2" (where crosses glittering in sunlight become "a mirror of mere delight") and the moment of delight experienced by the speaker in "The Idea of Order at Key West," as he turns toward the village with the song of "the maker" in his ears and the powerful summation of Stevens's marriage of religion and human creativity in "The Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." I don't pretend to know all these poems by heart, but I do have fragments of each that rub against each other and occasionally seem to make a whole.

Sometimes it is amusing to get into a recall contest by proposing a first line and seeing if there are any takers. My friend who proposed this essay is good at that. Just say, "When cares attack and life seems black/ How sweet it is to pot a yak," and he will be off with the rest of "Good Gnus," the hilarious romp from P. G. Wodehouse's "The Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court." I can tell something about how someone was educated if I get an answering response to Walt Kelly's "Have you ever, while pondering the ways of the morn, . . ."

I got started memorizing around the age of ten at my mother's instigation. But the kind of poem she thought my younger brothers and I would like was Ogden Nash's "Columbus" ("In fourteen hundred and ninety two/ Somebody sailed the ocean blue") or "Robinson Crusoe's Story" by Charles E. Carryl ("The night was thick and hazy/ When the 'Piccadilly Daisy'/ Carried down the crew and captain in the sea;"). Both have rather pronounced, unsubtle rhythms, and it may be that a taste for rhythm prepared me to absorb poems later in life. I've pretty much forgotten "Columbus" and Carryl. But not Walt Kelly.

An informal inventory of my current mental library of poets includes Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales* prologue, of course, but also bits of "Troilus and Criseyde"), a number of Elizabethans and Jacobeans, and poems by poets dating from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Richard Wilbur, as well as fragments of Homer, Alcman, Sappho, Horace, Catullus, Virgil, Dante, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé. The

library is particularly rich in Yeats and Frost, with some Eliot and Stevens mixed in.

Since my youngest days I have been tied to a singular landscape in the southern highlands, first a summer home in childhood and now my year-round residence. It has given me a particular, local framework for remembering Frost when he speaks of the tension between imagination and fact, as in "Mowing" ("The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows") or mocks other poets writing about nature as a picture, as in "Hybla Brook," with its jibe at Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Brook":

> A brook to none but who remember long.
> This as it will be seen is other far
> Than with brooks taken otherwhere in song.
> We love the things we love for what they are.

Of course, that brings to mind "Inversnaid" by Hopkins, with its passionate ending,

> What would the world be, once bereft
> Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
> O let them be left; wildness and wet;
> Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

And that, in turn, brings to mind the closing lines of Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," a very different and differently motivated paean to nature:

> Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
> Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
> Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
> And, in the isolation of the sky,
> At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
> Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
> Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

And from thence via bird-flight back to Hopkins: "I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin,/ dapple dawn-drawn falcon . . ."

Unsurprisingly, as I grow older, my memory of Yeats on aging has become much more pronounced: "Speech after long silence" (a marvel of a brief poem, all one sentence) and, my favorite among his many poems on the theme, "An acre of green grass," with its invocation of "an old man's eagle mind"—a phrase that reminds me of Stevens's "pensive man" who "sees the eagle float/ For which the intricate Alps are a single nest."

But the poem on aging I like best is by Alcman, written most likely in the mid-seventh century BC in Sparta. I like to think it is a candidate for the oldest lyric, having been written a couple of generations earlier than Sappho's works. The poem was possibly written as a chorus for old men at Spartan public ceremonies. The dances also had choruses for young men and young women. Alcman probably wrote songs for all three choruses, but most of his surviving fragments are for the parthenoi, young unmarried women. Kyrulos (Cyril) is the male kingfisher, Alkuon (Halcyon) is the female. I love the euphony of the Greek:

> οὔ μ᾽ ἔτι, παρθενικαὶ μελιγάρυες
> ἱμερόφωνοι,
> γυῖα φέρειν δύναται· βάλε δὴ βάλε
> κηρύλος εἴην,
> ὅς τ᾽ ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἅμ᾽ ἀλκυόνεσσι
> ποτῆται
> νηλεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἁλιπόρφυρος εἶαρος
> ὄρνις.

My translation:

> I'm not up to it, young maidens, you honey-
> voiced singers of hymns,
> My legs are too old to dance. I wish I were a
> Kingfisher
> That I might fly over the blossom of the wave
> with the Halcyon,
> Having a fearless heart, the purple-winged
> bird of spring.

Index

The New Criterion

Volume 31 *September 2012–June 2013*

Books considered

We like to think that the longevity of *The New Criterion* is a testimony to the excellence of the writing and critical insight we offer. Doubtless that is part of the story. But all of us here know that we would never have lived to this age of vigorous maturity without the generous intervention and support of people like you, our friends and readers. *The New Criterion* depends on the aid of its extended family: your contributions now make up more than a quarter of our annual budget. If you'd like to make an donation to help carry on the high-quality criticism of *The New Criterion*, please see www.newcriterion.com/donate.

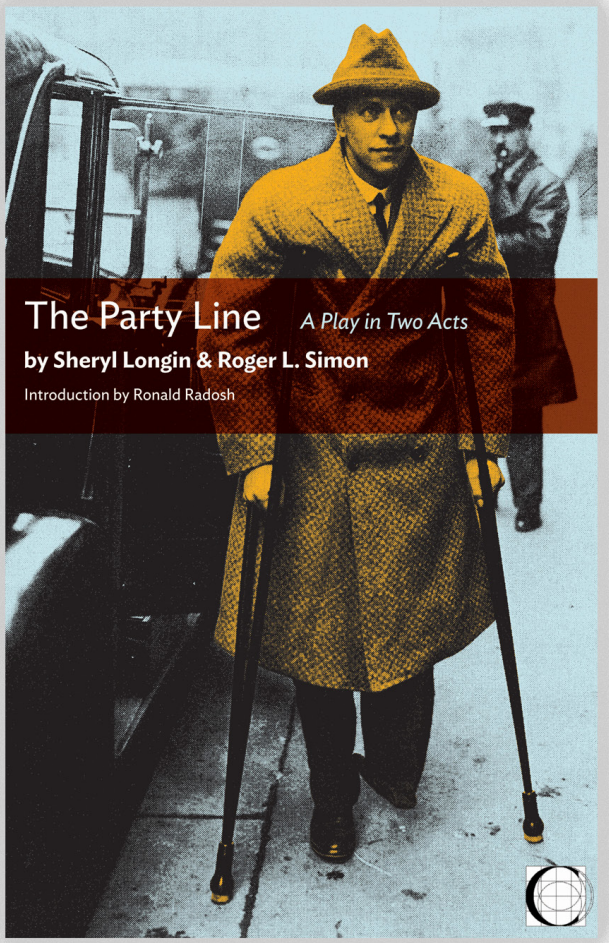
Also, be sure to connect with us online to stay up to date with all our latest articles, blog posts, events, and multimedia content.:

Like us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/newcriterion

Follow us on Twitter:
www.twitter.com/newcriterion

Watch us on YouTube:
www.youtube.com/thenewcriterion

The Party Line



A Play in Two Acts

by Sheryl Longin
and Roger L. Simon

(November 1, 2012)
The inaugural title from Criterion Books

The Party Line is a historical drama about the discredited Soviet apologist Walter Duranty. Using real and fictional characters, it intermingles the story of Duranty—*The New York Times*' Pulitzer Prize-winning Moscow correspondent in the 1930s—with the more contemporary story of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn who was assassinated in 2002, on the eve of becoming prime minister.

"Sheryl Longin and Roger L. Simon have accomplished a breathtaking feat in their imaginative and topical play."

—Ronald Radosh

Criterion Books
900 Broadway, Suite 602, New York, NY 10003

The Party Line is now available on Amazon.
Be sure to order your copy today!

Criterion Books, an imprint of St. Augustine's Press, is dedicated to literary titles of the highest merit. Like its parent publication, *The New Criterion*, Criterion Books seeks to champion what is best and most humanely vital in our cultural inheritance, while rejecting what is mendacious, corrosive, and spurious in the arts and culture. *The Party Line* is its inaugural title.

From the Pages of *The New Criterion*

FUTURE TENSE

The Lessons of Culture in an Age of Upheaval

ESSAYS BY

Michael J. Lewis

Victor Davis Hanson

Andrew Roberts

David Bentley Hart

Kevin D. Williamson

Anthony Daniels

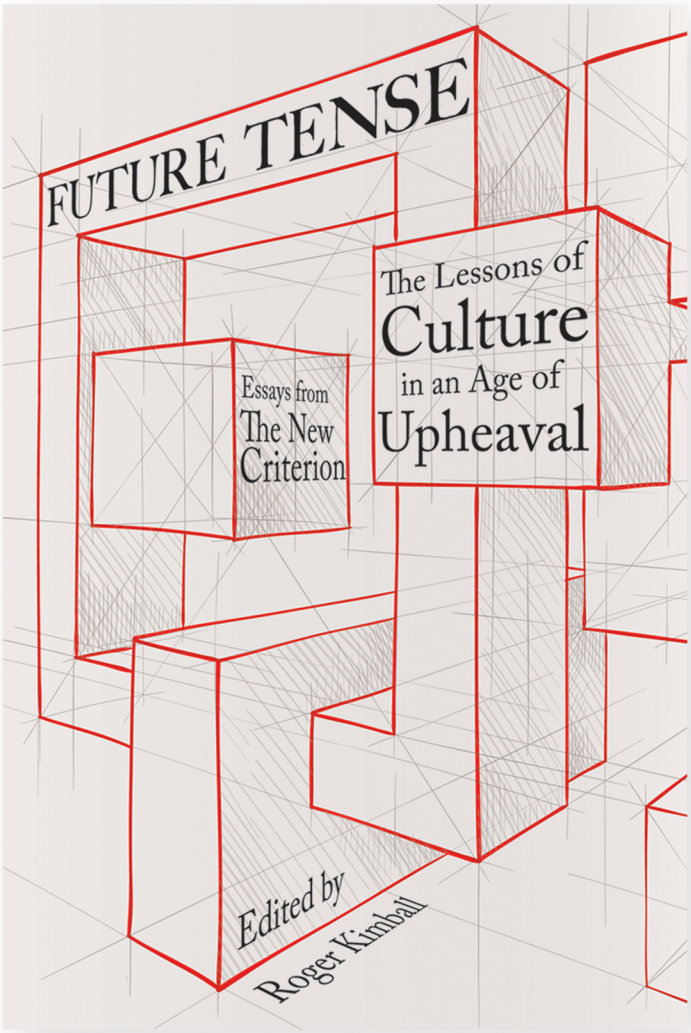
James Panero

Andrew C. McCarthy

Charles Murray

James Piereson

and Roger Kimball



ENCOUNTER BOOKS

Available Everywhere Books Are Sold