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Notes & Comments: November 2015

Misanthropic nostalgia

Regular readers may recall our fondness for the philosopher Harvey Mansfield's observation that "environmentalism is school prayer for liberals." Professor Mansfield delivered that *mot* some twenty years ago. It seemed almost quaint at the time. It was, we thought, a comparison that had the advantage of being both true (environmentalism really did seem like a religion for certain leftists) and amusing (how deliciously wicked to put a bunch of white, elite, college-educated leftists under the same rhetorical light as the Bible-thumpers they abominated). Ha, ha.

Well, we aren't laughing now. In the intervening years, the eco-nuts went from being a lunatic fringe to being lunatics at the center of power. Forget about Al Gore (if only we could): sure, he was vice president, but that was in another country (or so it seems) and besides . . . our readers will catch the allusion to Marlowe via T. S. Eliot. Despite his former proximity to the seat of power, Al Gore is relevant these days partly as comic relief, partly as an object lesson in the cynical manipulation of public credulity for the sake of personal enrichment. Has anyone totted up how many tens of millions Gore has raked in through his proselytization of the Gospel of Green? The current issue of *The Atlantic* suggests the number is in the hundreds of millions. The collections come early and often in the Church of Gore. Who knew that pseudo-science, wrapped in the mantle of anti-capitalist moral self-regard, could pay so well?

But we digress. The issue is not Al Gore but the institutionalization of a radical, anti-growth ideology at the center of American political power, abetted by yes-men in the media and the academy. They parrot the party line in exchange for a chance to bathe in the warm effluvium of self-congratulation followed by a brisk turn on the soap box of moral denunciation. We thought about this unedifying spectacle the other day when we chanced upon "Environmental Activists Turn Up the Rhetorical Heat," an essay by Joel Kotkin that appeared last month in *The Orange County Register*. "The green movement's real agenda," Kotkin points out, "is far more radical than generally presumed." And what is the green movement's "real agenda"? It involves, as part of its emotional fuel, what the former Sierra Club President Adam Werbach called "misanthropic nostalgia," a "deeply felt ambivalence," to quote another eco-crusader, "toward the human race and our presence here on planet Earth."

If that seems extreme, consider this statement from the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College (cross that college off the list), i.e., Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature* and other exercises in hectoring alarmism: "meaning has been in decline for a long time, almost since the start of civilization." Worse luck for us! No, really, titters aside, stop and think about that statement (from McKibben's book *Enough*—again, if only!): "meaning

has been in decline for a long time, almost since the start of civilization." So what do you think, Bill: would the world be more *meaningful* if we could only obliterate civilization and return to the primordial ooze? What about your tenure? What about your royalties?

Returning to some pre-civilizational state in which the world was not cluttered up with humans building things might be the long term goal of enviro-loons like McKibben. For the immediate future, plunging the Third World deeper into poverty while shackling the engines of economic prosperity in Europe and America is enough to be getting on with. In a way, this is old news. Consider, to take one prominent example, Paul Ehrlich's neo-Malthusian jeremiad *The Population Bomb.* Published in that *annus horribilis* 1968, it is a fittingly fatuous contribution to that most fatuous of years. "In the 1970s and 1980s," Ehrlich wrote, "hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. . . . We are today involved in the events leading to famine and ecocatastrophe." Of the world's poor, he skirls, "a *minimum*" (Ehrlich's emphasis) of ten million, mostly children, will starve to death every year in the 1970s. And that's just for starters. Those tens of millions are but "a handful" of the hundreds of millions slated for starvation because (as per Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*) "we are too menny."

Back in the 1970s, Paul Ehrlich was warning about the coming ice age. That was before the hysteria formerly known as "global warming" (now called "climate change," since the globe hasn't been cooperating on the warming front for more than fifteen years). But there are two things to note about the *modus operandi* of Ehrlich and his like-minded extremists. 1) Whatever their campaign *du jour*—overpopulation, global warming, global cooling—it's always too late. "Nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate," Ehrlich intones at the beginning of *The Population Bomb*. Should we all just pack up and go home then? All is lost. The sky is falling. Mass starvation is imminent and unavoidable. *Nothing can prevent it*. Nevertheless, you don't want to let a good crisis go to waste. Although nothing can be done, we need to "take immediate action at home and promote immediate action worldwide." What sort of action? "Population control," for starters, and this brings us to: 2) No matter what the crisis, massive government intervention is *always* the answer. Ehrlich (albeit with shaky grammar) would have us denude the planet of humans "hopefully through changes in our value system, but *by compulsion if voluntary methods fail*" (our emphasis).

"By compulsion": there in a single phrase you have the secret to the appeal of climate hysteria to the Left. Where's Robespierre when you need him? The world is ending, Comrade, and although there is nothing you can do about it, a whole alphabet soup of government agencies is here to tell you what you may and may not do when it comes to what sort of car you drive, how you heat your house, where your electricity comes from, what you may eat or drink, and on and on and on. Al Gore is just a cynical mountebank, Paul Ehrlich and Bill McKibben are just crackpot writers. Have you heard about John Holdren? Allow us to introduce you to President Obama's top science adviser. Holdren is Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and Co-Chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. He is also an acolyte of Paul Ehrlich and the co-author, with Paul and Ann Ehrlich, of *Ecoscience: Population, Resources, Environment*, another doomsday scenario in which the specter of overpopulation and putative exhaustion of the world's resources is paraded in a cornucopia of imminent apocalyptic fantasy.

Never mind that the world's chief population problem these days is collapsing birth rates throughout the industrialized world. In another thirty or forty years, there might still be a country called Italy, for example, but precious few Italians. But according to Holdren and the Ehrlichs "compulsory population-control laws, even including laws requiring compulsory abortion" might be just around the corner. Such interventions, they speculate, "could be sustained under the existing Constitution if

the population crisis became sufficiently severe to endanger the society." But never fear! "If effective action," such as *voluntary* sterilization, "is taken promptly against population growth, perhaps the need for the more extreme involuntary or repressive measures can be averted *in most countries*" (our emphasis).

For the Ehrlichs and President Obama's chief science advisor, though, the need for such "coercive control" is far from unimaginable. (Indeed, they note that "the potential effectiveness of those least acceptable measures may be great.") They dream about "an armed international organization, a global analogue of a police force" to provide security, and they cheerfully note that "the first step" on the road to this utopia "necessarily involves partial surrender of sovereignty to an international organization." Other steps include "A massive campaign . . . to restore a high-quality environment in North America and to de-develop the United States." "De-develop"? Yes, that's right. The authors note sadly that the idea of "de-development," like the idea of mandatory sterilization, has met with "considerable misunderstanding and resistance." They are not, they explain, anti-technology. They just want to put an end to technology they don't like—"giant automobiles," for example, or "plastic wrappings" or "disposable packages and containers." Their list is long and various. "Environmentalism is school prayer for liberals." The pulpit is now in the White House, and the sermons—and the enforcements—are being designed by people like John Holdren. It's enough to make one indulge in a bit of selective misanthropic nostalgia.

Free speech on campus

Throughout history, prudent sages have noted that freedom is a precious and fragile achievement, difficult to attain, easy to lose, and, once lost, enormously hard to regain. This is a truth studiously avoided on American college campuses. Datum: Williams College (Tuition and fees: $63,290) has undertaken an "Uncomfortable Learning" Speaker Series in order to provide intellectual diversity on a campus where (like most campuses) left-leaning sentiment prevails. What a good idea! How is it working out? The conservative writer Suzanne Venker was invited to speak in this series. But when word got out that an alternative point of view might be coming to Williams, angry students demanded her invitation be rescinded. It was. Explaining their decision, her hosts noted that the prospect of her visit was "stirring a lot of angry reactions among students on campus." So Suzanne Venker joins a long and distinguished list of people—including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, George Will, and Charles Murray—first invited and then disinvited to speak on campus. It's been clear for some time that such interdictions are not bizarre exceptions. On the contrary, they are perfect reflections of an ingrained hostility to free speech—and, beyond that, to free thought—in academia.

To put some numbers behind that perception, the William F. Buckley Jr. Program at Yale recently commissioned a survey from McLaughlin & Associates about attitudes towards free speech on campus. Some 800 students at a variety of colleges across the country were surveyed. The results, though not surprising, are nevertheless alarming. By a margin of 51 percent to 36 percent, students favor their school's having speech codes to regulate speech for students and faculty. Sixty-three percent favor requiring professors to employ "trigger warnings" to alert students to material that might be discomfiting. One-third of the students polled could not identify the First Amendment as the part of the Constitution that dealt with free speech. Thirty-five percent said that the First Amendment does not protect "hate speech," while 30 percent of self-identified liberal students say the First Amendment is outdated. With the assault on free speech and the First Amendment proceeding apace in institutions once dedicated to robust intellectual debate, it is no wonder that there are more and more calls to criminalize speech that dissents from the party line on any number of issues, from climate change to race relations, to feminism and sex. John Holdren and other commissars of the party of coercion must be smiling as they contemplate how thoroughly universities are preparing the ground for their interventions.

Becoming Henry Kissinger
by Conrad Black

There is no doubt that Niall Ferguson's *Kissinger* is a brilliant book by an outstanding historian about a great and durably interesting statesman, who is also a distinguished historian and gifted strategic thinker.[1] Niall Ferguson has produced the first volume of a commissioned work that is intended by the subject and the author to be definitive. The author has done the necessary to establish his impartiality and has made very extensive use of the immense archives that Henry Kissinger has opened to him. And the author has gone to admirable lengths (even by his always meticulous professional standards) to read very widely in background areas relevant to Henry Kissinger's Jewish and German origins and has interviewed in depth a great many of the subject's acquaintances in the forty-four formative years before he ascended to great offices of state.

There have been a number of other talented secretaries of state, including James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, William H. Seward, John Hay, Henry L. Stimson, General Marshall, Dean Acheson, George Shultz, and James Baker. And there have been many extremely prominent Americans whose careers included, but did not reach their peak of success, in that office, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, James G. Blaine, William Jennings Bryan, Charles Evans Hughes, Colin Powell, and Hillary Clinton. But none of them have attracted as much or as intense an interest for their strategic precepts, historical and strategic writings, or foreign policy execution as Henry Kissinger.

I have the distinction of having been a good friend of the subject for more than thirty years, (and a cordial acquaintance of the author for almost as long), and I have read and even written a good deal about Henry Kissinger and reviewed most of his career with him, though not very systematically. But it was a revelation to read how astonishingly quickly and almost effortlessly he brushed aside the handicap of his status as an immigrant with very limited means and no natural entrée to the higher echelons of American society. He turned each step of his career into a startling and original upward movement and success. From the Jewish community of two thousand in the rather nondescript Bavarian city of Furth, his family departed Germany (after lengthy formal processing, including by the Gestapo) shortly before the infamous pogroms of Kristallnacht in 1938, and, after a stopover with relatives in England, arrived in comfort in New York on the elegant and popular liner *Ile de France* in September 1938. An American cousin of Mrs. Kissinger had promised that they would not burden the country financially. His parents resided thereafter, to the ends of their long lives, in a modest apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and Henry worked in a shaving brush factory on Fifteenth Street while attending a local school. He went to City College and then was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942. After quite rigorous training in South Carolina

1 *Kissinger, 1923–1968: The Idealist*, by Niall Ferguson; Penguin Press, 986 pages, $39.95.

and Louisiana and a stint studying engineering in Pennsylvania under an armed forces education advancement program, he was assigned to the Eighty-Fourth Railsplitters infantry division and shipped back to Europe and into combat in Germany, starting in November 1944.

He has never made the least attempt to dramatize either his memories of the first five years of the Third Reich, which his parents, unlike many relatives, presciently departed just in time, nor his distinguished service in action, for which he was quickly promoted from private to staff sergeant, and from which he naturally joined the U.S. occupation denazification program as a member of the army Intelligence Corps. At the age of twenty-two, he was effectively the military governor of Bensheim, a pleasant Hessian town of about 20,000, and was very effective, but judicious, in identifying and removing Nazi officials without offending the proverbial reasonable German. He has always denied that he was particularly traumatized by the Nazi terror that drove his family from their homeland, or that he was overly emotionally reflective about his swift return as an official in the army of the avenging occupying power to which they had fled just six years before.

From the earliest post-war days, he saw the emerging complexities of German public opinion and the subtleties of navigating among the far left in Germany, the numerous former Nazi sympathizers, those who would seek German reunification and neutrality or even "Finlandization" opposite the USSR, and those who could be rallied as the vanguard of a new and respectable German federal democracy to the Western Allies and as a barrier to Russian advances to the West. (The zones of occupation got the Russians in one place to a hundred miles from the Rhine. These were agreed by the European Advisory Commission, where the British voted with the Russians, as Roosevelt didn't want a demarcation of occupation zones, believing, correctly, that once the Western Allies had crossed the Rhine, they would move very quickly, as the Germans would fight fiercely in the East but surrender quickly in the West to put their defeated country in the hands of its more civilized enemies. Ferguson seems to buy into parts of the Yalta myth and imagines that these zones were agreed to at that conference.) Kissinger had read and even seen enough European history to know that Germany was the strongest power in Europe and that that was why Richelieu had sought its fragmentation in the Thirty Years' War (posthumously successfully at Westphalia), and Napoleon and Metternich had continued that policy through and after the Napoleonic wars.

Kissinger gained entry into Harvard under Roosevelt's GI Bill of Rights. His graduate thesis was an astonishingly recondite philosophical treatise titled *The Meaning of History*, nearly 100,000 words, that summarized the apposite thoughts of dozens of great cultural figures from Homer to Sartre and Bertrand Russell. His doctoral thesis in 1954 was the basis of his extraordinarily perceptive and successful book *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822*, about the political reconstruction of Europe after the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. He started a successor volume, on Bismarck, which he has not completed. In writing about Metternich, he described the ingenuity and tenacity deployed to keep the ramshackle and polyglot fraud of the Austrian Empire going, while keeping Germany divided; as for Bismarck, Kissinger saluted the achievement of the creation of the German Empire, though recognizing its flaw: it could only prevent the coalescence of the principal powers surrounding it—France, Russia, and Great Britain—if the quality of Bismarck's statesmanship could be continued by his successors. This was impossible, and the result was the catastrophic hecatombs provoked by the hyperactive and neurotic, child-like Emperor Wilhelm II and the sometimes brilliant but psychotic and wicked Adolf Hitler. From the first days after the Second World War, Kissinger was considering how Western Europe could be stabilized in alliance with the United States, Russia kept out of Western Europe, and the majority of Germans persuaded to keep their nerve and stay in the West, though divided, and resist the call of disarmed, neutral reunification. He was an early critic of George Kennan's concept of "containment" of international Communism as insufficiently purposeful.

Henry Kissinger graduated tenuously onto the Harvard faculty with a Rockefeller Foundation grant that enabled him to be a research fellow. With his customary energy, he set up an annual international affairs seminar and a thoughtful magazine, *Confluence*, and attracted a great range of distinguished participants and contributors. Even eminent people who declined his invitations, from Albert Camus to Richard Nixon, were interesting correspondents who became aware of this young academic who was only in his early thirties when Camus died and Nixon was cranking up to run for president for the first time. He became an associate professor and was practically the first person of any intellectual seriousness, despite the presence in the serried ranks of the Democratic Party of people knowledgeable about foreign policy (including the defeated presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson and Kissinger's Harvard friend Arthur Schlesinger), to suggest real alternatives to the Eisenhower–Dulles defense posture of reduced ground forces after Korea, enhanced nuclear forces ("more bang for the buck"), and "brinkmanship" with its accompanying threat of "massive retaliation," i.e. nuclear response, for almost any Soviet or Chinese provocation. Though Eisenhower started the de-escalation of the Cold War with "Atoms for Peace" and open skies (reciprocal permitted aerial reconnaissance), he was so averse to involvement in enervating conventional wars around the perimeter of superpower areas of influence, such as Korea, that he spent the 1950s threatening the major Communist powers with utter destruction as the United States retained a large lead in deliverable hydrogen bombs and war-heads.

Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, published in 1957, became instantly famous and widely discussed. The president gave it to his rather belligerent secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, with the commendation that the author could be right. This was again an astonishing position of influence for a thirty-three-year-old Jewish German immigrant. Kissinger's suggestion was that there be an intermediate stage between inadequate conventional response to the over-large Red Army and a full nuclear assault. This was the use of short-range tactical nuclear weapons that would restrain the blast area, not compel maximum counter-strikes, and would also compensate for Soviet conventional superiority in Central Europe (and potentially opposite the Asian communists). There were critics who claimed that it would inevitably lead to maximum nuclear exchanges, and there was much agitation in German political, intellectual, and media circles, with which Kissinger quickly developed and retained his familiarity, that the superpowers meant to settle any disputes by killing all the Germans and a few neighbors, but not significant numbers of each other. And it was becoming more difficult to make the point in either part of Germany that German division and vulnerability were the consequences of profound German strategic and moral misjudgments in the recent past.

It is hard to recall it now, but in the late 1950s it was widely believed that the USSR was gaining economically on the United States, that the decolonized world would tend naturally to side with the communist powers over the West, and that a "missile gap" was developing in the Soviets' favor over the United States. These beliefs were reinforced by the Sputnik launch and the contemporaneous failure of the first attempted U.S. satellite launch. (There was no excuse for Eisenhower, one of the world's most authoritative militarists, to tolerate the currency of this myth, as he had certainly maintained American deterrent strength, as was revealed eventually by his successor, John F. Kennedy, after he had exploited the "missile gap" politically.) When Vice President Richard Nixon lost very narrowly, and in fact questionably, to Kennedy, the President-elect ransacked Harvard, of which he was an alumnus, to fill his administration. Kissinger had by this time become a paid advisor, though he retained substantial independence, to the governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller. McGeorge Bundy, Kissinger's former department head and cordial colleague, retained him on Kennedy's behalf as an advisor on European and strategic matters generally, but he was kept at a distance by Bundy. It all reminded Kissinger of the academic politics he was trying to escape. Kissinger did not believe that Kennedy's response to the building of the Berlin Wall ("the anti-fascist defense barrier," as the Russians called it) was adequate, and he shared the concerns

of both the West German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, that the new administration would not do anything serious to preserve the dream of German unification, and of the French president Charles de Gaulle, that the Americans were not serious about defending Western Europe at all, a view de Gaulle promoted to enhance French influence in Europe.

These sentiments were aggravated by the Cuban Missile Crisis, which Kennedy successfully represented as a triumph by withholding the fact that the United States pledged to withdraw already-deployed U.S. missiles in Turkey and Italy, as well as giving a pledge not to invade Cuba, both strategic retreats for the West. Kissinger agreed with de Gaulle that Kennedy should have been stronger in both instances, and he was in some agreement with de Gaulle's proposal for a senior tier of the United States, France, and Britain in NATO, though he thought Germany and a rotating fifth member would have to be added. Kissinger also agreed with de Gaulle (whom he did not meet for another decade) that the Kennedy proposal for a Multilateral or Atlantic Nuclear Force, accompanied by endless demands from Washington for increased European conventional forces, was bound to drive France, and possibly Germany as well, toward the Russians since it was really just an effort to put Anglo-French nuclear forces under American command through NATO. Kissinger made his views known very ingeniously through an endless series of imaginative and persuasive articles in learned journals and op-ed pieces, through his German and French intellectual and military contacts, and through speeches by Rockefeller, who was vying for the leadership of the out-of-office Republicans with Nixon and Senator Barry Goldwater.

It was another milestone for Kissinger, still in his thirties, to have become such a renowned strategic authority. As the Kennedy and succeeding Johnson administrations descended further into Vietnam, Kissinger visited there three times and became an early authority on the failings of American policy. He saw that the war was not properly supported by Congress or the public and was undertaken without real allies except South Korea. He also realized that the Pentagon had no idea how to conduct a guerrilla war and that not only was there no plan to cut off supplies and reinforcements from the North, there had in fact been none since the Laos Neutrality agreement of 1962, which turned much of that country into what became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Kissinger, like Nixon, had opposed the Laos giveaway. Kissinger also headed an astounding semi–private-sector peace negotiation, via two prominent French communists, with Ho Chi Minh personally. Kissinger clung to these fruitless negotiations long after it should have been clear that Hanoi was not dealing in good faith. Ho was in fact just trying to lull the Americans prior to the massive Tet Offensive in early 1968.

Ferguson goes to great lengths to debunk the theory that Kissinger had anything to do with an attempt by the Nixon campaign to arouse Saigon's hostility to a Johnson peace initiative. The Nixon archives confirm the same message: both men are victims of a smear campaign, especially the fabrications of two of the most scurrilous myth-makers of recent times, Seymour Hersh and Christopher Hitchens. Lyndon Johnson was trying to throw the election to his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, with a spurious claim of a peace break-through. In tactical terms, the battle between Nixon and Johnson (on behalf of Humphrey) was one of the most egregiously cynical in American history—Nixon had been cheated by the Kennedys in 1960 and was determined that it would not happen again. Kissinger's hard-earned expertise and perspective on Vietnam helped bring him, at the age of forty-four, Nixon's invitation to be National Security Adviser after the narrow Republican election victory in 1968.

Niall Ferguson describes this remarkable progress in a readable, businesslike manner, with heavy but not laborious reliance on original primary material backed by his own wide cultural insight. But there are a few tenuous premises in Ferguson's portrayal of Kissinger as an idealist prior to holding high office and a realist thereafter, as the author tries to square the circle of Kissinger's opinions from academic appreciation of statesmen such as Metternich and Bismarck to his own principles of Western democratic values, somewhat suspiciously meshed, it is implied, with rather vague invocations of Kant, Goethe,

and other pillars of traditional German education. Ferguson implies that, as this volume ends, Kissinger was on the verge of making a Faustian bargain that mortgaged principle to power in ways that alienated some of his loyalists and, it can be inferred, may compromise Kissinger's coming achievements. It is certainly true that the contrast is startling between Henry Kissinger's meteoric rise from 1945 to 1968, and the fact that since he left office in 1977 with President Gerald Ford (who is misrepresented in a photo cutline as having been nominated vice president with Nixon in 1968), Kissinger has rarely been seriously utilized by the succeeding seven presidents. Jimmy Carter was a moralistic *naif*, and Ronald Reagan thought Nixon and Kissinger made too many concessions, in Vietnam, arms control, and even the Panama Canal, and (he told me) he had reservations about Kissinger's loyalty to Nixon in office. Kissinger and Nixon were chess players; Ronald Reagan would be a poker player. All were right for their times and all were successful, and they, with Margaret Thatcher, John Paul II, Helmut Kohl, and a few others, won the Cold War. But the Clinton and George W. Bush secretaries of state were inadequate, despite Colin Powell's distinction elsewhere, and Henry Kissinger was still in his prime and would certainly have spared George W. some terrible mistakes. The implication is that he foreshortened his career and compromised himself by his deviousness, and adopted a Bismarckian-Gaullist view for short-term gain, but this is conjecture, a teaser, as this book ends just before the Nixon administration was inaugurated. The complexities of the Nixon–Kissinger relationship are only subtly intimated; the volume ends in Wagnerian mists of foreboding.

There are also a few factual soft points in the ramp-up to volume II. Ferguson not only buys into the fiction that Roosevelt was duped by Stalin (almost a universal misconception among British historians), but also the myth that Nixon was a bad man. Nixon was temperamental, awkward, cynical, and somewhat maladjusted, but he was a courageous, brilliant, and very successful president. He was sandbagged by his enemies, with whom, inexplicably for such a survivor, he almost cooperated in his mishandling of the absurd Watergate affair. Ferguson gives him no credit for quelling the left and attributes the turn of the chaotic tide of the 1960s to mysterious forces of history, as in de Gaulle's astounding rout of the general strike and the *événements* of 1968. Ferguson acknowledges that we don't know if Johnson's stand in Vietnam, mismanaged and ill-considered though it was, helped prevent a communist takeover in Indonesia in 1966, a point that Nixon often made.

Ferguson does think that Vietnam was always a lost cause, but it only was as Johnson conducted it. The Tet Offensive was one of the great victories of U.S. military history, but Johnson had been let down by his commanders and threw in the towel. If instead he had declared impending victory, given the "Silent Majority" speech that Nixon gave in November 1969, announced the Vietnamization of the war and the beginning of irreversible American troop withdrawals, suspended draft calls, followed Eisenhower and MacArthur's advice to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail by extending the DMZ across Laos, invaded the Cambodian sanctuaries and mined Haiphong Harbor as Nixon later successfully did, he would have been reelected and the Saigon government would have won within the borders of South Vietnam. Hanoi could not have taken the aerial pounding indefinitely if Johnson had stopped the on-again, off-again attempt to trade bombing pauses for reduced infiltration. As it was, the South defeated the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in April 1972 in their next big offensive, with no ground assistance, though heavy air support, from the United States. The Vietnam tragedy had many chapters to run and only ended when the Democrats, who had plunged into the war and then deserted Johnson, bloodlessly assassinated Nixon and delivered all Indochina to the Vietnamese communists and the Khmer Rouge.

Some of Niall Ferguson's dramatic allusions, (*Waiting for Godot*, *The Mousetrap*, and Aristophanes' *Peace*, including Trygaeus's flight to Mount Olympus on the giant dung beetle), like some of his historical assumptions, are a stretch. But this is a formidable work of scholarship and a riveting lead-up to the extended climax of a great world drama and of the career of a great and unique statesman. The reader gets to its end with regret and with anticipation for the sequel.

The intolerable dream
by Gary Saul Morson

Its admirers call it "the Quixote," as if to say "the masterpiece" or even "the universe."

Cervantes's novel, completed exactly four hundred years ago, established him as one of the greatest writers in world literature. In his recent book, *Quixote: The Novel and the World*, Ilan Stavans is even "convinced that the Spanish language exists in order for this magisterial novel to inhabit it."[1] Some praise has been even more extravagant.

Ivan Turgenev, otherwise a skeptic to the core, detected a mystical significance in the apparent coincidence that the first part of *Don Quixote* appeared (he supposed) in the same year as *Hamlet*. What's more, Turgenev noted, Shakespeare and Cervantes died on the same day—actually the same date, but England and Spain used different calendars—as if some angel had arranged to link them. In what is arguably the most famous essay in Russian literature, "Hamlet and Don Quixote," Turgenev described these two masterpieces as representing opposite extremes of human nature, if not of nature itself. Together they define "the fundamental forces of all that exists. They explain the growth of flowers to us, and they even enable us to comprehend the development of the most powerful nations."

In this reading, Hamlet incarnates inertia, Don Quixote progress. Shakespeare's brooding hero proves relentlessly ironic, rational, and perceptive, but cannot act. Believing in nothing but his own judgment, he grows completely self-absorbed and unable to love. Don Quixote is just the reverse, all will and no sense. The man of faith, he credulously accepts an ideal of goodness without suspecting he mistakes desire for fact. To his own detriment, he lives entirely selflessly, "inherently incapable of betraying his convictions or transferring them from one object to another." In Russian terms, Hamlet represented the aristocratic "superfluous man," who was cultivated but lethargic, while Don Quixote recalled the idealist revolutionary, believing foolishly in an impossible, if noble, ideal.

Don Quixote has prompted imitations and responses by countless writers, from Melville and Flaubert to Kafka and Borges. It inspired both Che Guevara and Dostoevsky. The Russian realists were obsessed with it.

So many writers and artists have taken Cervantes's book to heart that for most readers it comes pre-read. Everyone has seen some image of the gaunt knight and his paunchy squire, Sancho Panza, and most people know a version of the story, usually sentimentalized as in the 1964 musical *Man of La Mancha*. In its most famous song, the idealistic, absurd hero dedicates himself to "the impossible dream" and swears to follow his star "no matter how hopeless, no matter how far." He is "willing to march into Hell/ For a heavenly cause." No wonder the musical appealed to the generation of the 1960s. I can't help it: the song still thrills me.

But however moving this version of the story, it is not true to the book Cervantes wrote.

1 *Quixote: The Novel and the World*, by Ilan Stavans; W. W. Norton, 260 pages, $26.95.

And however great the book's reputation, it is far from flawless. It shows its writer, who never wrote anything else remotely comparable, constantly surprised by an idea he can barely handle. The *Quixote* begins with an apparently simple goal, to parody tales of knight-errantry by imagining someone who takes them literally. Having read so many chivalric epics that his brains have "dried up," the hero decides that he has been called to revive chivalry and restore the Golden Age in this Age of Iron. But as the book proceeded, Cervantes realized that he had hit on something much more profound than a simple parody. The story kept raising ultimate questions about faith, belief, evidence, and utopian ideals. When do we need caution and when risk? Should we seek to transform reality or the way we perceive it? Do good intentions or good results define moral actions? And what is the proper role of literature itself?

As Don Quixote veers from adventure to adventure, the author struggles to catch up and, in the process, happens upon ever subtler ideas. Part of the book's amazing charm comes from our sense that the author resembles his hero. He has written a sort of novel-errant, battered no less than its hero by tasks beyond its strength, but somehow all the better for the effort.

The book exhibits all sorts of obvious flaws, from plot lines that contradict each other to the insertion of long, tedious tales told by the characters. Oddly enough, these pastoral and moralistic stories are just what we would expect the author to make fun of. Critics, of course, have tried to justify them, but their very critical ingenuity tacitly admits why it is needed. In the second part of the novel, written ten years after the unexpected success of the first, Cervantes admits all these errors. And as if anticipating the pedantic glosses on his book, he parodies pedantry too. "A wise friend of mine," Don Quixote explains, "was of the opinion that no one should weary himself by writing glosses and the reason, he used to say, was that the gloss could never come near the text" and is usually "far from the intention and theme to be glossed." Is that wise friend Cervantes himself? A few pages later, when knight and squire encounter a pedantic author, whose pointless scholarly discoveries Sancho can easily copy, the squire explains that "it's just a matter of asking idiotic questions and giving silly replies." "You have said more than you know," agrees Don Quixote, "for there are some people who tire themselves out learning and proving things that, once learned and proved, don't matter a straw."

The book starts out describing the hero's peculiar, literary madness, his decrepit armor and pasteboard helmet, and the beaten-down old horse he grandiloquently names Rosinante, in imitation of the steeds in chivalric epic. It is as if naming by itself can transform reality, as, indeed, it sometimes does. A series of famous adventures are narrated both as Don Quixote sees them and as they are in reality. To no avail his squire cautions that those are windmills, not giants; sheep, not soldiers; and a barber's basin, not "the helmet of Mambrino."

One might think that when windmills batter him and people stone him, Don Quixote will at last doubt his vision, but he resists all contrary evidence. Like so many systems with which we are distressingly familiar, his mania precludes any possible disconfirmation. If capitalism does not collapse as Marxists predicted, they just call the present "late capitalism." From the beginning, psychoanalysis has discounted objections as so much "resistance," and therefore positive proof of the theory's correctness. As Freud's critic Karl Kraus once observed, "I tell the psychoanalysts to kiss my ass and they tell me I have an anal obsession."

Don Quixote attributes his failures to the schemes of evil enchanters. If the knight's peerless lady, Dulcinea of El Toboso, appears to be a hairy, smelly peasant girl, that is because she has been enchanted. "All the adventures of a knight-errant appear to be illusions, follies, and dreams, and turn out to be the reverse," he tells Sancho, "because in our midst, there is a host of enchanters, forever changing, disguising our affairs." And that will always be so, because "enchanters persecute me and will persecute me until they sink me and my exalted chivalries in the deepest abyss of oblivion." Empiricist philosophers tell us that the senses are the

bedrock of knowledge, but for Don Quixote they are what is *least* trustworthy. "Who do you believe," asked Groucho Marx, "me or your lying eyes?" Senses prove mistaken, but a good theory never does.

Here we verge on the "postmodern" Don Quixote. A truism of our age teaches that everything is equally a "fiction," even if some fictions should prove temporarily more useful than others. As Cervantes's novel gains steam, more and more people start constructing fictional worlds as they get the idea of humoring the madman. They pretend to be knights-errant or evil enchanters and construct elaborate tableaux within tableaux. In Part Two, almost everyone Don Quixote meets has read Part One and knows all about him. Amusingly, Sancho can't figure out how their chronicler managed to learn about things Sancho did when no one was there to see him. Is the book's narrator some sort of evil enchanter himself?

Some of the jokes these readers play on the heroes are so elaborate, and require so many participants, that one begins to ask whether it takes a fool to expend so much effort gulling a pair of fools. In the postmodern critical reading, all this play within play indicates that we live in a hall of infinite mirrors with no exit to "reality." But in joining the hero in a world of pure make-believe, aren't these critics imitating the folly of the readers in the book?

Some authors have taken such reflections not nihilistically, like the postmodernists, but religiously, as a sign of our inevitably fallen state. Without divine revelation, we are shut out from the truth. In Nikolai Gogol's hilarious version of Cervantes's tale, *The Inspector-General*, a town's corrupt officials, learning that a government inspector is coming, resolve to con him. Impressed with their own cleverness, they decide that a scapegrace staying at the local inn must be the inspector in disguise. As with Don Quixote, counter-evidence becomes evidence: the less the scapegrace resembles a government official, the better they think the official's disguise, and the better the disguise, the more certain he must be the official! In fact, he is just a spendthrift idiot who is delighted to accept their bribes. So the officials wind up conning themselves, as perhaps we all do. Just as readers are about to conclude that everything in the world is counterfeit, the real inspector general shows up, not at all in disguise, but like God at the Last Judgment, arriving when least expected.

At times, Don Quixote differs from earlier knights-errant because, unlike them, he *knows* that he is copying models. In one amusing sequence, he decides to imitate heroes who, like Amadis of Gaul or Orlando Furioso, go mad when they discover their lady's falsity. Don Quixote pretends to be mad like them, because, as he explains to his squire, that is what knights-errant do. So he goes into the wilderness, strips naked, and utters insane ravings he wants reported to Dulcinea. When Sancho Panza reminds him that Dulcinea has not been false, Don Quixote answers: "That is just where the subtleness of my plan comes in. A knight-errant who goes mad for a good reason deserves no thanks or gratitude; the whole point consists in going crazy without cause."

By the same logic, he demands at lance-point, like any good knight, that passers-by acknowledge Dulcinea's unsurpassed beauty. When one of them protests he has never seen her, Don Quixote replies: "If I were to show her to you, what merit would there be in acknowledging a truth so manifest to all? The important point is that you should believe, confess, swear, and defend it without setting eyes on her."

People do not believe because they see, they see because they already believe. Dostoevsky, ever questing after faith, viewed the novel as an allegory about the sources of belief. Are people *ever* convinced to accept an antagonistic world view? Imagine that the chemist Dmitri Mendeleev, a sort of smug atheist like Richard Dawkins today, should be confronted with an indubitable miracle. Devils lift him three feet in the air and leave him there against all the laws of physics. Would Mendeleev admit he might have been wrong? Never: he would insist it was all a trick and, if it came down to it, "would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact." With

such reasoning, atheists might as well resort to evil enchanters.

In one article, "A Lie Is Saved by a Lie," Dostoevsky speculates on a scene from *Don Quixote* he (mis)remembers. Once upon a time, the knight of the doleful countenance was suddenly struck by a puzzle. The books of chivalry describe knights who encounter armies of a hundred thousand conjured up by evil sorcerers, and annihilate them to the last man. But how could this be?, he asks. If you do the math, there isn't enough time to kill a hundred thousand people in a single battle. Could the books be mere fantasies? In short, Dostoevsky explains, Don Quixote "began yearning for realism!"

If the chivalric epics contain one lie, then they are all lies, so how can they be saved? At last Don Quixote hits on the solution: these men had bodies like slugs or mollusks and so a single sword stroke could kill several at once! To save one fantasy, he comes up with another, "twice, thrice as fantastic as the first one." And thus, "realism is satisfied, truth is saved, and it is possible to believe in the first and most important dream with no more doubts."

Now ask yourselves, hasn't the same thing happened to you, perhaps a hundred times? "Say you've come to cherish a certain dream, an idea, a theory, a conviction," or a person you love. If there is something you have exaggerated and distorted because of your passion, you will be aware of it in the depths of your being, doubt will tease you, and you will be unable to live at peace with your dream. Admit it, Dostoevsky writes: "don't you then invent a new dream, a new lie, even a terribly crude one, perhaps, but one that you were quick to embrace lovingly only because it resolved your initial doubt?"

Since the romantic period, and especially today, the *Quixote* has been read as a celebration of idealism. No matter how unrealistic the dream of peace and justice may be, isn't it better to believe in it and strive for it? "You see things that are and ask 'Why?' But I dream things that never were, and I ask 'Why not?'": we have all heard this line, once attributed to Bernard Shaw and now to Robert F. Kennedy. RFK also supposedly said: "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." Failure itself does not discredit but ennobles the idealistic striver. But to attribute such sentimentality to Cervantes is to be almost as foolish as his hero.

Time and again, Cervantes shows the terrible cost of pursuing ideals without attention to real people in actual situations. If the cost is counted, Nabokov noted, then "the implication of its [this book's] humor is brutal and grim." When Don Quixote frees some galley slaves, they immediately pelt him with stones and soon after become highwaymen plundering the countryside. Reproached with the consequences of his chivalrous deed, Don Quixote declares irately: "It is not the duty of knights-errant to find out whether the afflicted, enslaved, and the oppressed whom they encounter on the roads are in evil plight and anguish because of their crimes or because of their good actions. Their concern is simply to relieve them, having regard to their sufferings and not to their knaveries. . . . As for the rest, I am not concerned." On another occasion, Don Quixote has rescued a young man being whipped by his employer, but, the moment the doleful knight left, the employer whipped the boy all the harder. "He again tied me to the same tree," the young man reports, and, while making fun of the rescue, "gave me so many lashes that left me flayed like Saint Bartholomew." And so, the young man implores, even if you see me being cut to pieces, do not come to my aid, because no matter how great my misfortunes may be, "they will not be as great as those that spring from your help, and may God lay a curse on you and all the knights-errant that were ever born in the world."

I thought of these passages recently when Joseph Epstein reminded me of how some leftists justify their past defense of Stalin. They concede that they turned out to be wrong but maintain that in their hearts they were right, while their critics, who turned out to be right, have no hearts at all. Or as the late Michael Bernstein used to say, being an idealist means never having to say you are sorry. Good intentions excuse any outcome. But don't good

intentions include learning that good intentions are not enough?

When I arrived at Oxford as a graduate student, I told my tutor that I had just traveled around Europe carrying only a change of clothes, a bottle of Woolite, and a copy of *Don Quixote*, which I imagined especially applicable to my own role as a scholar-errant. "Everybody imagines that this book was written precisely for himself," he replied. "It justifies everything and everyone."

Ilan Stavans's study catalogues the many writers, critics, and artists who have adored this novel. Americans and Russians, as well as Spaniards and Latin Americans, have deemed it particularly applicable to their national experience. It has been endlessly translated and retranslated, appropriately enough since even the original purports to be a translation from the Arabic! At one point, when the supposed Muslim author "swears like a Catholic Christian," the supposed translator into Spanish assures us that that means he swears with perfect truthfulness. No matter who the readers may be, they discover a compliment to themselves.

For Stavans, this book is no mere novel. If it were, he wouldn't like it, since, as he boasts, "I really don't like reading long novels. I lose patience, my mind wanders. I particularly dislike psychological novels because of the way they defy logic (*Crime and Punishment*, ouch!)." "Ouch" is about the level of argument in some parts of this study. Confusing the "eschatological" (what pertains to the end of the world) with the "scatological" (what pertains to excrement), Stavans tells us: "This surely isn't a dirty novel. Eschatology is kept in check. Sex is nonexistent." He repeatedly calls Don Quixote an "imposter," apparently unaware that for there to be an imposter, there must be someone real that one pretends to be. If I imagine that I am the present king of France, or an enchanted unicorn, I may be many things, but I am not an imposter. When Stavans informs us that one wordsmith was not a consistent lexicographer "like Samuel Johnson was," one also winces at his grammar.

Surely Stavans intends this study as a quixotic prank? As Cervantes inserts tedious tales, Stavans seems to be filling as many pages as possible. For no discernible reason, he spends pages praising the beauties of Spanglish. Citations from various writers extend far beyond what is needed. At one point he reproduces a dozen translations of the same paragraph, thereby filling six pages, in order to show us that the English language has changed over the centuries and that interpretations of a text may differ.

So much does he love the *Quixote* that we learn it contains 2,059,005 letters, 381,104 words, 40,165 commas, and 20,050 semicolons. The word "que" ("what" or "who") "shows up 20,617 times; that is, it constitutes 5.41 percent of the complete text." Could this be a sly allusion to the novel's parody of needless pedantry? I hope so. Evidently, the book is Stavans's childhood friend and current nostalgia, an object of reverence he cannot talk about enough. It is his cherished ideal, his Platonic love, his Dulcinea of El Toboso.

As Stavans reminds us, perhaps no one loved this novel more than Dostoevsky, who pronounced it "the final and the greatest expression of human thought, the bitterest irony that a human is capable of expressing, and if the world were to come to an end and people were asked somewhere there: 'Well, did you understand anything from your life on earth and draw any conclusion from it?' a person could silently hand over *Don Quixote*: 'Here is my conclusion about life; can you condemn me for it?'"

To be sure, Dostoevsky immediately qualified this statement: "I don't claim that this judgment about life on earth would be right, but still . . ." Like Ivan Karamazov, he knew that even "the bitterest irony" could turn into a sort of reverse sentimentality. For intellectuals especially, the celebration of well-intentioned disaster tempts us with its own self-indulgent consolation.

State of nature
by Dominic Green

The English were the first modern people to develop a city-dwelling majority: some time around 1850, the year when Dickens was writing *Bleak House*, Henry Mayhew was editing his explorations of London's meaner streets, and American literature was still dwelling in the small-town world of *The Scarlet Letter*. More than a century had passed since the English had invented a modern urban art form: the novel. Admittedly, Cervantes and Rabelais had shown the way, by organizing its parent formats—the romance and the short story—around characters rather than situations, as Boccaccio and Chaucer had done. But stringing together short stories is not the same as the intense realism of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. We experience Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe as real people, because their experience is comprehensive. Defoe does not need to digress into daisy chains of anecdote tragical-historical-pastoral. Moll's world is already full: she exists in the present intense.

Even novelists doubted whether the intensity of that present was a healthy experience. In the 1770s, when Boston contained 20,000 people, London was on the way to its first million. "London is literally new to me," grumbles the misanthropic Matthew Bramble in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771). "New in its streets, houses and even in its situation. . . . What I left open fields, producing hay and corn, I now find covered with streets, and squares, and palaces, and churches." Bramble reaches for the now-familiar imagery of organic disorder. London is an "overgrown monster," whose "dropsical head" sucks in people from the country. Bramble fears this unnatural imbalance will "leave the body and head without nourishment and support." For the first time, the erasure of nature by brick and cobble seems possible. The artificial city lays a new foundation for society. In London's parks, as Voltaire had noticed, the apprentice paraded with the aristocrat, an equal in leisure. "In short," complains Mr. Bramble, "there is no distinction or subordination left. The different departments of life are jumbled together."

Georgian London was the first English Sublime. Compare Burke's definition of 1757 with the complaints of Smollett's Mr. Bramble. Burke defines the sublime as "astonishment . . . with some degree of horror." The mind is "so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it." This overwhelming is the source of the sublime's power: "far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force." And here comes Mr. Bramble, trying to cross the road in a city where "all is tumult and hurry."

> One would imagine they were impelled by some disorder of the brain, that will not suffer them to be at rest. The foot passengers run along as if they were pursued by bailiffs. The porters and chairmen trot with their burthens. People, who keep their own equipages, drive through the streets at full speed. Even citizens, physicians and apothecaries glide in their chariots like lightning. The

> hackney-coachmen make their horses smoke, and the pavement shakes under them; and I have actually seen a waggon pass through Piccadilly at the hand-gallop. In a word, the whole nation seems to be running out of their wits.

London made the Georgian novel by its power of attraction. It made Romantic verse by its power to repel. The crowding of the streets, the fouling of the air and water, the cost of living, and what Mr. Bramble called "the vile ferment of stupidity and corruption" all turned the sensitive stomach, and the sensitive eye, towards the country—or what remained of it. By the time Wordsworth and Coleridge went in search of crags and valleys, England had been turned into London's back garden. The thinking, feeling Individual—capitalized as the antithesis to the vile, fermenting Mass—could only find Nature on the ragged fringe of Civilization, where the terrain was too rough to be monetized: the Lake District, rural Wales, the Hebrides.

"The use of travelling," Dr. Johnson wrote to Hester Thrale from the Isle of Skye in 1773, "is to regulate imagination by reality and, instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are." But the first wave of Georgian tourists carried the baggage of urban life, like weekenders who visit Whole Foods before heading upstate. A decade earlier, James Macpherson's "discovery" of Ossian had turned the Hebrides into one of the shrines of a new European culture that prized the authentic, the rustic, and the remote. Gaelic became fashionable for the first time since the retreat of the Romans, and the "Homer of the Highlands" attained a cachet out of all proportion to his talent or authenticity. Goethe included excerpts in his *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Herder reflected on their cultural implications in "Extract from a Correspondence about Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples."

Imagination regulated reality. Life imitating art: when Sir Joseph Banks discovered a resonant sea cave in the Hebrides in 1772, he did not publicize it under its local name of Uamh-Binn, "cave of melody." He renamed it Fingal's Cave, in honor of Macpherson's fictional hero. Felix Mendelssohn came next, and then J. M. W. Turner in 1831. To him, the natural wonder shares its habitat with an unnatural wonder, a pleasure steamer. Black smoke smears the view. The experience of Nature in the wilderness is beginning to replicate the experience of Nature in the city. The viewer has to pretend not to see the boat, the smoke, or the tourists, just as Blake had used his "prophetic" eye to see the historic terrain of the city afresh. In *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804), Blake rendered invisible the grid of new streets that had been laid over the "little meadows green" of his childhood. Then, having cleared the vista, he superimposed upon it another sophisticated construction, in which the vicinity of Regent's Park becomes the Eden where the "Lamb of God" and "fair Jerusalem his Bride" had sported when the world was new.

> Is it a Truth that the Learned have Explored? Was Britain the primitive Seat of the Patriarchal Religion? . . . All things Begin & End in Albion's Ancient Druid Rocky Shore.

Poetry, Keith Douglas wrote, is what survives of the beloved. The English Romantics knew Nature when they saw it, because Nature was what remained after the great urbanization. The bigger the cities became, the deeper the longing, and the mistier the nostalgia. The result was the conquest of the country, and its conversion to utility as a reservoir for the Victorian and Edwardian imagination. The masterpieces of the nursery were written by the children of urban clerks, teachers, and lawyers: Mr. Pooter's children. They knew the country from visits to rural relatives and day trips on the train, and their lost England is the scene of their lost childhoods. Kenneth Grahame lived by the Thames with his grandmother for a few years, then went to work in the Bank of England. Beatrix Potter was the daughter of a London lawyer who took his children on healthy holidays in the Lake District. A. A. Milne was the son of a London headmaster, and first found success writing plays and film scripts. A. E. Housman worked at the Patent Office before escaping to the ivory tower. Even Richard Jefferies, whose

Wood Magic (1881) and *Bevis* (1882) inspired the fantasists of the nursery, was not a real countryman. The farm had only been in his family for two generations before his father sold up and moved to Bath as a domestic gardener, and, despite the impression given by *Bevis*, Jefferies spent much of his childhood in the London suburb of Sydenham.

The nursery library remains one of the high points of English literature. But, for all its rural locations, there is little Nature in it. There may be no more telling scene in this literature than the moment when the clubbable chaps of *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) have a vision of Pan in the Surrey hills. This is as true in spirit to the English countryside as it is false in fact. For, as Kipling described in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), Puck, not the Pan of the Romans, is the indigenous spirit; Kipling, of course, only came to the English countryside as an adult. The same overlaying of Classical schooling distorts the terrain of Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). Tramping the tumescent uplands in "The Merry Guide," he beholds a dewy "youth" who sports a "feathered cap on forehead," and grasps "a golden rod." No one had walked the hills of Shropshire in this get-up since the days of Robin Hood.

A generation raised on Potter's Peter Rabbit, Grahame's Toad, and Housman's *Shropshire Lad* became the second great wave of Georgian tourists. Jefferies's lines from *The Amateur Poacher* (1879) haunted the young Edward Thomas, a Londoner who had taken childhood holidays in Wales: "Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and pure wind." Retreating to the country, Thomas survived by hack reviewing, the kind of lifestyle that depended on regular mails and trains.

The Georgians took to the hills as Blériot took to the skies. The infernal combustion engine finished off the old British countryside: nowhere was now a day trip from somewhere. V. S. Pritchett, raised in the Suffolk market town of Ipswich and the less salubrious suburbs of south London, thought that the country was never the same after the old chalk roads were tarmacked. As Laurie Lee wrote of the illicit endogamists around Stroud, Gloucestershire, "Quiet incest flourished where the roads were bad."

Exeunt, pursued by Daimler-Benz. The Georgians' name betrays their destination: beating back into a past that Dr. Johnson would have recognized. In truth, the wild England of Langland's Chiltern hills or Shakespeare's Arden woods had almost disappeared by the time of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The rural ideal was not Eden, but Arcadia, with a centerpiece from the Odes of Horace: the country house, with its restrained Classical trim, its weathered stone, and its well-stocked library. The interwar Modernists shared in this dream and its anguished dissolution: Waugh, raised in suburban Golders Green, became the squire of Stinchcombe, standing athwart progress in his plus-fours. Pound and Yeats spent the last winter before the Great War near Ashdown in Kent, at Stone Cottage, on the other side of Five Hundred-Acre Wood from where A. A. Milne was to live.

A modest, elegaic tradition of nature writing survived, mostly memoirs of childhood in benighted but scenic locations, but, by the mid-nineteenth century, most English nature writers were travel writers, just as most visitors to the countryside were tourists, not pilgrims. And an English travel writer had to travel in order to write. Apart from the appalling weather, the British countryside was crowded, manicured, and over-written: all that remained to be said was Stella Gibbons's brilliant parody of Victorian country fiction, *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932).

Literary traditions are often compared to rivers, but travel writing was formed in the image of modern transport: trains and boats and planes. Perhaps the English took so well to travel writing because, impelled to leave their wet island, they glided outwards on the cheap and reliable networks of imperial transport: port out, starboard home. The main line of English travel writing runs from the ornate Oriental terminus of Charles Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844, the year of Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed*) to the Southern Baroque station of Norman Douglas's *Old Calabria* (1915),

and thence to the modern crossroads, Robert Byron's *Road to Oxiana* (1937), where the stationmaster is too suave for his own good. From here, those with time on their hands may wish to explore the sidings of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, or take a trip on the Aldous Huxley miniature railway, with its famous D. H. Lawrence tea room. After suspension of services due to work on the tracks between 1939 and 1945, the English line survived the postwar decades by running irregular services to favorite destinations (Patrick Leigh Fermor's fondly remembered Greek excursions, and his much delayed trans-European express) and odd new markets beyond the reach of the package tourist (Wilfred Thesiger and Bruce Chatwin).

The native Naturists did not die out after 1945, but they too diversified. In *Akenfield: A Portrait of an English Village* (1969), Ronald Blythe, a Suffolk farmer's son, became a Studs Terkel of the fields and compiled an artful social history. Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1943) and Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (1959) had a similar appeal: like the great house of *Brideshead Revisited*, Nature was the stage set on which the tragic denouement of the old ways played out, the old order extinguished. T. H. White's *The Goshawk* (1951), his memoir of his struggle to train a predator, was unpublished for nearly twenty years; meanwhile White became better known as the author of Dark Ages fantasies. Gavin Maxwell, who, as *The House of Elrig* (1965) describes, had grown up in rural Scotland, wrote beautifully on the Hebrides and the Western Highlands. But Maxwell's Scottish stories describe the invasions of modern life, and usually by Maxwell himself. In *Harpoon at a Venture* (1952), Maxwell the conservationist introduces industrial shark fishing to the Inner Hebrides. In *Ring of Bright Water* (1960), he violates further precepts by introducing an Iraqi otter into Scotland; the brutal outcome is only slightly more traumatic for the otter, bludgeoned to death with a hammer, than for the reader, battered with Maxwell's bleak view of life.

Maxwell's otter was a souvenir of his travels among the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq with Wilfred Thesiger, a trip that generated travel books for both of them. The born nature writer was acquiring the traits and royalty statements of the travel writer. And the travel writer's lucrative exile might have appealed for another reason. Postwar Britain looked outwards for its aesthetic cues, to Paris and New York, not upwards to the imperial officer class who had dominated both nature and travel writing, and who now, with the empire gone, seemed as superfluous as a wooden plow. These were the decades of James Lees-Milne's diaries: death taxes on the great estates, demolitions and sell-offs to the National Trust, tea rooms in the old stables. Masterpieces of the rural childhood memoir, like Herbert Read's *The Innocent Eye* (1940) and Alison Uttley's *The Country Child* (1931), were forgotten. The Classical curriculum, which had dignified the landscape as well as falsified it, fell from grace in all but the private schools. Children were still permitted to read *The Wind in the Willows*, but the weasels had overrun Toad Hall.

The filming of Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* (1927) in 1979 seemed to mark the end of the road, or the muddy lane, for nature writing, even at its most anthropomorphic. Williamson's Herder-style reflections on the relationship between kinship, language, and place had led him into fascism. Nature writing was by the posh and for the posh, a legacy of the old, ever-dying England.

How, then, are we now amid a comeback of nature writing in "vibrant" and "multicultural" Britain? There is no doubt that we are undergoing a revival. The bookshops of England are full of books about moors, marginal areas, and seasons spent on recondite rural pursuits. The leaders of the pack are Helen Macdonald, author of the memoir *H is for Hawk* (2014), and Robert Macfarlane. A Cambridge academic like A. E. Housman, Macfarlane has produced a trilogy of clever, illuminating, and artfully written books: *The Wild Places* (2007), *The Old Ways* (2012), and *Landmarks* (2015). Behind these two, a howling pack hunts down the foxy contracts, driven by the pink-coated agents and blooded editors.

The hills are alive with the sound of typing. Ever wanted to read the biography of a field? Try John Lewis-Stempel's *Meadowland: The Private Life of an English Field* (2014). Perhaps you prefer something boggier? How about Stephen Moss's *Wild Hares and Hummingbirds* (2012), a history of the "watery wonderland" around a village in the Somerset Levels. Wetter still? That'll be Simon Cooper's *Life of a Chalkstream* (2010). How about trees? Colin Elford's *A Year in the Woods* (2011) is a scintillating diary of a year spent as a forest ranger. Or there's *The Green Road into the Trees* (2013) by Hugh Thomson, who walked around England. Or perhaps you would like to know what life is like without an internet connection or a car in one of the wettest, most isolated, and economically palsied places in Britain? *Deep Country: Five Years in the Welsh Hills* (2012) by Neil Ansell.

There is, it turns out, gold in them there hills, as well as sheep. Not all of the New Naturists are opportunists. John Lewis-Stempel certainly walks the country talk. He has also written *Foraging: The Essential Guide to Free Food*, and *The Wild Life* (2012), a memoir of a year in which he ate only what he could forage, catch, or shoot; his competence in this lunatic venture is attested by the fact that his publicity photograph shows him still in possession of a full set of teeth. Some of the others, though, might be suspected of talking the walk. Hugh Thomson was an old-fashioned travel writer, seeking out the distant and dismal—rural Peru, the Himalayas—before he wrote about walking across England. But Helen Macdonald, though she might be accused of over-sharing, can hardly be accused of cynicism. *H is for Hawk* is a memoir of the grief that followed her father's death, and her recovery by training a goshawk in the style of T. H. White. Life makes a prey of us, and her consuming sorrow has the unmistakable rawness of truth.

The rawness of Robert Macfarlane is all in the landscape; the sensibility is highly refined. If these qualities have to be polarized, this is the preferable split. Like Macdonald, and like Nick Hunt, author of the excellent travelogue *Walking the Woods and the Water* (2014), Macfarlane is reflexively literary. Earlier writers applied a well-read mind to the book of Nature. All three of these writers apply a well-read mind to the books of well-read but now deceased minds that once were open to Nature. Macdonald takes to her road of grief and gauntlets with T. H. White. Hunt, in the aftermath of 2008, retraces the steps of Leigh Fermor's "Great Walk" across Europe. Macfarlane walks *The Old Ways* with Edward Thomas. While T. H. White managed to mask his homosexuality and sadomasochism, Macfarlane has been candid about his Victorian specialities. Apart from his nature trilogy, he has published *Original Copy* (2007), an academic study of "borrowing"—also known as "influence" if you like it, and "plagiarism" if you don't—among Victorian writers. These nature books are also books about books.

Macfarlane swings between two registers, both of them alien, urban, and modern: the scientific vocabulary that has replaced the old names and local dialects, and the literary history that farmers tend not to be interested in. He extemporizes at great and frequently gripping length on the literary associations of every bog, dale, and hollow that he crosses. In *The Old Ways*, Macfarlane, walking in rural Sussex, shares a path with a man called Lewis, who has taken to the road after the death of his wife, and walked all over Europe.

> Somewhere near Amberley a barn owl lifted from a stand of phragmites. We stopped to watch it hunt over the water margin, slowly moving north up the line of the river, pulling a skein of shrills from the warblers in the reeds. It was a daytime ghost, its wings beating with a huge soundlessness. "You go ahead," said Lewis to me. "I'm in no hurry."

As Lewis treks off, Macfarlane grabs the reader's rainproofed sleeve. "There are two intertwined histories of modern wayfaring," he announces. There is the history of the "wilful wanderer, the Borrovian or Whitmanesque walker, out for the romance of the way." And there is the history of "the tramps, the hobos, the vagrants, the dispossessed, the fugitives, the harmed and the jobless." From

there, Macfarlane discusses vagrancy in late Victorian England, and then the "sad and brilliant" scene in Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (1969), where the young Lee, setting out in 1934, encounters a somnambulist army of unemployed men, "all trudging northwards in a sombre procession." And then we proceed, off to a Bronze Age burial mound—it's supposed to be haunted—by way of a sudden encounter with a badger with "quick green jewel-flash" eyes. A real badger, that is, not the one from *The Wind in the Willows*: the sort that Britain's farmers gas or shoot whenever possible.

Macfarlane's free associations with Lewis and the commonwealth of English letters are erudite, and he shuffles the images quickly. So quickly, in fact, that we might miss the schematic construction. To his credit, Macfarlane uses the academic's trick of polarizing the analysis to productive as opposed to barren effect. He is a genuinely poetic writer, and a relentlessly interesting companion. But are there really only two histories of modern wayfaring? When tramps are "hobos," vagrants "the dispossessed," and criminals "fugitives," we are in the land of economic romance, Sussex by way of Steinbeck. And can the skilled unemployed be compared to any of these, or the non-specifically "harmed"?

Many of Laurie Lee's somnambulists carried "bags of tools, or shabby cardboard suitcases." Others wore "the ghosts of city suits," and stopped to polish their shoes with grass. They were, Lee said, "carpenters, clerks, engineers," skilled workers who had been "walking up and down the country in a maze of jobless refusals, the treadmill of the mid-Thirties." How, we might wonder, would a person who has left home in search of a living wage feel about being lumped in with the lumpenproles by some Cambridge academic who, he tells us, only stretches his legs on the weekend? Some of my forebears came to Britain as shabby skilled workers, and some of their children scraped through the Thirties in rags. I hope that, if Macfarlane were to travel back through time and share his analysis, they would escort him politely from their slum.

Then again, do the little people read? Tocqueville said that in America, moral questions become legal cases. In Britain, literary criticism becomes class war. A couple of splendidly bitter articles have attacked the "New Nature" genre. The best, and bitterest, was by Kathleen Jamie, in *Granta*:

> Who's that coming over the hill? A white, middle-class Englishman! A Lone, Enraptured Male! From Cambridge! Here to boldly go, "discovering," then quelling our harsh and lovely and sometimes difficult land with his civilized lyrical words.

In *Landmarks*, Macfarlane describes the atrocity of the revised *Oxford Junior Dictionary*. The names of trees and animals are out, and hi-tech neologisms are in. Goodbye to "acorn," "dandelion," and "ivy"; hello to "blog," "celebrity," and "voice-mail." The thankless task of explaining this cruel pruning of the tree of language fell to Vineeta Gupta, head of Oxford University Press's children's dictionaries. "Nowadays, the environment has changed," she said. It certainly has, and not only because of the electronic deluge. Industrial agriculture has slaughtered the landscape and its animal inhabitants. According to Michael McCarthy's *The Moth Snowstorm* (2015), the once-common British phenomenon described in his title, the spattering of a car's windscreen at night until it was caked with dead bugs, is now a memory for those over fifty years of age.

Landmarks is a dictionary of dialect, of language embedded in its native terrain, of last words and last sightings of a landscape fast becoming incomprehensible.

blàr: very flat area of moor, often boggy (Gaelic)
boglach: general term for boggy area (Gaelic)
boglet: little bog (coined by R. D. Blackmore in *Lorna Doone*, 1869)
botach: reedy bog (Gaelic)
bottoms: marshy ground (Irish English)
breunloch: dangerous sinking bog that may be bright green and grassy (Gaelic)
brochan: miry, soft ground (literally, "porridge"; Gaelic)
carr: boggy or fenny copse (Northern English)

"For *blackberry*, read *BlackBerry*," Macfarlane writes. "A basic literacy of landscape is falling away up and down the ages." This is undeniably true. But what does it mean? "A common language—a language *of* the commons—is getting rarer. And what is lost along with this literacy is something precious: a kind of word magic, the power that certain terms possess to enchant our relations with nature and place." Macfarlane is deep in Herder country, and I cannot follow his path. There is always a common language; in Britain these days, its tones are the downwardly aspirational urban notes of "Mockney" (mock-Cockney) and Jamaican patois. There are always lovers of "word magic." The lovers' susceptibility and fluency has little to do with color, religion, or sex, and everything to do with education and opportunity, including the opportunity to take cheap train journeys to the country. But the "language of the commons"—the Herder-style pun that derives modern political rights from ancient grazing rights—is and always was the property of country people, the old stock who made the old ways and named the old places. Not interlopers and academics like Housman and Macfarlane, or people like me, latecomers to Albion's Ancient Druid Rocky Shore, the children and grandchildren of immigrants to the cities.

It is kind of Macfarlane to write that loanwords from "Chinese, Urdu, Korean, Portuguese, and Yiddish are right now being used to describe the landscapes of Britain and Ireland." But I don't believe him. I wonder whether he really believes it, either. There is a crisis of identity going on in Britain. The very word "Britain" is shedding its political meaning, and returning to a purely geographical one. The constituent nations are returning to their turfs, boggy or not, full of bitterness at the tyranny of London and the apparently endless inrush of immigrants. The English are leaving London: the great urbanization is, for them at least, over. The emigrants who return to the country talk of London as a foreign city: the body and the head are divorcing, the commons losing a common language. The English are becoming English again; the English are losing their sense of Englishness. Part of the beauty of Macfarlane's writing lies not in the drama of "discovery," but in a sense of reacquaintance, as if returning from a long journey.

Since my family shed their rags, I am now mostly white, very middle-class, and usually English enough, in a Jewish kind of way. Last summer, I stayed with friends in a decommissioned vicarage outside Oxford. At tea, we talked about Henry James against a timeless backdrop of sheep and rusting agricultural equipment. At home in my Hebraic urban fastness, I enjoy nothing more than a good book about books. But when it comes to the country, I am with Karl Marx. Urbanization liberated us from "the idiocy of rural life."

The only way to have rural life without the idiocy is to take your library with you, as Waugh did when he set up at Stinchcombe. This, metaphorically speaking, is what Robert Macfarlane has done—and what the New Nature cohort are doing. They are doing it as well as it can be done, under the circumstances. But there is no way back to the old ways, for good or bad. It is a hundred years since Yeats, having pared back his style after wintering with Pound in the Hundred-Acre Wood, wrote that "Old England is dying." Today, Ashdown is a stop on the high-speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link. As the nature writers say, the English are up a creek without a paddle.

Pamphlets of revolution
by James Piereson

For the past three and a half decades the Library of America has been turning out hardcover volumes of American letters with informative introductions and commentary by distinguished scholars. The brainchild of Edmund Wilson, the Library of America was established in 1979 as a not-for-profit publishing house to celebrate our national literature by collecting the major works of American authors and by republishing classic works that have gone out of print. The directors and editors of the enterprise have been dedicated to turning Wilson's vision into reality. Not every volume succeeds—there are some ephemeral authors in the mix and in some recent volumes one can discern a hint of political correctness in some of the editorial choices. But with nearly 300 volumes in print, the Library of America is an impressive achievement. It includes collections of the most important American novelists and poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries along with the collected works of important historical figures like George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. It has also published anthologies of American poetry, the debates on the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, the speeches of American presidents, and collections of journalistic writings on World War II, the war in Vietnam, and the Civil Rights movement.

The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate, 1764–1776 is the latest installment in this now long-running series and is published this year to mark the 250th anniversary of the Stamp Act crisis.[1] Edited by Gordon Wood, an emeritus professor of history at Brown University and the foremost living historian on the Revolutionary era, this two-volume collection brings together the writings of influential British and American pamphleteers who debated the issues of Parliamentary authority in America and the place of the colonies in the Empire during the tense decade leading up to the outbreak of the revolution. The collection of thirty-nine separate pamphlet essays is skillfully edited both to illuminate the issues and events that strained relations between the British government and the American colonists and to illustrate the back-and-forth nature of the debate as pamphleteers in London and America responded to one another in an unfolding sequence of claims and counter-claims regarding the nature and limits of British authority in the colonies. The two-volume set also contains short essays by the editor on each pamphlet, extensive bibliographical notes on the pamphlets, brief biographies of the pamphleteers, and a comprehensive chronology of the events leading up to the Declaration of Independence.

As Wood points out in his excellent introduction to the collection, the pamphlet debate broke out in 1764 and 1765, when British ministers altered long-standing imperial policy

1 *The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate, 1764–1776* (two volumes), edited by Gordon Wood; Library of America, 1,889 pages, $75.

by imposing direct taxes on the colonies to cover the expenses of the recently concluded French and Indian War and the administrative costs of maintaining British officers in the colonies. Up until that moment, the great majority of colonists regarded themselves as loyal subjects of the King and were proud to be members of the richest and most powerful empire in the world. The settled character of the American empire was turned upside down in a few short years as colonists reacted to Parliamentary measures that banned the issue of paper currency in the colonies and laid duties and taxes on imported sugar and printed paper (the Stamp Act). The colonists claimed, at least initially, that only their representative legislatures—not Parliament—had the right to lay taxes in America, since they were not and could not be represented in Parliament. The debate grew more intense as the years passed as both sides dug into their respective positions, the King and Parliament claiming that the colonies were but administrative sub-units of the Empire and thus subject to taxation and regulation by London and the colonists ultimately concluding that they could protect their liberties only by severing ties with Britain.

Volume One collects a series of pamphlets issued from 1764 to 1772, or from the end of the French and Indian War to the aftermath of the "Boston Massacre," a critical turning point in relations between Britain and the colonies when Americans began to move in earnest toward independence. The volume contains all of the most influential pamphlets of the period, including James Otis's *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1768), and Joseph Warren's *Oration* on the Boston massacre (1772), in addition to the text of Benjamin Franklin's testimony before Parliament on colonial resistance to the Stamp Act (1766).

The early pamphlets reflect a measure of ambivalence on both sides about relations between Britain and the colonies. American pamphleteers such as Otis of Massachusetts, Richard Bland of Virginia, and others both acknowledged the supremacy of Parliament while asserting at the same time that it had no legal or natural right to tax the colonists without their consent. The American authors were well versed in the natural-rights philosophy of John Locke and adeptly reprised his arguments for liberty, limited government, and representation that Whig ministers in Parliament had used in the previous century to justify Parliamentary supremacy. At the same time, pamphleteers in Britain were similarly uncertain about the colonial question, at once asserting the unlimited powers of Parliament over the colonies while also questioning whether it was wise to test those powers with new taxes and regulations. In the early years of the controversy, as these pamphlets illustrate, neither side was yet ready to accept the full implications of their arguments.

Benjamin Franklin, in his testimony before Parliament on the Stamp Act, stated that the colonists would never consent to direct taxes imposed from London and appeared to draw a distinction between "internal" taxes that were illegitimate and "external" taxes designed to regulate trade rather than to raise revenue. Franklin's testimony persuaded Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act and then to impose a new series of "external" taxes on imported goods in the belief that these would be acceptable to the Americans. Yet the Townshend duties led to still further opposition in the colonies as some pamphleteers, such as Dickinson of Pennsylvania, claimed that the new duties, while ostensibly designed to regulate trade, were in fact designed to raise revenue and were part of an overall plan to subjugate the colonies. Dickinson's "Letters" were widely read across the colonies and promoted the conspiratorial sense that the British government could not be trusted no matter what policies it might enact. The volume concludes with the influential "Boston Pamphlet" approved by a "committee of correspondence" in Boston that anticipated the Declaration of Independence by asserting the natural rights of colonists and summarizing Parliament's alleged infringements on those rights. The pamphlet quickly led to the creation of similar committees of correspondence throughout the colonies, which

proved to be important avenues of organization and communication as the movement toward independence gathered speed.

Volume Two contains twenty pamphlets on the evolving crisis issued from 1773 to 1776, roughly dating from the Boston Tea Party to the Declaration of Independence. On the radical or anti-British side, the volume contains Thomas Jefferson's *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), James Wilson's *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament* (1774), and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776); from the British side, Samuel Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775), Edmund Burke's *Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies* (1775), and Thomas Hutchinson's *Strictures upon the Declaration of the Congress at Philadelphia* (1776), the latter a spirited attack on the Declaration of Independence. These historically important documents reflect both the sophisticated theoretical level of the debate leading up to the revolution and the increasing radicalism of the leaders of both sides.

Jefferson and Wilson, as late as 1774, merely denied Parliamentary authority over the colonies but were not yet ready to call for independence and revolution. Jefferson was even ready to accept the distant authority of the King, so long as the colonies were otherwise self-governing, much as the quasi-independent states of the British Commonwealth operate today. The passage of the Coercive Acts in 1774 in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party changed the equation as figures like Jefferson and Paine now began to accuse both the King and the British government in general for harboring designs to subjugate the colonies and to reduce Americans to slavery. Writing in response to those Acts, Paine (though a recent émigré from England to America) called openly for revolution and independence.

Samuel Johnson's pamphlet, written in his entertaining style, takes a hard line against the colonists, defending the Coercive Acts and the use of all necessary force to conquer the rebels and to maintain the British Empire in America. He claimed that the English colonists gave up their right to representation in Parliament when they left for America. When he was not calling the Americans traitors, he was labeling them as frauds and hypocrites: "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?," he asked.

Among the contestants on both sides, Burke was one of the few by 1775 calling for conciliation and compromise, though by that point it was already too late to save the situation. A spokesman for the opposition in the House of Commons, Burke argued that it was impossible for the British to conquer the Americans: they were too numerous and too well educated; their territory was too remote; and they had absorbed a prejudice for liberty and self-government: "They augur misgovernment at a distance, and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze." He called for repeal of the Parliamentary acts that had produced the crisis in America and recommended that Americans be allowed to regulate their affairs as far as possible through their colonial assemblies (much as they had been allowed to do prior to the war with France). But by this time, the British government was committed to a policy more in keeping with Johnson's pamphlet than with Burke's.

Professor Wood does not tell us in his introduction or in his notes where the American pamphleteers found the ideas and images that shaped their intellectual opposition to British power, nor does he address other puzzling questions such as why a revolutionary crisis broke out over seemingly negotiable issues like taxes and import duties or how a local uprising in Boston spread so quickly across the continent. The pamphlets dispel left-wing theories that some kind of class conflict within the colonies provoked the Revolution and point instead toward a philosophical or ideological explanation of the crisis.

Some historians have identified Locke as the main source of colonial thinking and thus view the revolution as a victory for liberalism with its emphasis upon self-interest, private property, and strict limits on government. Others have put forth a more "republican" interpretation of the pamphlet debate, emphasizing virtue and community somewhat more than individualism and private property.

Bernard Bailyn, who was one of the first historians to make a close study of the pamphlets, has argued that the colonists relied upon the ideas and imagery of England's eighteenth-century "Commonwealth men." This was a group of radical Whigs led by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon and a handful of others who were active in the early decades of the century in opposition to the ministry of Sir Robert Walpole. Publishing pamphlets under the name of Cato, they opposed standing armies and an established church, held that governmental power is always a threat to liberty, and claimed that republics inevitably move through cycles from virtue to corruption to the destruction of constitutional liberties. While they had little influence in England, their pamphlets were widely read and circulated throughout the colonies in the decades leading up to the Stamp Act crisis. In formulating their opposition to British power, American pamphleteers, including Otis, Dickinson, Jefferson, Paine, and many others, drew heavily upon this intellectual inheritance in their campaign to expose corruption, conspiracies against the liberties of the people, and the subtle and not-so-subtle erosion of constitutional forms. As Bailyn has written, "More than any single group of writers they shaped the mind of the revolutionary generation." While readers may agree or disagree with these interpretations of the revolution, they will be grateful to Professor Wood for assembling the evidence that will allow them to test his ideas for themselves.

This outstanding collection of historical documents is superior in several ways to the few collections of revolutionary pamphlets published in the past. It contains virtually all of the important pamphlets on both sides of the conflict, rather than just those on the American side; it reproduces the pamphlets in full rather than in edited or abridged form; and the summaries and extensive notes on the texts contributed by the editor give the reader a good sense of the role each pamphlet played in the developing debate. *Writings from the Pamphlet Debate* is one more important contribution from the Library of America, and an important source book on the Revolution that will be used by historians and students for decades to come.

Poems

From "Medea," by Euripides

translated by Charles Martin

The audience of Athenians that poured into the Theater of Dionysus to witness the first performance of Euripides' *Medea* in 431 BC might have been wondering what aspect of Medea's complicated story the playwright would have taken as his subject. Was it her romantic infatuation with the Greek hero Jason when he journeyed with the other Argonauts into her father's kingdom in search of the Golden Fleece? Her passion led her to use the magic that enabled him to steal that treasure, and she fled with him—eloped, really—to avoid her father's wrath, killing her younger brother in the process. Was it the trick she played on the daughters of King Pelias that left the old man stewed in lifeless pieces in the cauldron that was supposed to reinvigorate him?

There was no lack of good theatrical material in Medea's story, but, from that moment when the Nurse begins her prologue, the audience would have realized that Medea was in Corinth, where her husband Jason has abandoned her and their two sons for a far more advantageous match with the daughter of the Corinthian King Creon. Medea is in a terrible state, the Nurse tells us, but no less dangerous for that. She has been betrayed and there is no telling what she is capable of: she may kill Creon and his daughter. She may even harm her own children. The Tutor of those children appears onstage to confirm that they are in danger from another source: he has just overheard Creon telling of how he will send the children and their mother into immediate exile. In subsequent scenes, Medea must first counter the immediate threat from Creon and then advance her own rapidly developing plan for revenge against Jason by murdering Creon and his daughter, then murdering her own children, and finally escaping to Athens.

All of this happens in Euripides' play with breakneck speed. When the Nurse first appears onstage, she attempts to run time backwards: if only, she says . . . if only the Argonauts hadn't gone sailing off to Colchis; if only the pines that their ship had been built with had remained in place on Mount Pelion; if only King Pelias hadn't commanded the Argonauts to go on their voyage, Medea would have had nothing to do with Jason and would not be here in Corinth now.

But time goes only in one direction, into a future that opens up swiftly and inevitably into a place of great horror. We can do nothing to stop it. Medea tricks her husband into using their children as the unwitting delivery system for poisoned gifts that will destroy the Corinthian princess and her father. They set out on their fatal mission. We wait with Medea onstage for the appearance of a messenger from the house of Creon. He arrives breathless, for he has been running.

The messenger's speech

When your two boys and husband had appeared
At the bride's house and entered, those of us who
Had suffered from your griefs were greatly cheered:
From ear to ear, the welcome news that you
Had settled amicably with your spouse
Went buzzing through the servants of the house.
One kissed the children's hands in his elation,
Another, their golden curls. I shared in their joys
And followed the swelling throng in celebration
Into the women's quarters with your boys.
The mistress we now honor in your place
Wasn't aware your sons were there at first—
Her gaze was fixed on her new husband's face,
And the boys' approach took her by surprise.
Soon as she noticed them, she veiled her eyes
And turned away her pale cheek in disgust.
Your husband, though, attempted to assuage
Her anger, telling her, "You mustn't be
An enemy of those who are dear to me;
Turn back to us again, without your rage,
Let those I call my friends be yours as well;
They bring you gifts, which I would have you take—
Then plead with Creon so he won't expel
The children from this land—for your husband's sake!"
As soon as she had seen the elegant
Finery they offered, all resistance
Collapsed, and she gave Jason her consent.
He and the boys had traveled no great distance
From the bride's house, when she put on the gown,
And on her golden curls set the gold crown,
As pleased as any girl by a new bonnet.
She held a mirror up before her hair,
Smiled at the lifeless image glimpsed within it,
Then lifted herself lightly from her chair
And elegantly danced about her suite,
Rapt in her gifts, admiring them
And how they suited her: her pale white feet
Capering as she checked her swirling hem.
Then came a truly horrifying sight:
Her color changed, she staggered left and right
Stumbling until she found her seat once more,

Managing, barely, to avoid the floor!
One of her slaves, perhaps in the belief
That she had either been possessed by Pan
Or by another god, raised a festive cry—
Until she saw the white foam on her lips,
And the tormented madness in her eye,
Her bloodless skin—the hymn that she began
Trailed off and turned into a wail of grief.
At once a servant ran to find her father
Back in his chambers, as yet unaware
Of what had just been happening—another
Went searching for the husband, now outside,
To tell him what had happened to his bride;
Others were running madly everywhere.
In the time in which a rapid sprinter runs
The second leg of a two hundred yard dash,
The princess became conscious once again.
Her eyes sprang open and she groaned in pain,
For grief assailed her from two sources now,
As suddenly a dreadful stream of flame
Erupted from the garland on her brow,
While the woven robe, the gift of your two sons,
Was eating through the wretched woman's flesh.
Then leaping from her chair, she fled, on fire,
Tossing her hair now one way, now another,
Trying to shake the garland from her head,
But the golden band shook off *her* instead,
And her exertions made the flames leap higher!
Disaster claimed her. She crumpled to the floor,
Unrecognizable but to a father:
Her eyes no longer lovely, as before,
That face of hers no longer beautiful.
Fiery blood dripped from her ruined crown,
And from her white bones the scorched flesh fell
Like resin from a pine torch dripping down
All burned off by the poisons you'd employed.
No one could bear to see the girl destroyed,
Yet none was brave enough to intervene,
So well had we all learned from what we'd seen.
But when her father, who had not yet heard
Of the calamity that had occurred,
Came in and stumbled on her without warning,
He clasped her body in a last embrace,

And as he kissed her desolated face,
Maddened by grief, cried out these words of mourning:
"O my unlucky darling, my poor dear,
Which of the gods has treated you this way,
Has shamed you like this on your wedding day?
I am bereft, a walking sepulcher!
O daughter, daughter, let me die with you!"
But when his lamentation had at last
Ended and the king attempted to
Lift his aged body to his feet once more,
He found himself stuck to the gown, held fast
By the subtle stuff that drew him toward the floor,
Clinging to him as ivy clings to bay.
He struggled, but he couldn't get away:
She held him and prevented him from rising,
And if he struggled with her, it would flense
The ancient flesh from his unyielding bones.
That was enough. Enough to say that he
Died, overwhelmed by his catastrophe.
Who would not weep? They lie there side by side
In death, an agèd father, a young bride.
I will say nothing of *your* likely fate,
But soon enough, you'll get your recompense.
I've often thought that life is just a show
Of shadows, and I wouldn't hesitate
To say that those most sure of what they know,
Whose polished speeches reek of confidence,
Are the more fools to think themselves clever!
Turns from Medea to address the audience directly:
No mortal may attain to a blessèd state:
If wealth pours in, you're truly fortunate,
You're lucky in your life. But blessèd? Never.
Exit Messenger from stage right.

Letter from London

Leaping to the Left

by Jeremy Black

The cause that I and a handful of friends represent is this morning, apparently, going down to ruin, but I think we ought to take heart of courage from the fact that after 2,000 years of war and strife, at least, even those who enter upon this colossal struggle have to admit that in the end force has not settled, and cannot and will not settle anything. I hope that out of this terrible calamity there will arise a real spirit, a spirit that will compel people to give up reliance on force, and that perhaps this time humanity will learn the lesson and refuse in the future to put its trust in poison gas, in the massacre of little children and universal slaughter.

Sounds good? Which American left-winger would you attribute this to? Or maybe it is Jeremy Corbyn, the new leader of Britain's major opposition party, the Labour Party? Well, no: it is George Lansbury, Corbyn's predecessor as leader from 1931 to 1935. A prominent socialist, Lansbury was a pacifist who resigned rather than support sanctions against Italy after Mussolini invaded Abyssinia/Ethiopia in 1935. Lansbury is quoted in 1939 speaking in the House of Commons in opposition to the outbreak of war with Germany, a war in which gas was indeed used by Germany to massacre "little children" and millions of others, while, albeit on a far smaller scale, Mussolini's forces had made extensive use of gas attacks during the invasion of Abyssinia. History, indeed, provides one way to consider today Corbyn and the Left in America and Britain, not least in their failure to act firmly in 2013 against that modern employer of gas attacks on civilians, Bashar al-Assad, as well as his predecessor in gas attacks, Saddam Hussein.

"They do it funny out there." We do, yes, but developments abroad can offer a reality check on what might happen at home. And so with the election in September 2015 of Jeremy Corbyn, the hard-Left candidate to lead Britain's Labour Party, an election that tells us about the threats posed in the United States by changes in the Democratic Party, including the way it has lurched to the Left. Barack Obama would have been considered an extraordinary leader for the Democratic party in the 1900s or early 2000s, let alone a highly improbable president. Well, highly improbable he may remain, and unbiased historians are likely to judge him a baleful leader stronger on phrases than performance, but he is president, albeit with a smaller majority the second time aroud (51.1 percent). Moreover, he defeated more experienced candidates.

Does the situation in Britain matter, however, to you or me? I, as a British Conservative, should surely be celebrating what makes Labour unelectable and that should give comfort to Americans concerned about political developments in one of their least unreliable allies. Not quite—both because the lurch to the Left portends all sorts of problems and also because of what is termed the Overton window. This helpful concept, a term derived from Joseph P. Overton, an American commentator, analyzes the range of ideas the public will accept. Overton's window delineated the range of policies considered politically accept-

able in the current climate of public opinion, which a politician can recommend without being considered too extreme to gain, or keep, public office.

In Britain, this range has definitely moved leftward this year and there is a danger that the same will continue to happen in the United States as it has done over the last quarter-century. An America in which much of the electorate can take Bernie Sanders seriously becomes one in which others in the electorate must take him seriously. The Democrats' failure to produce viable politics makes their lurch to the Left not laughable but an exercise in self-indulgence that is dangerous to everyone else.

With Corbyn, it is his past, his present, and his instincts that each cause most disquiet for the future. His past offers clear warnings. This is a politician who, as an adult, not an adolescent, has consistently been close to political extremists and has taken a particularly questionable stance on the Middle East. His public support for Hamas and Hezbollah is of a part with that, repeatedly, for the IRA, another terrorist group. There were, of course, many prominent Democrats who followed the last, but, until the recent "reaching out" (is language not truly fantastic?) to Iran, Middle Eastern extremists have been held at arm's length in the United States. But for how much longer? It is instructive that Corbyn and his friend and Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell, have a consistent track record in voting against anti-terror legislation, despite the real and continuing threat of terror attacks on Britain and its allies. The extent of terrorist attempts in Europe makes this a troubling problem. Corbyn's hostility towards a war on terror raises fundamental questions about his eloquent claims to love the country. Moreover, this point underlines the tension between the patriotism of much of the Labour Party during the Cold War and the reality of a powerful strand with very different values and objectives.

Corbyn's present is also replete with the reality and symbolism of the politics of sectarianism—one, moreover, that involves distaste for the values of the vast bulk of the British nation, indeed for what constitutes the nation. It is not therefore surprising that Corbyn's present symbolism is scarcely that of the nation, but, rather, a hodgepodge of other values, each characterized by a left-wing internationalism. Having been elected, his first act—and one in the full blaze of publicity—was to attend a refugee protest rally in Parliament Square where he sang "The Red Flag," a socialist anthem, and made it clear that he would vote against bombing ISIS in Syria, thus breaking with the attitude of much of his Party. Later that day, Corbyn sang "The Red Flag" for a second time. He continued by attending the national service of thanksgiving for the Battle of Britain, the traumatic and brave battle against German air assault in 1940, and conspicuously failed there to sing the National Anthem. That Corbyn opposes NATO, clearly dislikes the United States, is hostile to Israel, and is friendly to Russia is all of a piece.

Since becoming leader, he has gone on record as stating that he would never use Britain's nuclear weapons. This both destroys the deterrent nature of these weapons and lessens the value of Britain as an ally. Corbyn's stance, like that of President Obama and would-be Presidents Clinton and Sanders, is all about helping themselves and other activists feel good about themselves and imagining the world accordingly, but the remainder of the world will not comply with such fantasies. Indeed, the failure of understanding revealed by their views of Russia and the Middle East poses serious dangers.

There have also been persistent questions as to whether Corbyn is anti-Semitic: his hostility to Israel and friendship with its enemies certainly gives rise to doubt. Corbyn does not appear to consider himself anti-Semitic, but many commentators lack this confidence and are ready to express their doubts.

The election of a politician praised by left-wingers, including the Communist-backed *Morning Star*, Hamas websites, Syriza, and Russian commentators, is notable, and even more so because, in a contest among four candidates and with much prior warning about his views, Corbyn still received 59.5 percent of

the vote on the first ballot. This election then represents a major lurch to the Left, one also reflecting a defiant contempt for an electorate that recently rejected Labour under a less extreme left-wing leader, Ed Miliband, and, instead, elected a Conservative government. It is as if the voters made a mistake and require correction, akin to those on the Left who publicly celebrated the death of Margaret Thatcher. Supporting and expressing such hitherto extreme views, Corbyn moves public debate in a much more left-wing direction. He is the Marxist to Miliband's Marxisant fancy.

What does Corbyn have to suggest about American politics? First, and most clearly, there is the contempt for the electorate and the failure to engage with the large number of views that a diverse society will have. There is also the failure to recognize that the national constitution and tradition, including respect for the law and for legal rights, are important in providing and protecting coherence in liberty and liberty in coherence. This is true of both Britain and the United States, but it is an element that the internationalism of the Left finds difficult to accept. So also with their sense that the traditions of the past are somehow artifices that can be discarded. The argument of present necessity, obviously as interpreted by the Left, serves to make both Constitution and law malleable and, thereby, to threaten rights, both individual and public.

As troubling in the present world is an almost reflective suspicion, on the part of the Left, of the military and security services. This is ironic as, in other respects, the automatic prejudice on the Left is to spend more on state officials, hire more, and expand their powers. This suspicion is an element that gives comfort to a range of hostile and dangerous forces. Corbyn makes his hostility to the nuclear deterrent and to the struggle with terrorist networks readily apparent, and it is unclear that the situation is totally different on the Democratic Left in the United States.

More particularly, there is an almost reflexive set of values that are deeply problematic. In answer to Corbyn, Sanders, and their ilk, it is well worth considering what Churchill said in the Commons on the same day that Lansbury delivered his opinion. Churchill's words are still resonant today, and they say much to the major effort the United States and Britain have made and, we must hope, will continue to make:

> This is not a question of fighting for Danzig [Gdansk] or fighting for Poland. We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny and in defence of all that is most sacred to man. This is no war for domination or imperial aggrandisement or material gain; no war to shut any country out of its sunlight and means of progress. It is a war, viewed in its inherent quality, to establish on impregnable rocks, the rights of the individual, and it is a war to establish and revive the stature of man.

The struggle continues and will always continue as long as humans survive. May we, for our generation, be as worthy as our forebears.

Reflections

A lesson in Western Civ

by Mark Bauerlein

On my desk the book is open to page nine, where it says, "I stand at the window of a railway carriage which is traveling uniformly, and drop a stone on the embankment, without throwing it." Einstein is speaking here, addressing laymen in the 1920 translation of his handy primer *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. To him on the train, the stone falls in a straight line, while a pedestrian outside sees it trace a parabola. This simple act shows that motion is relative to the position of the viewer. So begins the presentation of the greatest breakthrough in modern physics, not with a formula, but a scenario. And it's not a one-time event in the book. Einstein returns to it again and again, adding new elements with each step of the demonstration: a raven flying by, a man walking through the railway car, not sitting down. He really wants you to pretend you are there in the carriage and to see what is actually happening. Yes, we have citations of "Galilean co-ordinate systems" and Lorentz on "electrodynamical and optical phenomena" that require scientific reason, but we also have a dramatic scene that tests the imagination.

My English department colleagues love this kind of illustration. It shows how important the humanities are to the frontiers of science, not to mention the progress of society. If that seems like a stretch, a desperate claim of relevance, consider what they have witnessed in just the last few years that might provoke it:

Enrollment in the humanities has dropped at Stanford, Harvard, the University of Virginia, and other top institutions (a 2013 *New York Times* story bore the headline "As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry," while an insidehighered.com story on English majors at the University of Maryland and elsewhere was titled "Major Exodus"). Funding has shrunk, as summarized by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences: "this report shows a field being squeezed on several sides, with federal funding, state support for higher education, and charitable giving to the humanities all flagging since 2007." Cuts have been made to foreign language programs at SUNY Albany, Louisiana State University, the University of Nevada, Reno, the University of Southern California, Emory, and elsewhere. State legislators, Democrat and Republican, have proposed substituting coding for foreign languages in high school graduation requirements. Literary works have been diminished while there has been an increase in "informational texts" on the NAEP ("Nation's Report Card") reading exam (which for twelfth-graders is 70 percent informational) and Common Core English Language Arts Standards, which call for "special emphasis on informational texts." In 2012 only 47 percent of adults read a work of literature of any kind and any length in their leisure time (in 1982, the rate was 57 percent), while only 55 percent read any book at all (in 1992, the rate was 61 percent).

At the same time that humanities interests ebb, colleagues across the quad in STEM fields seem to have the whole nation behind them. A few months after taking office in early 2009, President Obama conceived the Educate to Innovate initiative, which has attracted more than

$1 billion in public-private partnerships. While funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities has seen its budget (in inflation-adjusted dollars) collapse from a high of $390 million in 1979 to $146 million in 2014, at the White House National Science Fair this year the President announced a $90 million commitment to but one element in the program, an effort to maintain STEM "opportunities" for under-represented kids, plus a $25 million Department of Education project to produce media that "will engage children in the world of science." If we compare science/engineering support to humanities support in higher education alone, expenditures on the latter are microscopic, a mere 0.55 percent of science expenditures.

Throughout the 1980s when I was a graduate student and lecturer, and well into the '90s when I was an assistant and associate professor, I never heard a word about dwindling resources and popularity. True, business had become the most popular field in higher education by the mid-1980s, and English, foreign languages, philosophy, and religion enrollments took a dive in the 1970s. But those fields held steady through the '80s, and the most populated one was still English, a perennial fixture if only because freshmen writing requirements sent nearly every just-matriculated student into English courses for one or two semesters. Also, minors and certificates in creative writing and journalism helped maintain enrollments in traditional literature courses, along with the spread of double majors starting in the '90s.

Prestige, too, was solid back then. When I started my professorship at Emory, it would have been hard for any university to claim first-tier status if it did not have an impressive English department. The very fact that the English syllabus was one of the central disputes of the Culture Wars of that era—recall how many literature professors were cited in the pages of this magazine—demonstrated how important we were. Those of us coming up at the time, fired with the seriousness of humanistic study and hoping to enter the pages of *New Literary History* and seminars at the School of Criticism & Theory, could not have anticipated the blows to come, disparagements ranging from the Sokal hoax to the elimination of General Education requirements in literature. The harbingers of decay were clear, of course, but we could ignore or dismiss William Bennett's 1984 NEH report *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* as long as classes were full and internal debate over Wallace Stevens and literary theory remained heated. After all, around the same time (February 1986), *The New York Times Magazine* had profiled the Yale deconstructors in high, if devilish terms—"The group is unquestionably brilliant"—adding lustrous full-page photos that teaching assistants on the fourth floor at UCLA passed around with silent hopes of their own future fame.

This is why my colleagues reacted so feebly to the trend. We were singularly unfitted to answer it. Our training was all about talking to one another, not to outsiders. At the important thresholds of career we had to convince specialists of our merit. Hiring committees, tenure reviewers, journal and press editors had to examine our writing and speech and assent. Survival in the pipeline demanded it. If two or three professors in faraway places wrote letters of faint praise or mild criticism at tenure time, your department might turn you down and close your academic future. This was our audience, the esteemed experts in the subfield, not students, administrators, parents, journalists, and the public.

Furthermore, the idiom of literary criticism had become exceedingly coded and specialized during the High Theory years. If you were an interested layman in 1955, you might pick up a scholarly quarterly and absorb the essays without too much confusion. The entries may have been drily academic, but the language was more or less familiar. Pick up a copy of *Critical Inquiry* or *October* in 1990, however, and the educated man on the street couldn't get through one paragraph without the old Elvis line popping into his head: "I don' know what the hell y'er talking about." How could we justify ourselves to the public when the discipline forced us into a lingo of *aporia*, *supplement*, *power/knowledge*, *hybridity*, *subaltern*, and *queer*?

The sciences spoke a technical language making many of their clinical studies unreadable,

of course, but they had a ready translation: "I'm studying correlations between exposure to this toxin and rates of lung disease." When literary scholars said, "I'm working on a corrected edition of Donne's poems" or "I'm trying to explain what *Moby-Dick* really means," people accepted the projects as worthwhile. But after critical theory "problematized" texts and meanings, and then added political and "identity" themes that were more appropriate to social sciences, the justifications fell flat. The failing affected not only tenured radicals and adversarial-culture types, who could hardly stoop to justifying themselves to groups they despised. It also disabled anybody who had undergone a formation after 1975.

Our failure struck me acutely when I attended my nephew's first-day-of-medical-school ceremony at Penn a few years ago. We sat in the auditorium while the inductees waited their turns to climb the stage and receive their white coats and stethoscopes. The guests were joyous. For the students, it was a first step, but for the parents a final triumph. I couldn't help but wonder how they would feel if their children were entering graduate school in Art History, English, or French. The dean and two professors took turns outlining the kind of research the students would participate in during their training. One project involved a just-signed agreement with Novartis to experiment with removing cells from cancer patients and re-engineering them so that they could be injected into tumors to attack them. What would happen if Penn asked humanities professors to present their most cutting-edge work to these same parents? The humanities formation at Penn closest to medical matters that I found is The Project on Bioethics, Sexuality, and Gender Identity, whose mission statement begins:

> Inspired by scholastic advancements in the Humanities on matters related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) studies, whereby a distinct field of queer studies has been created, this project aspires to take the next step for the benefit of LGBTQI persons in the medical world by marrying queer scholarship with bioethics studies and medical policy.

Millions of parents in America, liberal and conservative, dream about their children going to medical school. How many delight at the thought of children becoming queer theorists? The liberals among them certainly profess support of gender matters, but when it comes to their own kids, they are just as *haut bourgeois* as the country-club Republicans they detest.

Theory was never going to work. After having won the Bad Writing Contest, Judith Butler wrote an op-ed in *The New York Times* that invoked the Frankfurt School point that "nefarious ideologies" such as slavery can become embedded in common sense and ordinary language. Hence it takes a complex counter-language to disrupt them and "point the way to a more socially just world." But the comparison of 1850s abolitionists to 1990s professors was patently ridiculous, and few people could tie any social reform to Butler's hokum prose, packed as it was with addled phrases such as "a heterosexual matrix for conceptualizing gender and desire" (from the preface to *Gender Trouble*). Butler's style provoked even the solemnly liberal Martha Nussbaum to complain in a notorious profile in *The New Republic* (February 1999) of an "air of in-group knowingness" that, in effect, frustrates the very cause of social justice.

Wiser humanities professors have tried other tactics than direct appeals to what they actually say and do. Ironically, these justifications follow the tack of the accountability movement in education led mostly by conservative reformers in that they focus on outcomes related to worldly affairs beyond the classroom. They are:

The critical thinking advantage—In spotlighting "otherness," racial and sexual bias, and multicultural perspectives, the humanities lay special claim to correct un-critical mindsets.

The sensitivity advantage—Because they focus on the breadth of human experience from diverse perspectives, not on wealth and success or techniques and logistics, the humanities instill sensitivity and tolerance better than other fields do.

The career-readiness advantage—Twenty-first-century skills include creativity, innovation, media savvy, diversity-friendly attitudes, and global awareness, and so the humanities are, in fact, wonderful preparation for the workplace.

These benefits follow from liberal and neoliberal assumptions, but in spite of that they have a strangely abstract character. They emphasize mental skills and dispositions, not history and culture. The dean of arts and humanities at Harvard summarizes them well: "to develop habits of mind, to develop a sense of how to reason rigorously, how to express ideas in a compelling way." Habits and how-to are the goal, not the acquisition of learning. Nicholas Kristof echoes a common line when, after regretting that parents and students are "retreating from the humanities," he states, "literature nurtures a richer emotional intelligence." A type of aptitude counts more than a body of knowledge.

What strikes someone my age about this focus is how much it differs from the Culture Wars. Back then, the controversy was precisely about content—what went on the syllabus and whether Western Civ should be required. A famous photograph of Butler Library at Columbia University during those days neatly captures the core dispute. Across the frieze are written the names Homer and Herodotus, Cicero and Vergil, but a banner sways above them with Sappho, Marie de France, Christine de Pizan, Juana Ines de la Cruz, Brontë, Dickinson, and Woolf in similarly august script. (Women's Studies at Columbia maintains the photo on its web page.) The purpose of the progressive humanities was to acquaint young Americans with other traditions of greatness made up of not–Dead White Male writers and artists. That would affirm the minority and female students in class and displace Eurocentrism and American Exceptionalism.

People don't talk that way anymore, apart from the occasional pacifying gesture to group-identity advocates. Perhaps the professors and administrators now believe that a humanistic argument for multicultural *knowledge* would be no more effective than was the defense of Western Civ back in 1989. Or maybe they know, but don't admit, that if the debate stuck to content, Western Civ would prevail and remain the core of the curriculum. Or, maybe they realize that knocking Hawthorne's racism won't attract more student enrollments, not to mention alumni dollars and public funding.

The mental-skills framework dispels all those prickly cultural disputes and still upholds the special value of the disciplines. To people who advance it, the framework nicely satisfies both sides, a faculty that clings to identity- and theory-oriented work and a public that wants proficient graduates. The humanities used to matter because they passed down the best that has been thought and said. Now, they matter because they teach youths to think right and write well.

It's a hopeless model. The problems are obvious. The critical thinking claim doesn't work because humanities professors apply it unevenly. They are adept at critiquing bourgeois norms and common sense, but resistant when it comes to progressive aims and academic mindsets. Added to that, the STEM fields have a rival claim: "We teach critical thinking, too—it's called the 'scientific method.'"

The sensitivity claim falls for the simple reason that humanities professors, to say the least, come off as no more sensitive and tolerant than any other profession. Here, too, STEM has a decisive reply: "Has any force brought greater good to humanity than science and technology?"

The workforce readiness claim is more complicated. It is certainly true that science, business, law, media, education, and even manufacturing prize good readers and writers, as surveys such as the Skills Gap reports show. USC's English department says on its web site that Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens believes that the study of poetry is "the best undergraduate preparation for a legal career." But the connection between a humanities major and specific workplaces is so buffered and uncertain that it carries little weight. Other fields are more direct. Civil engineering majors do civil engineering when they graduate. Philosophy majors don't do philosophy (unless they go to grad school). Psychology majors become psychologists. English majors don't become Englishists.

So what, then, is left? The fact that most humanities professors don't know the answer to that question shows just how much the disciplines have lost their way. What is left is the most important and effective justification of all, the materials themselves. Yes, we are back to the best that has been thought and said—Antigone

agonizing over her brother's body, Harry Lime on the Ferris wheel, the last line of "A narrow fellow in the grass," the master-slave dialectic, and so on. My colleagues have lost faith in those touchstones either because it is *mal pensant* not to or because their tastes have slipped and their learning has narrowed. But if at a reception for new grad students and their families an art historian projected "Washington Crossing the Delaware" onto a screen and began a lively, informed analysis—no jargon or theory, no politics, only close appreciation of the object—the parents would be just as enthralled as the students. If a sophomore on vacation told Mom and Dad she plans to major in French, they would sigh, but if she waxes well on the Court of Louis XIV and recites with a perfect accent ten lines from *La Jeune Parque*, they'll respect her.

Why my colleagues across the country have no confidence in what they've got is beyond me, and why they think that critical thinking or identity-based advertisements of their labors will entice others is a mystery. There was a petulant essay in *Harper's* a few years back entitled "Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School," which complained about the quantification and monetization of education before praising the humanizing work of the humanities. But when it began by announcing, "the whole point of reading is to force us into an encounter with the other," I want to ask the author Mark Slouka, "Do you really think that this conception will draw more students?" His ideal instructor is a public high school teacher who (in his own words) aims "to dislocate the complacent mind" through examples such as Santa Claus and lying. "Having to treat Santa Claus as a systemic lie," the teacher says, "even if we can argue for its necessity, troubles a lot of them." Will the experience of "trouble" bring them back for more?

Our sole advantage is inspiration. Appeals to success and career, goodness and empathy don't work. Only the spark of desire will. We have the materials—not Stephen King, an essay on "torture porn," or the video game *The Sims*, which the teacher uses and Slouka approves of, and not Harry Potter, which the Chair of English at Stanford advocates in a story on declining enrollments there, but Achilles and Hector, Madame Butterfly—and we should esteem and enjoy them enough to make students think we have treasure to impart. The turn to youth culture products is cast as a logical tactic of relevance, "meeting kids where they are" (as the ed school saying goes), but in truth it is a mark of failure. Professors are neither learned nor charismatic enough to make Wordsworth's lyric affect their pupils, and so they select youth culture artifacts that already affect them, then give them a critical spin and compliment themselves for doing so.

We don't have a humanities crisis. We have a personnel problem. Political correctness has turned humanities teachers into scolds. Critical thinking has killed joy and inspiration. Theory has replaced honor and love and faith with "the other" and "gender identity." This is not an ideological collapse. It's a professional condition. Ambitious young teachers are not trained to enthrall nineteen-year-olds. They are trained to impress fifty-year-old tenured professors. If the humanities are to survive as anything more than a boutique operation in a corner of the campus, they need to switch.

Einstein's railway carriage is, indeed, a worthy model, but not in the way my colleagues think. His scenario demonstrates the importance of imagination to scientific reasoning, yes, but it's not an endorsement of the humanities contra the sciences. It's an example of how to make the presentation of an abstract subject sharp and entertaining. The sciences may need more of it, but so do the humanities. I have attended hundreds of conferences and lectures over the years, and the typical presenter was uptight, plodding, scripted, and humorless (save for an occasional joke about dumb students, administrators, and conservatives). When I took my turn at the podium, I slipped into the same tiresome character. The greatness and beauty, wit and profundity of our subject matter sank into a quicksand of professional exertion. If we don't remove the theoretical and political filter from the classroom, if we don't allow nineteen-year-olds an initial rapture, if we don't help great works speak for themselves and show American teens a richer, more intelligent, and more tasteful universe than the youth culture they inhabit, the slide will continue.

Theater

Love fools

by Kyle Smith

One would have thought that one of the few benefits to deafness was that it would tend to limit one's exposure to rock musicals. "You've got two tickets to 'Rent,' have you? Can't make it, I'm afraid. Deaf as a post, don't you know. Musical appreciation diminished in proportion. Send my regrets to those tatterdemalion hermaphrodites and their dancing hypodermic needles, will you? I'll be home with a good book. No, I don't want the bloody T-shirt they sell in the lobby."

Comes 2015, the era of strenuously achieved, or at least attempted, "inclusion" and . . . there's a musical for the deaf on Broadway. It is *Spring Awakening* (the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, through January 24), a revival of the richly praised 2006 Broadway show that was based on a German play by Franz Wedekind set in 1891 and first performed in 1906. The piece this time is performed in two languages: English and American Sign Language, with the cast divided between those possessed of hearing and those bereft of it.

Never for a moment is this feature anything other than irredeemably irritating. It's a gimmick founded on the assumption—no doubt correct!—that the audience's compassion for the hearing-denied will overrule or belabor into submission its instinct that theater is artificial enough without the cast members either frantically echoing their own lines in sign language or, in the case of the deaf performers, being trailed around by spectral doppelgängers who speak their parts for them while lurking in the shadows. All of this gesticulating and ventriloquism, not to mention the actress who randomly rolls in and out of the scenery in a wheelchair, would be arson-inducingly distracting if the show itself were *Oklahoma!* But *Oklahoma!* it is not.

Since the deaf still can't, generous intentions aside, actually hear music, providing the lyrics and dialogue in sign language (or, at times, projecting them on screens) seems simply an exercise in self-gratification for the tirelessly self-congratulatory. The choice is unintentionally apposite because the show is about masturbation.

Oh, not just masturbation. There's also abortion and sadomasochism—you know, the vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry of progressive sexual politics. It is very like a degenerate to blame his peccadilloes on the normal folk around him, so by the time we learn that the adorable young naïf Wendla (performed by the deaf actress Sandra Mae Frank, a Gallaudet University graduate making her Broadway debut, with her sterling voice provided by Katie Boeck, trailing behind her on stage) likes to be beaten on the upper thighs with a switch, we realize that this is of course all the fault of her stern mother for being derelict in her sex-education duties.

Wendla, who is so benighted on the details of human biology that she thinks babies can arrive only when a *married* man and woman fully express their love (her mother's definition of sex), is a teen who catches the eye of the kindly student Melchior (a likable Austin P. McKenzie, also making his Broadway debut).

Melchior and his friend Moritz (still another Broadway newcomer, the deaf actor Daniel N. Durant, with his voice supplied by Alex Boniello), who is flailing academically, are each a walking gusher of hormones whose exacting Latin lessons at their all-boys school contrast with the conjugating they wish they were doing with the local girls after class. Naturally, the only non-anguished member of the ensemble is a deliriously gay student who is allowed most of the few moments of comedy. The others are either haunted, repressed youths whose sexuality is being dangerously smothered or members of the tyrannically repressive Lutheran regime of adults (among those playing several roles are Camryn Manheim, who appeared on ABC's *The Practice* and CBS's *Ghost Whisperer*, and the deaf actress Marlee Matlin, who won an Oscar for the 1986 film *Children of a Lesser God*). In case the point is lost, the adults are forever glowering and demanding, practically mortared into their starchy clothing, while the kids frolic about in saucy, loose-fitting clothing as they indulge in group masturbation or make out on hay bales.

While doing so, they frequently and alarmingly burst into song; the music is by Duncan Sheik, who came up with a hit in 1996 with the brilliant rock single "Barely Breathing." That, it turned out, was all he had: over the next thirteen years, Sheik delivered five more rock albums, none of them containing a single song that anyone can remember. Rather than being a launching pad for great songwriters, musical theater these days increasingly looks like a safe haven or New Deal–style full-employment catch basin for rock composers who can't write hits. If there's lots of dancing and cute kids and splashy lighting, the reasoning goes, why get hung up on the quality of the music? Really, for the purposes of staging, it just has to be *loud*. Everything in *Spring Awakening* sounds like the not-hit portions of an album, the songs that fans listen to once, out of politeness. They're delivered enthusiastically but there is nothing catchy about any of them, and the lyrics by Steven Sater, who also wrote the book, are merely emphatic statements of lust or despair or frustration: "You're F—ed" is the title of the peppy number Melchior sings when school authorities catch him in a trap. It sounds like a rough draft of a rock song, and yet it's one of the better tunes in the show. As for the rest, if a band were playing any of them in a tavern, you'd pick up your drink, delicately move away from the speakers and continue your conversation. Funnily enough, Duncan Sheik turns out to be the ideal man to write music for those who can't hear.

Two non-musical plays are at the moment cross-examining the obverse of spring awakening. Overlooking the merry-tragic flow of vernal sap, Drs. Harold Pinter and Sam Shepard are placing EKGs to measure the more sclerotic surges of middle-aged lust and sexual jealousy in revivals of *Old Times* and *Fool for Love*.

The resemblance between the plays is striking. Each features in its lead role a youthful-looking but fiftyish movie star (Clive Owen, fifty-two; Sam Rockwell, forty-seven this month) who never quite became an A-lister. In each, the commencement of festivities is announced by an uncanny and unsettling musical cue delivered with a basso profundo ordinarily associated with, say, an Apollo liftoff or a depth charge being set off between the spleen and the transverse colon. Each production's lights then switch on dramatically to reveal three actors lounging about the set while indulging an uncomfortably lingering silence, and in each case the trio is gradually revealed to be a couple with a tortured history and a mysterious third party whose relation to the other two will not fully be mapped until nearly the end, which in each play arrives in just a bit more than sixty minutes of a single twitchy and spiteful act—during which a bottle of liquor (brandy, tequila) gets drained.

Of the two, 1983's *Fool for Love*, marking its Broadway premiere in a production directed by Daniel Aukin (the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre), is, despite a stroke of the self-consciously European and surreal, much the more approachable piece. Its underlying warmth is perhaps its most salient distinction from *Old Times*'s typically Pinteresque peregrination through the realm of the frosty and nasty.

The single set is a dingy motel "on the edge of the Mojave desert," as the program advises.

A cowboy named Eddie (Rockwell) tells his girlfriend May (Nina Arianda, a slinky young thing who made a splash in 2011's *Venus in Fur*, for which she captured a Tony) that he has driven 2,400 miles out of his way to see her, and yet she can't escape him quickly enough. Or so she says, making vague allusions to a date with another fellow who may or may not exist. An early indication that she is lying about her devotion to Eddie is that, after he suddenly departs, she rushes to pack a suitcase and is preparing to bolt out the door in his wake when she instead espies him returning, ditches the suitcase, and flops on the bed in a pose of studied insouciance.

Throughout all of this, a gray personage billed only as the Old Man (Gordon Joseph Weiss) sits quietly in the corner in an arm chair, not moving. He isn't really there—that's Shepard's most brilliant or perhap most cynical stroke, the European touch, the choice that stamps *Fool for Love* as theater rather than an excerpt from a novel or an episode of a highbrow soap opera. And yet the Old Man will, over the course of the evening (if seventy-five minutes can be so termed), have much to say to the other two, who wouldn't be here without him.

Eddie and May are locked in one of those working-class can't-live-with-you/can't-live-without-you relationships we hear of from troubadours of the country and the western, and (just as is the case in *Old Times*) there is a strong suggestion that their path together is a wobbly, drunken circle. As toxic and cursed as their love is, however, the play does at least live up to its title, to a degree. At the center of this cactus there is something sweet, if irretrievable. One wishes Eddie and May could stop the wounding and the wailing and find some peace together.

Instead, each's favorite gambit is to interrogate the other over alleged infidelities: the unseen presence in Eddie's life is "the Countess" (surely a find in the metropolitan Mojave region), who periodically is seen by the cast (but not the audience) in the motel parking lot, where she expresses her disapproval of Eddie's return to May by attacking his truck outside. May, meanwhile, shrugs off her dressing gown and dons a flaming red dress in preparation for her expected evening rendezvous with a maintenance worker called Martin (Tom Pelphrey). Eddie figures things "can't be very serious" between them because she describes him as "the man who's coming over here." "If you called him a 'guy' I'd be worried about it but since you called him a 'man' you give yourself away," Eddie notes.

Such piquant observation, not the somewhat ungainly plays for surrealism, represent Shepard's most valuable contribution to the theater, and must be why the verbally agile Rockwell was attracted to the part. The actor, known for his excellent work in such films as *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and *The Way Way Back*, as well as the 2010 Broadway production of Martin McDonagh's play *A Behanding in Spokane*, expertly navigates his part, now arrogant, now tender, always shrewd. Rockwell is at his finest—gregarious, hilarious, with a softly sheathed menace—when Eddie, in his cups and flat on his back, comedically questions Martin on the details of his and May's association.

Arianda's role is more reactive, and May spends much of the piece sulking, or hiding, or composing herself in the bathroom, but she makes May's broken steering funny and seductive. "I don't love you. I don't need you. I don't want you," she is telling Eddie when lights appear in the wings marking yet another vengeful offstage appearance by the unseen Countess. Then, as if segueing naturally into the next verse, she adds, "I'm gonna go out there! I'm gonna go out there and tear her damn head off! I'm gonna wipe her out!" It may be that these two are a chemically unstable combination—when at last they kiss, the moment is marked with a literal explosion—but Shepard and the two actors convincingly make the case that they can't exist separately. As Eddie describes the moment of their first meeting, in a line charged with meaning, "It was like we knew each other from somewhere but couldn't place where."

Not quite giving away exactly how well the principals know one another is the principal business of the first Broadway revival of 1971's

Old Times (American Airlines Theatre through Nov. 29). Not one of the best-known works by Harold Pinter (1930–2008), it lacks either the structural sophistication of *Betrayal* or the passive-aggressive comic voltage of *The Caretaker*. It is probably the most evasive and inscrutable production that will appear on Broadway this season.

As directed by Douglas Hodge, a longtime Pinter collaborator, the drama opens in a punitively modern space whose backdrop is a series of concentric circles suggesting ripples advancing relentlessly across the water, orbits in an unfriendly solar system, or a vinyl record from an unrecoverable era. Seethingly stylish modern couches are scattered just so. The location would be ideal for a desultory orgy or perhaps an especially severe outbreak of contemporary art.

A seaside English burgher Deeley (gamely played by Owen) and his wife Kate (Kelly Reilly, adhering to the sleepy-eyed mien she favored in season two of HBO's *True Detective*) are discussing the expected arrival of a houseguest, whom Kate startlingly reveals to be her "only" friend. Eve Best, who plays this third party, Anna, stands with her back turned, indicating her absence, as the overeager husband gradually extracts from the sullen wife the particulars of her onetime friendship, down in London, with Anna. Youth was intoxicating, the world was new, etc.

The casual references to London as the one and only place in England where anything can be said to happen are meant to cast small-town Deeley in an unflattering light: He's understood to stand for all things stolid and philistine. It seems highly likely that the man does something regrettable, like sales, and is hence unworthy of either of the two women, each of them sensuous and artistically attuned, though one has sold her vitality for a lifetime membership card in Club Bourgeois. The zombiefication process known as middle-class marriage has expunged from her all traces of personality and she is today a Brontë wraith, a somnambulant thing who wafts listlessly through the piece: "I was interested once in the arts, but I can't remember now which ones they were," Kate says. Asked by Anna whether Deeley is away on business for long periods of time, she replies, "I think, sometimes. Are you?"

Reilly, all languorous body and wounded soul, lends the play its most erotic moment when she takes off her robe and simulates taking a shower behind a screen that looks like a block of ice. She is an astute choice to play Kate, but Deeley is too oafish and provincial for Owen to be convincing in the role. The actor is helplessly urbane—he was born natty, glided out of the womb with panache. One pictures him wearing cufflinks and a pocket square with his onesie. Best, a veteran stage actress most known for 2007 productions of Pinter's *The Homecoming* and O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, proves a smoldering presence, but Pinter's words produce more smoke than fire.

The play is a three-way sexual tug-of-war, with jealousy and suspicion radiating from all to all. The trio's history is complex. As the evening gradually tears away at their dissimulations, though, what is the effect? Deeley mentions first meeting Kate in a cinema that was showing *Odd Man Out*, a 1947 Carol Reed noir whose title comes freighted with significance, perhaps more than Pinter understood. It's not Deeley but the audience that winds up being the odd man out as the puzzlement concludes. At an hour and five minutes, the play is brief, but in a manner of speaking it's a bargain because you may spend four additional hours at the bar afterwards unpacking its meaning, or simply recovering. At his best, Pinter makes each comma a blade, every pause a cliff. But *Old Times* feels incomplete even for a Pinter play, contenting itself with leaving the audience weary and bruised. The most appropriate reaction may be dismissal. Forget it, Jake: it's Pintertown.

Art

"Class distinctions" in Boston

by Karen Wilkin

The Netherlands in the seventeenth century—its "Golden Age"—was a remarkable place. When the region declared independence from Spain, in the late sixteenth century, it became an unusual political entity, one led not by a hereditary aristocrat but by the heads of the seven provinces of the new Dutch Republic, united, during the seventeenth century, under a series of *stadholders*—the Princes of Orange, descendants of William the Silent, who threw off the Spanish yoke. (Dutch seventeenth-century history is, in fact, a lot more complicated than this, but that's the general idea.) The *stadholder* selected municipal officials and was head of the Republic's army and navy. Only a few old feudal landed nobles remained—there hadn't been many in the first place—and there was no autocratic monarch, but the Republic was nevertheless a highly stratified society. The upper classes were, for the most part, newly wealthy merchants, investors in international trade, and appointed officials who sat on the governing boards of charitable organizations, served in largely honorary militias, and, when they became rich enough, bought estates and titles. There was a burgeoning educated middle class of ministers, notaries, and other professionals, along with shopkeepers, skilled craftsmen, and tradesman. And there were the lower classes: unskilled urban and rural laborers, and the poor, for whom the upper classes organized charities, assuming the recipients of this largesse were "deserving."

For some of us, what is even more remarkable than the politics of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic is the number of notable artists at work in this small, mercantile country at the time, and the surprising fact that almost everyone owned art, even people of fairly modest means. Travelers to the Republic remarked on this phenomenon, as well as on the relatively high degree of independence of Dutch women of the period. Now, the well-chosen exhibition "Class Distinctions: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer," at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through January 18, 2016, presents us with a wealth of important paintings from the Golden Age, selected to emphasize what they can tell us about the social structure of the period.[1] The installation is divided into sections broadly dealing with the upper, middle, and laboring classes, and the poor. If this sounds simplistic, sub-sections headed "Stadholders and the Court," "Nobles and Aspiring Nobles," "Regents and Wealthy Merchants," "Professions and Trades," "Women at Work," "Labor," "The Indigent," and "Where the Classes Meet" present the thesis with nuanced distinctions, rather than heavy-handed generalizations. Organized by Ronni Baer, the William and Ann Elfers Senior Curator of Paintings, Art of Europe, at the MFA Boston, the exhibition brings together seventy-five major works by Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Vermeer, Frans Hals, Jan Steen, Pieter de Hooch, Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Ga-

1 "Class Distinctions: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer" opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on October 11, 2015 and remains on view through January 18, 2016.

briel Metsu, and Hendrick Avercamp, among many other notables, from private and public collections across Europe and the United States. Twenty-four of these, we are told, have never before been seen in this country.

That the art of a given period imparts significant information about the values and mores of its time is hardly news, but the groupings in "Class Distinctions" sharpen our awareness of the show's generating ideas without belaboring the point or preaching at us. On purely visual grounds, for example, we can't ignore the "sociological" contrast between two double portraits hung side-by-side, in the Upper Class section. In one of these, we are confronted by a successful but soberly dressed Mennonite publisher/printer and his wife, captured in a modest-sized painting made in 1663 by Jan de Bray. In the other, the elegant black silk of a rich textile merchant is all but eclipsed by the gleaming silk and lavish embroidery of his wife's gown, in a large portrait painted in 1654 by the fashionable Bartholomeus van der Helst. If we concentrate solely on the differences between the opulent and austere fabrics suggested in the two pictures, we may wonder briefly about the Mennonite publisher's wife's frivolous red underskirt. But our attention is soon claimed by other indicators of class, such as the subjects' postures and relationships to each other, and the settings. The prosperous merchant gazes fondly at his gorgeously dressed spouse, holding her right wrist rather possessively; she ignores him and stares us down. The publisher looks at us and holds his wife's hand, raising one of *his* hands as if he were declaiming; she angles towards her husband, seemingly pulled off balance, eyes fixed rapturously on him, Nancy Reagan–style. The merchant and his wife are seated in a vaguely indicated garden, perhaps suggesting a landed estate, once a sign of nobility. The publisher and his adoring spouse, by contrast, are surrounded by signs of intellectual life—a "classical" head, a large globe, magnificent books—but they are also seated in a sort of loggia with a handsome balustrade, against lush foliage; an artful drape straight out of Anthony Van Dyck's society portraits adds the ultimate note of luxury. Since both portraits were commissioned, we start thinking about the sitters' motivations in wishing to be portrayed as they are, what that tells us about their idea of themselves, and what (given the decade that separates the two works) the differences between them tell us about the changing desiderata of the times.

In the same section, we find ourselves thinking about these variables even more when we are faced with the portraits of two self-satisfied, apparently self-made men, despite the many other merits of the paintings: Rembrandt's animated *Andries de Graeff* (1639, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel), with one expensive glove dropped at his feet, and Hals's posturing *Willem van Heythuysen* (ca. 1625, Alte Pinakothek, Munich), with his enormous sword and his hand on his hip. Both are shown life-size and standing, traditionally a prerogative of royalty and the nobility, here an indicator, like van Heythuysen's wholly rhetorical and rather preposterous sword, of status, aspiration, and—since large commissioned paintings by sought-after artists cost more than small ones by less sought-after practitioners—affluence. The more we look at the works in this section, whether small images of standing figures or large, seated half-length couples or group portraits, the more we begin to notice inclusions associated, in the past, with representations of aristocracy: hunting dogs (hunting was once a perquisite of aristocrats), a black servant, columns, drapes, and the like. And in many paintings, the complacency and sheer self-regard of the frequently very well-fed sitters is palpable.

But the exhibition is not simply a demonstration of the sociology of the Golden Age. Just about all of the included paintings reward close scrutiny for their formal merits. Much of the work in "Class Distinctions" is so impressive that it's perfectly possible to approach the show simply as an assembly of often stellar Dutch seventeenth-century paintings and pay little or no attention to subtext, the informative wall texts notwithstanding. It's testimony both to the Boston MFA's clout as a borrowing institution and the esteem in which the exhibition's curator is held that the selection includes

such deservedly celebrated pictures as, in the Upper Class section, Van Dyck's half-length portrait *Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange* (ca. 1631–32, Baltimore Museum of Art), all gleaming armor, seductively rendered linen and lace, and an explosion of red plumes—an image that could serve as a template for how an important man should be depicted. There's Hals's iconic group portrait *Regents of the St. Elizabeth Hospital in Haarlem* (1641, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem), an archetypical homage to the municipality's important men, with the uniformly black costumes, white collars, and black hats of the five protagonists countered by Hals's attention to the individuality of each Regent, the varied positions of their hands, and the play of warm light across the canvas. We forget about social position when faced with the Middle Class section's "Rembrandt wall," which offers the Boston MFA's own pair of life-size seated portraits of the Reverend Johannes Elison and his wife Maria Bockenolle, both 1634, on either side of the stunning *Jan Rijcksen and His Wife, Griet Jans, Known as "The Shipbuilder and His Wife"* (1633, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II). The sensitively characterized Reverend Elison and his wife seem to welcome us graciously into their presence while appraising us, but formality and dignity overwhelm warmth. By contrast, the half-length shipbuilder and his wife seem to have been captured in an intimate moment without significance; she rushes to hand him a note, interrupting his drafting of a ship's hull. All three paintings are triumphs of subtle paint-handling and varied brushwork, from bold and assured to miraculously delicate, conjuring up everything from fine linen to silky hair, to aging, healthy flesh. And there's Vermeer's *A Lady Writing* (ca. 1665, National Gallery, Washington, D.C.), clearly a representation of an educated, literate woman of means, a consideration that seems less significant than this wonderful picture's wash of cool, northern light and its orchestration of grays, blues, and pale yellow. There's his equally magical *The Astronomer* (1668, Musée du Louvre, Paris), an image, we are told, of a wealthy amateur, most notable for its flood of light, the textures of the fabrics and paper that light falls upon, and the rigorous, apparently accidental geometry of the setting. And more.

Yet if we begin to pay attention to the signifiers of social position in the works in "Class Distinctions," rather than concentrating solely on their power as *paintings*, we start seeing even the most familiar in fresh ways, discovering new ways of interpreting what is before us, enriching our perceptions without compromising our awareness of the other qualities of these works. Often, we learn to recognize things that would have been immediately apparent to viewers at the time these paintings were first made. In the Middle Class section, "Women at Work," for example, we learn that costume historians have identified the woman holding the child's hand in Pieter de Hooch's charming *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (1658, National Gallery, London) as a servant. The mistress of the house, in her expensive red-dyed skirt, has her back to us, gazing through a doorway. Discovering this doesn't diminish our pleasure in the combination of cobbles, bricks, and weathered wood in the courtyard or the contrast of deep and shallow spaces framing the figure groups, but makes the picture more intelligble. In the same way, de Hooch's *Interior with Women Beside a Linen Cupboard* (1663, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), with its moodily lit, richly paneled room and its long view, through another room, to an open door, turns out to depict not a householder and her servant, but, rather, a mother instructing her well-dressed daughter in the care of linen—a significant part of any seventeenth-century Dutch household's accoutrements, kept in an important piece of furniture, such as the painting's intarsia cupboard. Knowing this doesn't change our response to the picture as a composition, but it offers us a glimpse of how it was read in its own day. (We need no extra information, however, to realize that a bare-breasted woman with a coin in the "Women at Work" section is a prostitute.)

Elsewhere, we are encouraged to consider landscapes and marine paintings differently. In the Lower Class section, we can enjoy the moist light and cloud-filled sky of Jacob van Ruisdael's *View of the Plain of Haarlem with*

Bleaching Grounds (ca. 1660–63, Private Collection, Boston) and appreciate the diffuse, pale sunlight in a scene of fishing boats on a calm sea. But we are also made aware of the brute labor of the women who spread the enormous lengths of wet, heavy linen to bleach in the sun and are told that the boats are the latest kind of herring *buss*, an innovative design of great benefit to the Netherlands's important herring fishing industry, since it both allowed longer voyages further from shore and permitted the fish to be gutted, salted, and stored on board.

There's less ambiguity and less mystery in the Lower Class sub-sections labeled "Labor" and "The Indigent"—all genre scenes whose subject, often treated with conspicuous good humor, is the unglamorous side of life. Scenes of a knife-grinder at work, pig-slaughtering, or drunken revelers in a tavern require no explication. We can concentrate on the firm modeling, subtle shading, and solid composition of Gerard Ter Borch's *A Maid Milking a Cow* (ca. 1652–54, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) or the dramatic lighting in Paulus Potter's *A Farrier's Shop* (1648, National Gallery, Washington, D.C.) without thinking about the social strata represented. Scenes of the deserving and undeserving poor begging or receiving alms remind us that we've already seen their benefactors, far removed from the crowds of petitioners, in paintings such as Hals's group portrait of the elegant pillars of Haarlem society, the hospital Regents.

"Class Distinctions" ends with images of the places "Where the Classes Meet"—in city squares or churches; on the ice, when the canals froze and everyone went skating; at country fairs, where the rich went to watch the revels; when traveling. A Gabriel Metsu of a well-dressed patron waiting for his horse to be shod by a hard-working blacksmith shows another kind of contact. Most provocative are scenes of beggars at the entrance to wealthy homes, complex images whose moral message seems curiously open-ended. In one of these, an affluent burgher sits on the stoop of his house on the most elegant street in Delft, contemplating an old woman with a cane accompanied by a small boy. She bends imploringly towards him and extends a hand. The householder looks noncommittal. His elegantly dressed daughter, descending the step, faces away from the confrontation and looks at us, as if wishing to be admired. Charity or indifference? It's hard to tell, even though the painting was presumably a commissioned portrait. (We know who the householder and his daughter are.) Fewer questions are raised by another "threshold" painting, as the curator has termed them, in which we are inside a fine house. The silk-clad mistress sits in what seems to be the entrance hall, while a servant, who has opened the door to the street, calls the attention of a small silk-clad girl to a pair of poorly dressed street musicians outside. Here, at least, the beggar-performers seem welcome.

"Class Distinction" offers all this, three amusing table settings with linen, glassware, cutlery, silver, porcelain, and earthenware appropriate to each class, and a fully illustrated, enlightening catalogue with essays anatomizing Dutch society of the Golden Age. Book a trip to Boston.

The Congo line

by Anthony Daniels

When Ghana achieved its independence from Britain in 1957, I was in my stamp-collecting phase, and for me the most important consequence of that momentous event was the issue of garishly multi-colored stamps by the newly independent country to celebrate it. Until then, the stamps of the Gold Coast (as Ghana had been known) were typical of those of all British colonies: a little oval in the right-hand corner with the reigning monarch's portrait, accompanied by an engraved scene of the territory's daily life—cocoa-farming, fishing, basket-weaving—or of its flora and fauna. They were either monochrome or, at the most, of two colors, and were objects of a restrained finesse.

I was reminded of all this at the exhibition "Beauté Congo 1926–2015" at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris.[1] If the exhibits were representative (and, being totally ignorant of the domain, I have no means of knowing whether they were), independence brought about an immediate change in the aesthetic sensibility of the Congolese who painted, a change analogous to the philatelic change wrought by the independence of Ghana. Before independence Congolese coloration was restrained, after it exuberant; of instinctively good taste before, of instinctively bad afterwards. By good taste I mean, of course, that which coincides with my own.

Before independence, Congolese art owed a great deal to two remarkable and far-sighted men, Georges Thiry, a Belgian colonial official, and Pierre Romain-Desfossés, a former Free French officer and amateur painter who founded an atelier for promising artists known as "le Hangar" in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi).

In the 1920s, Thiry, an aficionado of modern art as well as an official (a combination difficult to imagine nowadays), noticed the beauty and refined taste with which the exteriors of Congolese houses were often decorated—as did I in my travels in Africa more than half a century later—and wanted to preserve the work from the ravages of time. He provided the decorators with paper and watercolors and set them to work, without in the least prescribing what they should paint.

Their work had a considerable impact when exhibited in Brussels in the 1920s and 1930s; indeed, Djilatendo's work was exhibited alongside Magritte's and Delvaux's. But they were soon forgotten, and nothing illustrates better the oblivion into which they fell than their biographies in the exhibition catalogue: Ngoma, born about 1900 at Kampene, in the province of Maniema; Paul Mampinda, born about 1895. Compared with this, Keats's name was writ not in water, but carved in stone of Egyptian-pyramidal proportions.

The artists whom Thiry encouraged had remarkable taste and an exquisite eye for design, form, and color. Naïve art their work might be considered, but it has a transcendent

1 "Beauté Congo 1926–2015" opened at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, on July 11, 2015 and remains on view through January 10, 2016.

beauty and radiates (and transmits) a love and tenderness for the world it depicts. The stylized forms of the birds, beasts, trees, and insects are the fruit of an intense and loving observation; the creatures share the world with the painters, a world infused with meaning in which everything is mythical and real at the same time. Every color—pastel, never primary—seems just right, as if it could be no other, as in a great poem no word is superfluous and no other word than the one used would be right.

Pierre Romain-Defossés founded his atelier in 1946, encouraging many artists whose work still reflected a pre-urban sensibility dominated by the natural world (less than a fifth of the population of the Congo lived at the time in towns). The jungle, not the urban jungle, was the natural subject of their art, and again the colors are subdued, for though the jungle is vivid it is also dark, or at least not brightly lit. Primary colors are actually secondary, at least in the sociological sense: they emerge with the exponential post-independence urbanization. There are now about as many children living in the streets of Kinshasa, the capital, as there were inhabitants in 1930.

If the exhibition is a true reflection of art in the Congo, there seems to have been a hiatus of ten or fifteen years between independence and the emergence of an art with a completely urban sensibility. Now the colors are brash and bright enough to hurt the eyes, nature has been forgotten, expelled from the mind by the excitements of the city, and the aesthetic is entirely that of popular culture of the 1970s, which was that of platform shoes, bell-bottomed trousers, gaudy shirts, and mirrored sunglasses. It is the aesthetic not of kitsch alone, but of kitsch militant, a programmatic kitsch that brooks no refinement and no competition, in which Las Vegas is taken as the height of human aesthetic accomplishment. The artists proudly proclaim that their art is "of the people," popular, which effectively puts it beyond the reach of criticism, for nothing that is of the people or popular can be criticized adversely, any such criticism being inherently anti-democratic in spirit. The artists are no

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longer directing themselves to a couple of old colonials, however enlightened or sympathetic they might have been; they are directing themselves to the *people*. But as their level of technical accomplishment increases, so the kitschiness, the loss of restraint, the crudity of the palette of their work, becomes more painful to the eye, or at least to *my* eye.

The triumph of the primary color over the pastel shade, of the bright over the subdued, of kitsch over taste, is not Congolese alone, of course. A small manifestation of this triumph, and perhaps a minor cause of it also, is the universal replacement of E. H. Shepherd's illustrations of *Winnie-the-Pooh* by the crude and brightly colored Disney cartoon figures that prepare children permanently to be attracted by the color schemes of McDonald's restaurants and Toys"R"Us. I have heard it urged in favor of the Disney version of *Pooh* that it is more immediately attractive to children, as bright things are to magpies, than Shepherd's: the thought that this is precisely a reason for preferring Shepherd's is too subversive to be entertained, for children have a right from birth to the vote in all things.

But all is not lost, at least in the Congo. A subsequent generation of artists there has returned to greater subtlety, not by an anachronistic return to a pre-urban world, but by a more oblique approach to their reality. The gouaches of Kura Shomali are impressive in their composition and content. His *Général major devant sa troupe*, representational but not literal, encapsulates in a single powerful image the ruthlessness and corruption of the war in Central Africa that has cost millions of lives. And a photographer called Kiripi Katembo, who died, alas, earlier this year at the age of thirty-six, had the brilliant idea, in a series of photographs called *Un regard*, of photographing Kinshasa as reflected in the puddles in the potholes of its muddy and stony roads. The resulting images are strange and disturbing but aesthetically pleasing (because cleverly composed), as well as a profound commentary on the Congolese condition.

By inverting the relationship between the reflection and the reality it reflects, so that the reflection is dominant, the reality being but the reflection of the reflection, as it were, the artist is telling us that the broken-downness of the city is what dominates peoples' lives there, what determines their whole way of life—true, as any visitor to Kinshasa will confirm. And this leads, naturally enough, to reflection, if I may so put it, on the reasons for this state of affairs: none of them at the sacrifice of purely aesthetic considerations.

Not long ago I went to the exhibition of the prize-winning students of the best, or at least most prestigious, art school in France. To say that the exhibition was a pile of rubbish would be to traduce rubbish; I came away angry that the corrupt, and no doubt themselves corrupted, judges had flattered and rewarded such trivial productions, such worthless detritus: accompanied, of course, by texts of grotesque pretentiousness. If pretension were an artistic virtue, ours would be a golden age indeed.

As it is, we have turned ourselves into provincials, and left real work to our former colonies.

Gallery chronicle
by James Panero

There may be no better indication of the health of contemporary painting than declarations of painting's demise. "From today, painting is dead!" Every recent generation of art has faced such a prophecy. The painter Paul Delaroche gets credit for the original observation, attributed way back to 1839, the year that Daguerre first introduced his method of photographic duplication. In fact, it is this very rise of new reproduction technologies that tends to occasion painting's supposed doom. After all, painting was itself at one time its own advanced reproduction technology, projecting the outside world onto the caves of Lascaux, receiving regular updates and tech support through the Renaissance with the development of oils and the portable canvas. So one might assume that the eventual arrival of even more advanced means of visual reproduction, whether it be the photograph or the television or the computer, would finally eclipse the need for trained specialists to simulate sight by spreading toxic liquids around a prepared surface. Painting either should or must give way to the new media of the times.

As it turns out, painting has shown remarkable resilience despite, or just as likely because of, the assumptions of its irrelevance. Perhaps the greatest boon to painting has been the notion of the quote-unquote "death of painting," or at the very least an indication of its ongoing presence. Our own generation's digital landscape has not driven artists away from paint. Instead we have seen a new flourishing of paint in the studios and galleries as artists have explored its modes of analog expression, whether as a form of revived older media, or as a way of transcending the limits of digital reproduction, or as a means of drawing some connection between the two, or because of some other motivation entirely.

Surprisingly, for some observers, painting's continuing importance has still not spelled the death of the "death of painting." Just the other week, Holland Cotter, a critic for *The New York Times*, bemoaned the recent "hype around painting, specifically abstraction, that has encouraged the equivalent of a fancy airport art for newly rich collectors." For him, the only form of painting that still deserves attention "goes beyond a fixation on form to focus on ideas that tie art and artists to life."

A year ago, the Museum of Modern Art came to a different but similarly narrow conclusion. In its first survey show of contemporary painting in years, called "The Forever Now: Contemporary Art in an Atemporal World," MOMA focused exclusively on work that was turned in on itself—painting about the history of painting, or, even more likely, painting about the "death of painting." As the critic John Yau observed, "by exhibition curator Laura Hoptman's standards, the only choices open to a painter are copying, sampling, or being reductive."

This past month at Hollis Taggart Galleries, Yau was the curator of his own exhibition meant as an answer to MOMA. The title said it all: "Painting Is Not Doomed To Repeat Itself."[1]

1 "Painting Is Not Doomed To Repeat Itself" was on view at Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, from September 24 through October 31, 2015.

Drawing on work that Yau hoped "testifies to painting's resiliency, its ability to morph into something fresh and engaging," the exhibition showed the wide range of painting being done today. While the work on view may have had "little in common," as he claimed, Yau nevertheless focused on artists who "resist style and branding." As Yau wrote in his catalogue essay, the artists in his selection make "uncategorizable hybrid objects. They work in oil, acrylic, and ink. They use brushes, spray cans, and silkscreens. They work on traditional stretched canvas, shaped canvas, multiple panels, and wood that has been cut up into blocks. They span everything from trompe l'oeil to abstraction, from image to language."

The sculptural paintings of Daniel Douke were a standout, or at the very least a remarkable demonstration of how far painting could go beyond what we think of as "painting." Taking trompe l'oeil into the third dimension, Douke shapes his canvas into an astonishing verisimilitude of everyday objects but leaves one side open, so you can see the canvas, staples, and stretchers that make them up. There is no other way you could tell that *Wanted* (2014) is anything other than a galvanized steel street vent covered in graffiti and stickers. Or that *Folding Table* (2008) is an intricately hand-sculpted painting and not just another white molded plastic picnic table.

Much of the other work here was similarly hyper-expressed. Brenda Goodman tapped into paint's hyperemotional pull through thick daubs of color; Catherine Murphy painted hyperrealistic images of cushions and reflections of furniture; Joshua Marsh amplified his colors and forms into a cross between Peter Saul and spray art; Philip Taaffe continued to explore his mastery of paint-based reproduction techniques that can range from stamps to stencils, silkscreens to paper marbling.

While demonstrating painting's continued potential, the exhibition also approached visual incoherence. I wonder if such a show in fact comes out of an equal fallacy to "painting is dead." Is it just as much of a rhetorical trap to exclaim that "painting is NOT dead"? Even if true, I worry that its declaration may be another side of a false argument, here overly broadening rather than narrowing our field of observation while flattening our perspective of painting from a process into a point. Painting is not "dead." Nor is it flamboyantly "alive." Painting just "is," in infinite variety.

Last month the small non-profit Outpost Artists Resources, located in a row house in Ridgewood, Queens, continued its run of exceptional programming with a group exhibition called "Checkered History: The Grid in Art & Life."[2] Here sixty contemporary artists, many of them painters, used the grid to structure their compositions. Even as these artists came to the grid through a wide variety of means and for a wide variety of purposes, the show made visual sense. Assembled by David Weinstein and Ruth Kahn, who describe themselves as "curators, organizers, producers, and sheetrockers," the exhibition also seemed to tease out some interesting conclusions.

The grid is a digital-like format that cuts against the analog mode of paint, which more easily lends itself to free forms than straight lines. The grid is the basis of classical perspective. To our contemporary eye the grid also references mechanical modes of reproduction, whether it be the moiré flicker of a television screen we might see in the work of Cathy Nan Quinlan or Rob de Oude, or the patterned designs of Robert Otto Epstein and Meg Atkinson that call to mind both machine-made textiles and low-resolution computer games. Here this final connection was made even more explicit through a video piece by Cory Arcangel of a hacked version of the Mario Bros. Nintendo game and textile computer chips by Crystal Gregory.

"Tempos: Selected Works by Elizabeth Gourlay, 2013–2015" at Fox Gallery NYC is another exhibition that sees the grid bringing structure to paint.[3] I wrote about Fox Gallery in this space last January to praise the patterned paintings of Claire Seidl and Kim Uchiya-

2 "Checkered History: The Grid in Art & Life" was on view at Outpost Artists Resources, Queens, from October 2 through October 30, 2015.

3 "Tempos: Selected Works by Elizabeth Gourlay, 2013–2015" opened at Fox Gallery NYC on October 13, 2015 and remains on view through February 13, 2016.

ma. I also wanted to draw attention to the pleasures of seeing a gallery exhibition in a domestic space—here, in the apartment of a gorgeous (and recently cleaned) terracotta pre-war building by Blum & Blum. Just last month Gourlay appeared in the flat files of the exhibition at Odetta Gallery on "seeing sound." For Gourlay the painterly sound is rhythmic. She mutes her colors of melody to emphasize the syncopation of her forms. In her large square canvases, often named after instruments, she she uses collage to layer horizontal strips of paper that have been tinted along their edges, then adds additional squares of paint like regular punctuations. In other examples she stacks her square blocks of color. In others she plucks an edge into a triangle. The overall results are quiet and harmonic, like an ensemble of world music in otherworldly form, here arranged in sublime surroundings.

"Diphthong" is yet another exhibition that relates to artists who appeared here last month: both Gelah Penn, part of "seeing sound" at Odetta, and Stephen Maine at Hionas Gallery.[4] At the Shirley Fiterman Art Center at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, a block north of Ground Zero, Penn and Maine are the co-curators of this group exhibition of seventeen artists working in "process-based abstraction." Coming out of the post-Minimalist movement of the 1970s, the idea of "process" art is that the means of fabrication become a subject of the art's completion. In practice, and as revealed through the range of materials and forms in this exhibition, process artists employ unorthodox modes of production to reach unusual conclusions. For example, there is the evocative imagery that can result from Maine's own process of stamping carpet textures onto canvas; or the "acrylic, stains, and spray paint on wood panel" by Jaq Chartier that somehow come to resemble photographic emulsion; or the acrylics on canvas by Thomas Pihl of subtly gradated color that seem like translucent screens of light. At its best, letting the process take over the project removes the intentions of design and lets more distant visions come through. At the same time, I want to know how this work is made, and I wouldn't mind some additional transparency. Process artists are known to be resistant to explanation, but what might be lost in mystery would be more than gained in understanding.

This month two Bushwick-area galleries serve as bookends to the story of paint in the contemporary scene. Through different styles, both demonstrate how today's overriding sense for paint is one of joyous affection. Against the ash heaps of our digital world, the boldness of paint, its colors and its textures, gets fully embraced.

At Life on Mars, Todd Bienvenu indulges in the paint-heavy brush to create cartoonish fantasies of our prosaic environment.[5] In some cases this can be a trash can filled with flowers, or sneakers hanging from lampposts. It also looks back to childhood fantasies: an epic-sized treehouse, women by the pool, or ringside at a professional wrestling match, with garish colors and bulky modeling that recall sixteen-bit video games.

Nearby at the new Stout Projects, the abstract painters Paul Behnke and Matthew Neil Gehring layer pools of painted color (Behnke) and gestural strokes (something new for Gehring).[6] At Stout this fun is foregrounded by the work of Rebecca Murtaugh. Working halfway between a painted sculpture and a sculptural painting, Murtaugh shapes "reclaimed house paint" into clotted masses that resemble minimalist sculptures covered in riotous growths of medium and pigment. Murtaugh calls these "apertures," for their ocular forms. For me, I just want to look through, look at, and touch these crazy things, which are head-over-heels valentines to paint.

4 "Diphthong" opened at the Shirley Fiterman Art Center, New York, on September 29 and remains on view through November 14, 2015.

5 "Todd Bienvenu: Exile on Bogart Street" opened at Life on Mars, Brooklyn, on October 9 and remains on view through November 8, 2015.

6 "Occo Socko!" opened at Stout Projects, Brooklyn, on October 16 and remains on view through November 13, 2015.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

This chronicle will read like an opera blog—but first, we will go to the movies. In the week or so before its real season, the New York Philharmonic has movie nights, a little series called "The Art of the Score." The orchestra plays that score—whatever it is—while the movie unspools on a big screen overhead. On the first night this year, the Philharmonic showed *On the Waterfront*, Elia Kazan's masterpiece from 1954. Its score is by Leonard Bernstein, the Philharmonic's own.

This is the only movie score he ever wrote. Before *Waterfront* came along, he had received many requests to write a score, but had always resisted. "It is a musically unsatisfactory experience for a composer to write a score whose chief merit ought to be its unobtrusiveness," he recalled. But Kazan's movie, he could not resist. Much of his music wound up on the cutting-room floor. This is something a composer simply must endure, Bernstein commented. "Everyone tries to comfort him. 'You can always use it in a suite.'" Bernstein indeed fashioned a suite, a symphonic suite. He also fashioned a work for voice and piano. When you see it cited now, you also see that always-intriguing designation: "(withdrawn)."

The *Waterfront* score is recognizably, unmistakably Bernsteinian. It's also very sad. Furthermore—and this is crucial—it goes with the picture, even enhancing the picture (and enhancing Kazan is very hard to do). The Philharmonic was conducted by David Newman, who is himself a film composer. The orchestra played well enough—but it was sometimes ragged. It was also loud, very loud. The music was too prominent, grafted onto the movie rather than being part of it. Nevertheless, this was an exciting evening. And a couple of first-deskmen stood out: Philip Myers, the French horn, who was off and on, but mainly on; and Matthew Muckey, the trumpet, who played nicely.

He would have a lot more to do the next night, when the Philharmonic screened *The Godfather*. The trumpet is the instrument that haunts that score. You could almost say that *The Godfather*, like Mahler's Symphony No. 5 and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, is one of the great trumpet scores. Muckey had a phonation problem or two, but he duly haunted.

The Godfather was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, as you know, and its score was composed by Nino Rota. His music for the picture is now a cliché. But it once was not. It was new, wondrous, and perfectly fitting (fitting with the movie). Imagine having written music so familiar, so iconic, that it becomes a cliché! The Philharmonic on this occasion was conducted by Justin Freer, another composer who has made a mark in Hollywood. This time around, I did not notice the music so much. What I mean is, it blended into the movie. Deserving of mention are the oboe, Sherry Sylar, and the cello, Eileen Moon. Like their colleague on the trumpet, they played beautifully and hauntingly. Also, this being Italy, the guitar and the mandolin had a lot to do.

By the way, I had forgotten that *The Godfather* includes a snatch of *La traviata*, played in a wedding scene: the Brindisi, the toast (and waltz).

The Metropolitan Opera opened its season, not with *La traviata*, but with another Verdi opera, *Otello*. I did not attend Opening Night, but a subsequent performance. In the pit, as from the beginning, was Yannick Nézet-Séguin. He conducted vibrantly, dynamically. I could pick at him, as who could not? A listener can hardly embrace every choice a conductor makes, particularly over the course of a long work. For instance, the Otello-Iago duet, "Sì, pel ciel marmoreo giuro," is seldom fat and swaggering enough for me. Conductors tend to race through it, as Nézet-Séguin did. Still, he had a splendid night, and so did the orchestra under him.

Let me raise an issue. After Desdemona sings her Ave Maria, Verdi shifts the mood with an ominous low E. Nézet-Séguin went right to that E, but the audience wanted to applaud the Ave Maria, as well it should have. Nézet-Séguin had to cut the orchestra off. People in the audience shushed the applauders (which was highly annoying). Then Nézet-Séguin returned to the E. It is wiser, I believe, to let the audience applaud the Ave Maria, and not to gripe about it with headshakes and sulks (and shushes).

The tenor, singing the title role, was Aleksandrs Antonenko, from Latvia. Reviewing his Otello in Salzburg seven years ago, I said that he was "underpowered." Antonenko "is a good singer, who owns a beautiful, somewhat luxurious voice. But this seems not to be his role, at least for now." At the Met, I did not find him underpowered. But he started pretty rough, with wayward pitch (and no low notes whatsoever). His Desdemona was Sonya Yoncheva, from Bulgaria. In their duet, she showed an interesting cutting sound, but this beautiful music had precious little beauty, and the soprano exhibited a Kiri trait: she kept coming in early. This is sometimes endearing, sometimes not.

Iago was Željko Lučić, that veteran Verdi baritone from Serbia. He is a rugged pro, but he did nothing special in the early going. Allow me to note that these three big roles were all taken by Easterners (and I'm not talking about Vermonters and New Hampshirites). Not only was there nothing Italian, there was nothing Italianate coming from that stage.

But something happened as the opera wore on: everyone came to life. Antonenko settled into some heroic singing, really "booming it out there," as Merrill once said of his friend Tucker. Lučić became a picture of baritonal villainy. And Yoncheva? After Act I, I could not have told you that she was capable of singing the Willow Song and Ave Maria so beautifully, so intelligently, so movingly. I doubt I have heard better.

I was much looking forward to the Lodovico of Günther Groissböck, the Austrian bass whom I have lavishly praised in these pages—for his Baron Ochs (*Rosenkavalier*) at Salzburg. He looked terrific as Verdi's Venetian ambassador: a model of diplomatic and quasi-military splendor. But frankly, I couldn't hear him. I wonder whether the part lies too low for him.

The Met has a new production of *Otello*, from the talented Bartlett Sher. It has wonderful, shifting skies. And nothing about the production is objectionable. At the same time, I wonder what is commendable (apart from the skies). The stage is dominated by very large, plastic-seeming semi-monuments—a friend of mine used the word "Lucite." They slide around, frequently.

To some fanfare, the Met announced that its Otellos would no longer appear in dark makeup. This is understandable, given American sensitivities, and minstrelsy, and blackface. But I wonder about the importance of Otello's race to the story. While we're on the subject—a multifaceted one—what about Rigoletto's disability? Is it important to *that* story? Rigoletto thinks so: he says so (in lines of great poignancy, even painfulness). In the Met's current *Rigoletto*, as I recall, the character stands upright, evincing no disability whatsoever. But once we start asking for verisimilitude in opera . . .

Two nights after this *Otello*, the Met did *Turandot*, Puccini's last opera (which he could not quite complete). As I approached the house, a sax was wailing "Nessun dorma," the hit aria from that opera. It is sung by the tenor, Caláf, but you can't have *Turandot* without the soprano, Turandot—and that is a very hard role to fill. It is a famous voice-wrecker of a role. Ideally, you want creamy lyricism and steely power in

one woman. Good luck. The Met had engaged Christine Goerke, as good a candidate for Turandot as any. The character's first music is her aria, "In questa reggia." Here, Goerke was not in her best voice or on her best pitch. Her singing was slightly effortful—which is more than understandable in this aria—but it was also musical, expressive, and bold. Later in the opera, she was free. Entirely free. She was not so much producing sound as riding sound—and it was glorious.

Caláf was Marcelo Álvarez, the Argentinian tenor, who shouted a little, perhaps trying to will his voice bigger than it is. But if this was shouting, it was elegant shouting, let me say. Álvarez acquitted himself honorably. Regarding his "Nessun dorma," I'll give you a little scorecard. He had no low D. He composed his own rhythm. His high B was tight. He let go of his final A almost immediately. But, all in all, he sang the aria respectably, as he did the whole role. May I say too that, with every passing year, he looks more like Plácido Domingo onstage?

Since 1987, the Met has used Franco Zeffirelli's production, and a colleague of mine has called it "critic-proof": critics can't kill this production, because the public loves it too much to let it die. In this case, the public is right, I believe. One by one, the Zeffirelli productions at the Met are falling. *Turandot* will probably be the last one standing. But it too will fall, and when it does, I and a million others will wail. Speaking of wailing, that sax was back at "Nessun dorma" as I headed home.

Two nights later, in the Met again, the applause for Dmitri Hvorostovsky was tumultuous. Not just at the end of the evening but on his entrance. An audience is always happy to see him, because he is one of the best performers in opera. But why the extra enthusiasm this time? Last summer, the starry Russian baritone announced that he had a brain tumor and would undergo treatment in London. He suspended this treatment in order to appear at the Met as the Conte di Luna in *Il trovatore* (Verdi). He signed on to sing three performances only.

And how did he do on this particular night? He was Hvorostovsky. He sang with his customary suavity, nobility, and self-possession. His phrases were as long as ever. "We think he has a third lung," Renée Fleming once told me. Did I imagine that he sang with extra intensity and commitment? I'm really not sure. I *am* sure, however, that at the end of the evening the orchestra flung dozens of single white roses at him.

The evening's soprano was another starry Russian, Anna Netrebko. She has been singing this role, Leonora, in Salzburg too. She commits some vocal errors, as Callas once did. But, like Callas, she delivers a knockout operatic punch. And I must not slight her technical ability. At the Met, she demonstrated a true *piano*—not a fake one, not a cheating wispiness, but a *piano* with body. By the end of the evening, she was giving no less than a clinic in singing. Her celebrity must not be allowed to overshadow her greatness.

Our tenor, Manrico, was Yonghoon Lee. When he is tight, he is painful. When he is free, he is marvelous. And he was free all night long. Dolora Zajick was Azucena, as she has been for as long as most people can remember. Should she hang it up? Not anytime soon. She ought to be studied by scientists who wonder about the secrets of longevity. So, Netrebko, Hvorostovsky, Zajick: these are usual suspects, but they are usual suspects for a reason. The Met had assembled a lot of vocal and dramatic talent on that stage. As the Met should. And the free-and-easy Lee was a bonus.

Two nights after *that*, the Met revived *Anna Bolena*, the first of Donizetti's "Three Queens" operas. The others are *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*. "Anna Bolena" is an Italian way of saying "Anne Boleyn." "Maria Stuarda" is Mary, Queen of Scots. The queen in *Roberto Devereux* is Elizabeth (not the present occupant of Buckingham Palace). Beverly Sills made a kind of history when she sang all Three Queens. Another American soprano, Sondra Radvanovsky, is doing the same at the Met this season. For a long time now, I have called her the Met's "go-to gal for Verdi." She is now its go-to Donizettian.

On the night I heard her as Anna, she did everything required, and a lot is required: technically, dramatically, vocally, and mentally.

She had the high notes and the low notes, the dynamics and the agility, the power and the delicacy, the poise and the pathos. Her mad scene was a model of control. All night, she displayed her "carpet of sound," as I have long called it. Sometimes the carpet was raspy—frayed, if you like—but it was always elegant and effective. Her entire career, Radvanovsky has been good and dependable. But on given nights, she is great.

Taking the role of Giovanna (Jane) Seymour was Jamie Barton, the fast-rising American mezzo. In Act I, she did not sound very Italian, and she did not sound like a bel canto singer. But as the evening progressed, she was formidable. Her duet with Radvanovsky was a powerhouse, and it was musical too. The women were simply hurling sound (musically). I felt that I was hearing something close to historic. In any event, this was big bel canto, bel canto as grand opera, and the crowd roared appropriately.

As he was four seasons ago, Ildar Abdrazakov was Enrico. I wrote in 2011, "The singer's bass voice seems to grow more beautiful every year, and his authority onstage seems to increase." I can say the same today. The intonation is as sure as ever. The voice glowed regally. He even negotiated a little passagework. When he bowed, by the way, he did so with an apologetic smile: his character, Henry VIII, is *such* an SOB.

One nice touch of this production by David McVicar is Anna's little daughter—an adorable redhead named Elizabeth. The great Sondra Radvanovsky will play her in *Roberto Devereux* soon.

A week after my *Bolena*, James Levine was in the pit, making his season debut. When the audience caught sight of him, there was near-tumult in the house. To many people, every Levine appearance is something of a bonus, given his medical struggles. On this night, the Met's music director was conducting Wagner, specifically *Tannhäuser*. He was not at his best in the overture. The music was slightly disjointed and blunt. It did not melt where it should have. But it was exciting enough, and the conductor was just warming up. In Acts II and III especially, he paced the opera superbly. He was brisk, or undawdling, but not bull-like. He conducted with Wagnerian humanity. (No, not a contradiction in terms, despite the hateful side of that genius.) The surging orchestral phrases in the Pilgrims' Chorus were rare and remarkable.

The Met orchestra was impressive, with the woodwinds excelling. I wish they—and the horns—could have taken solo bows (though this is seldom done in opera).

Eva-Maria Westbroek, the Dutch soprano, was Elisabeth. In her great, opening aria, "Dich, teure Halle," she was big, bright, and generous. She was also wobbly in her tone. But Westbroek's virtues can overwhelm any wobble. She is made to sing Elisabeth, that good and poignant soul. Venus was Michelle DeYoung, the American mezzo, who was in top form, a Wagnerian to the tips of her golden hair. "I heard a sound so sweet," sings the Young Shepherd in this show. So did I, when the shepherd, Ying Fang, started to sing. This Chinese-born soprano was pure, guileless—astounding.

We should quickly get to the men, for *Tannhäuser* is loaded with male voices, in the forms of knights and pilgrims. Johan Botha took the title role, and the South African tenor was strong as usual. He had a problem or two, including roughness in the middle voice. But Tannhäusers are like Turandots and Otellos: they don't grow on trees, and you're grateful for them. Peter Mattei, the Swedish baritone, was Wolfram. He was sometimes imperfect of pitch, but always beautiful of voice. That Austrian bass, Günther Groissböck, was back, singing Hermann. This time, I had no trouble hearing him, and what I heard was rich and right. There is a chorus too, especially a men's chorus—and the Met's hit a very high standard.

Fine as the singing generally was, this was a night to appreciate another shot of Levine. When the curtain was falling, and he was conducting the final bars, people started to applaud, as opera audiences do, and other people shushed them. The shushing was far worse—more spoiling—than the applause. Isn't it always?

The media

Parodic crudeness

by James Bowman

As I check in with *The Guardian* nearly every day, I find myself keeping a private tally of the top headlines of the year which could only have appeared in *The Guardian* and which thus make it the lovable home of what was once called the loony left but now, in the age of Jeremy Corbyn, I suppose must be called the left *tout court*. A few weeks ago the paper ran one that has to be a contender for top headline of this year, if not of all time: "A moment that changed me—my husband fell in love with a bonobo." That will certainly take some beating, though I would be sorry not to be able to give some kind of runner-up notice to "Cops ignore me because I have light skin. That just reaffirms their racism" or "I work at the US Senate. I shouldn't have to dance at strip clubs to feed my son" or "Do you applaud Caitlyn Jenner because she is brave, or because she's pretty?"—or, the previous occupant of the top slot of the year before it was deposed by the bonobo lady, "It's time to stop misgendering trans murder victims."

You think being murdered is bad? Just try being misgendered as well! But there also ought to be a prize for the provider of the most consistently self-parodying material, and that would have to go to the American feminist Jessica Valenti, who appears on the "Comment is Free" page of *The Guardian* seemingly more often than any other single contributor. Here are a few of my recent favorites from Ms. Valenti's impressive oeuvre: "Teaching my daughter to cook does not make me a bad feminist"; "You might not think you're sexist—until you take a look at your bookshelf"; "Women deserve orgasm equality"; and, her own entry into the always fruitful "It's time to . . ." category, "It's time to retire the idea that alcohol-facilitated rape is simply drunken sex." Whose idea is that, I wonder? And isn't retirement too good for him?

That reminds me of another of her columns titled: "Sexual assault is an epidemic. Only the most committed apologist can deny it." "Committed apologist?" Can she possibly mean committed apologist for sexual assault? I fear she can—because it is entirely typical of her to forestall argument by implying that that is what you are if you question her epidemiological metaphor. In the same way, "Worldwide sexism increases suicide risk in young women" suggests—and is *meant* to suggest—that if you're not a feminist who hews pretty closely to the Valentian idea of what "sexism" is, you're responsible for the deaths of young women all over the world.

What makes such writing parodic is the crudeness with which it reveals the assumption, usually more subtly adumbrated, that lies behind so much of what one reads from writers on the left—and, increasingly, on the right, too. This is the assumption that to disagree with the author is to brand oneself, ipso facto, as outcast from the world of civilized discourse, an "apologist" for rapists and criminals if not a rapist and a criminal oneself. There is a similar tactic at work in another one of Ms. Valenti's prize-winning efforts: "Opposition to legal abortion takes magical thinking and a lack of logic"—with the sub-head: "Those

intent on destroying access to abortion live in a dream world where they are right and just, even as they are continually provided evidence to the contrary." Not, that is, like anyone *we* know.

As must now be apparent, taking advice on logic from Jessica Valenti is like—but, no, there's nothing remotely like it. She seems to admit as much, too, in the opening paragraphs:

> There was a time when I empathized with those on the other side of the abortion debate. They felt abortion was murder—and no matter how wrong I knew they were, I understood that believing such a thing would mean fighting to make abortion illegal. But I don't understand anymore. There are too many holes in their logic, too much magical thinking and outright lies to leave room for meaningful debate. How can you find common ground if you're not even living on the same planet?

I wonder if she realizes that she is admitting the "lies" and the "magical thinking" and holey logic are all words that apply only on planet Valenti? The rest of the article is a typical mixture of muddled thinking and bad writing—suggesting either an absence of editorial supervision at *The Guardian* or a willingness to let her reform the language as well as the political culture:

> Perhaps the most dangerous fantasy, though, is the anti-choice claim that if *Roe v Wade* is overturned women won't be arrested for having abortions—even though this is already happening while the procedure is legal. In some cases, as with [Carly] Fiorina, these aren't self-deceptions but knowing lies, made to provocate [*sic*] and rally people behind the cause by any means. And the power of these lies are [*sic*] dependent on the widespread, manic self-righteousness that makes anti-choicers unable—or unwilling—to separate fact from fiction.

A nice concession to generosity of spirit there, to imply that they may just be stupid and deluded and not the lying evil scoundrels they otherwise appear to be.

This conceit of not living on the same planet with the speaker—usually the speaker is more careful to stipulate that he or she is the one living on planet Earth—is one that I discussed in some detail in these pages (see "Lexicographic lies" in *The New Criterion* of October 2012) in connection with Bill Clinton's claim at the Democratic convention in 2012 that Republicans were living in an "alternative universe." On that occasion, you may remember, he was referring to what he and his fellow conventioneers must have regarded as the preposterousness of Republican claims that, as Mr. Clinton put it, "the President and the Democrats don't really believe in free enterprise and individual initiative, how we want everybody to be dependent on the government, how bad we are for the economy." In other words, it was a complaint about the debasement of what is still anachronistically called political "debate." Mr. Clinton had a point, too—a point from which the fact that Democrats had made and are still making at least an equal contribution to this debasement does not distract. By now a similar idea, in the somewhat toned-down sense that the two parties are talking about quite different things, has become almost a commonplace. Here, for instance, is Philip Rucker in *The Washington Post* writing in the wake of the second Republican debate last September in an article headed "Are Democrats and Republicans talking about the same country?"

> To the Democratic candidates, the 2016 presidential campaign is about shrinking the gap between rich and poor; combating climate change; and expanding voting rights, gay rights and workplace equality for women. To listen to the Republican candidates is to hear an entirely different campaign—one that centers on defeating Islamic State terrorists, deterring a nuclear Iran, restricting abortion, and debating whether to deport illegal immigrants and construct a wall to keep them out. At a political moment of pitched voter anxiety, candidates in both parties talk in dark, sometimes apocalyptic tones—but about different issues, as if they're addressing two different countries.

At least it's countries and not planets. At least they're talking about different things rather

than referring to each other as the scum of the earth—though, as it happens, they are doing that, too. And, in a way, they *are* addressing two different countries: the America divided into red and blue states that everybody has come to take for granted since we were first introduced to it with the election of 2000. The conduct of the campaign so far has been such as to confirm the more general short-circuiting of debate in our political culture—debate in the genuine sense of a rational argument about political ends and the means to them—but the effect has been to reinforce even further the dominance of that culture by the media's hunt for scandal, which is what was crowding out any real debate long before the red-blue divide.

It was exactly this media scandal culture which was exposed for all to see with Megyn Kelly's first question to Donald Trump in the first Republican debate, which made no pretense of any interest in why he was proposing himself as a candidate for the presidency but only in what he would say when it was put to him that he was a bad man, unworthy to hold the office. "We're Living," as Jim Geraghty of *National Review* puts it, "in Post-Deliberative-Democracy America."

> Obama's entire presidency is marked by statements and behavior that suggest he's willing to engage and negotiate with the world's most brutal regimes, like Iran, but he finds his American critics and opposing lawmakers too silly, extreme, or malevolent, inherently beyond the pale. The man who bowed to the Saudi King is the same man who called on Latinos to "punish our enemies." The president who is so eager to pronounce "Pakistan," "Taliban," and "Koran" in the authentic style of locals dismisses his domestic critics as "teabaggers." There's little sign this will change. The entire apparatus of the Democratic party—from DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz to MSNBC to *The New York Times*' editorial board carry this same conviction that their opposition is self-evidently evil and not worthy of having a real debate with.

Mr. Geraghty was responding to a point made by Michael Gerson in *The Washington Post*, who had written that, "when the main players in our politics give up on deliberative democracy, it feels like some Rubicon is being crossed"—but was making the point that the Rubicon had been crossed some time ago, perhaps as early as the first days of the Obama administration when, by spurning Republicans in Congress with the announcement that "I won," the President first indicated a willingness to believe that, as Mr. Gerson put it, "opponents are evil—entirely beyond the normal instruments of reason and good faith. So the only option is the collection and exercise of power."

I think it may be a point worth making that this attitude goes back a lot further than the dawn of the Age of Obama and that the President himself could not have been so successful in ignoring constitutional constraints on his power if the ground had not been prepared for him a long time before by an irresponsibly partisan and progressive media. He depends on the scandal culture and the scandal culture depends on a rigid adherence to the Jessica Valenti view of the world, which is that the enemies of progressivism are bad people—racists, sexists, homophobes, liars, and bigots—just waiting to be exposed by the vigilant progressive paladins of the media. The President has merely adopted the progressive "narrative" prepared for him by the likes of Ms. Valenti by (for example) making Republicans and others opposed to gun control complicit in a mass murder in Oregon: "This is a political choice that we make to allow this to happen every few months in America. We collectively are answerable to those families who lose their loved ones because of our inaction." It's clear that, by "we" he means "they"; by "our" he means "their."

Donald Trump may have electrified a Republican audience by defying Megyn Kelly's scandal-mongering and living (so far) to tell the tale, but I'm afraid we must suppose the majority of Americans to be still susceptible to the whispered blandishments of scandal in their ears, and Republicans and conservatives listen as attentively as anyone else. Just look what happened when the House majority leader, Kevin McCarthy, made an injudicious remark about the House subcommittee which

has been investigating the murders of Americans in Benghazi, Libya, in 2012—a remark gleefully seized upon by the media and by the principal subject of that investigation, Hillary Clinton, as proof that the subcommittee was politically motivated in its persecution (as they saw it) of Mrs. Clinton. Why, this is what they had been saying all along!

Logically there was no inconsistency between the conduct of a public-spirited and disinterested Congressional inquiry into an obvious State Department screw-up and the awkwardly phrased welcome given its political effects by someone expecting to benefit from them—except, of course, that a man in Mr. McCarthy's position should have known that the Democrats and their media allies would see it as an admission that the inquiry was not public-spirited at all but politically motivated at the outset. Many conservatives have so far adapted themselves to living under the threat of being turned into scandals that they now take for granted the media's malign purpose towards them and, instead of blaming the media, blame each other for making the "stunningly stupid" comments (Jonathan S. Tobin in *Commentary*) that expose them to further bad-faith attacks by the media. Once the pattern of media exposure of secret Republican perfidy has been set, as it was set at least as long ago as Watergate, it becomes progressively easier to repeat it, even when, as here, it may seem to be of dubious applicability.

When, on the retirement of John Boehner, Mr. McCarthy was subsequently forced from the House Republican caucus's election to the Speakership, it was whispered about on the Internet that his withdrawal had to do with more than just his now-notorious "gaffe," but, oddly, the scandal-obsessed media adopted an unaccustomed reticence about this. *The New York Times* didn't mention it at all and *The Washington Post* only referred to a letter mentioning "misdeeds" from one of Mr. McCarthy's House colleagues—who proceeded to deny that he had had any misdeeds of Mr. McCarthy's in mind. The *Post* was inclined to take this denial at face value, though it did mention that Mr. McCarthy had made his announcement "with his wife at his side."

I might be inclined to congratulate the progressive media on their restraint if I didn't suspect that it was owing to their wish not to distract their public from the preferable scandal that the GOP was divided, at war with itself and so suffering from an "inability to govern," as Harry Reid slyly put it. "The GOP sinks deeper into chaos. Can it still function as a party?," wondered *The Washington Post*. "McCarthy Withdraws From Speaker's Race, Putting House in Chaos" headlined *The New York Times*. That putative "chaos" represented a swiftly-arrived-at media consensus and a *much* better scandal from the Democrats' point of view, I think you'll agree, than some boring sex scandal, even assuming that they could have rustled one up. It also allowed them to keep just as far away as ever from any of the substantive matters that might once have interested our political class—way back before it arrived in Washington with its mind already made up about everything.

Fiction chronicle

Bad luck & trouble

by Stefan Beck

This past summer I received a review copy of Janice Kaplan's book *The Gratitude Diaries: How a Year of Looking on the Bright Side Can Transform Your Life*. I was intrigued, not because I'm an enthusiastic consumer of self-help literature but because I guessed that Ms. Kaplan must have endured some biblically proportioned misfortunes to feel qualified to write an entire book about optimism. I checked her author photo: no disfigurement to speak of, but then again it was only a head shot. Would her bio place her as a refugee, a terminal patient, maybe the victim of a Twitter shaming campaign? No such luck. She "has enjoyed wide success as a magazine editor, television producer, writer, and journalist." She "lives in New York City and Kent, Connecticut." The book, I thought, ought to include a disclaimer for the genuinely suffering: *Your results may vary*.

Looking on the bright side is easy if it's the only side you've got. The useful trick if your life has really gone pear-shaped is to look not on your own bright side but on someone else's dark side, to be grateful that at least you aren't *that* guy. That is one of the more therapeutic ways to read the Book of Job, say, or the police blotter of a Florida newspaper. It is certainly the ideal spirit in which to read Steve Toltz's hilarious *Quicksand*, which makes the God of Job look downright unimaginative in His punishments—though one does not like to tempt fate by saying so.[1] Toltz, an Australian writer whose 2008 debut novel, *A Fraction of the Whole*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, has created in his hero Aldo Benjamin a strong contender for World's Unluckiest Man. If comedy is, as Mel Brooks once said, when someone else falls into an open sewer and dies, *Quicksand* is comic gold.

When we meet Aldo, he is drinking in an Australian beach bar with his best friend and foil, Liam Wilder, a failed novelist-cum-policeman who is desperate to appoint himself Aldo's personal Boswell. "[Y]ou'll inspire people," Liam says of his proposed novelization of Aldo's trials and tribulations. "To count their blessings." Aldo is, we soon learn, a paraplegic and ex-convict. He is a failed serial entrepreneur ("he just needs to find a way to appeal to 'people who want their instant gratification *yesterday*'"), a lightning rod for catastrophe, a man so unlucky in love that he was once accused of date rape while still a virgin. He can't even commit suicide properly, prompting him to explain his decision to try horse poison thus: "You'd have to pour yourself *literally buckets* of human poison just so you can reach the point where you can say: This is enough to kill a horse."

Quicksand is not a novel with a plot so much as it is a catalogue of the horrible fates that have befallen Aldo, from high school to his final, almost Christ-like disappearance. The book is a patchwork of different narrative styles and devices. It is told in part by Liam, but it also includes Liam's partial manuscript *Aldo Benjamin, King of Unforced Errors*; a transcript of Liam's long interro-

1 *Quicksand*, by Steve Toltz; Simon & Schuster, 368 pages, $26.

gation, in his capacity as constable, of Aldo in his capacity as a child-murder suspect; a transcript of Aldo's testimony as defendant in an unrelated homicide trial; some poetry; and a maybe-but-maybe-not-hallucinated conversation between Aldo and God. Forward momentum is effortlessly maintained by the reader's knowledge that things can get worse and his unsavory but irrepressible desire to know how, specifically, they are going to do so.

The incidents Toltz forces his poor protagonist to endure vary widely in their emotional tenor. We may smirk as Aldo is horse-whipped with a car antenna for trying to steal one of the revenge-porn photos a woman has hired him to remove from city lampposts. We may laugh helplessly when the madam of a brothel tries to charge him for the combination to a bike lock she had given him to secure his wheelchair ("The bouncer became alert though insultingly made no move to silence me, finding me harmless and unthreatening"). But there are moments of searing pain in *Quicksand* as well. Aldo's wife, about to perform at a music festival, discovers that their unborn child has died, and Aldo botches his attempt to comfort her. Aldo is savagely raped in prison, and "[t]he single consoling thought, that *so many* had gone through this before, was not consoling at all."

It is in moments like these that *Quicksand* ceases to be a mere shaggy-dog joke—albeit an unusually, deliriously inventive one—and wades into the ravenous quicksand of theodicy. Why is suffering on such a scale permitted? How much of it can one man be expected to take without succumbing to despair? And are any of the available defenses against despair—faith, friendship, love—effective when one has suffered as profoundly as Aldo Benjamin has? (In a sort of slam-poetic prayer, Aldo addresses God: "about love, I was on the fence—until You electrified it." Even the good in his life has gone bad.) Toltz wisely refrains from trying to give a definitive answer to any of these questions, but his book raises them and raises them in an insistent, even aggressive way. Few novels as funny as *Quicksand* manage anything remotely approaching its gravity.

Notwithstanding the fact that Aldo ends his days living on a figurative ash-heap—a tiny, rocky island near a popular Australian surfing beach—*Quicksand* explicitly mentions the Book of Job only once. "I know what you're thinking," he tells Liam in the midst of one of his manic fits of logorrhea. "*Is there no end to these words of yours, to your long-winded blustering? Job 8:1.*" Liam replies, "I totally wasn't thinking that." The reader—forewarned is forearmed—totally *will* think that at various points in Toltz's book. Toltz and his creations speak in belching cataracts of words, jokes, and aphorisms. These can be maddening as often as they are entertaining or moving. The reader's patience is, however, richly rewarded. Toltz shows us how language and its creative use make friendship possible by allowing us to transfigure and communicate the truth of our lives—and so to keep hope alive.

The French writer Patrick Modiano, the winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature, offers a subtler and less optimistic glimpse of an ill-fated life in his novella *Paris Nocturne*, newly translated by Phoebe Weston-Evans.[2] It is a book with a decidedly Kafkaesque bent, in which the narrator's troubles do not seem to admit any solution because the troubles themselves do not come into sharp enough focus. Despite a spare prose style that never strains after any novel or startling effects, Modiano suffuses every page of *Paris Nocturne* with dread. The book starts with trouble and will, the reader feels certain, end with something worse. It is a cautionary tale about knowing when one is out of his depth, knowing when to leave well enough alone.

"Late at night, a long time ago," our narrator begins, "when I was about to turn twenty-one, I was crossing Place des Pyramides on my way to Place de la Concorde when a car appeared suddenly from out of the darkness." The young man is hit, though not badly; a woman dressed in a fur coat, her face bloodied, exits the car. The two of them are spirited into a nearby hotel lobby while the police

2 *Paris Nocturne*, by Patrick Modiano; Yale University Press, 160 pages, $16.

arrive. The young man, though mentally "muddled" by the impact, takes note both of the woman's obvious wealth—"Her fur coat was certainly not one you would find at a flea market"—and of the presence of a "huge" man who "glanced at us coldly from time to time." He is shuttled between hospitals in a manner that seems not quite above board, to say the least. Ether is involved.

The huge man reappears to present our narrator with two things: an affidavit to sign, indicating that the woman was not at fault in the accident, and a fat wad of cash ("I had never held such a large sum of money"). Despite the generosity of this bribe, our narrator more or less fails to see it as one, noting that he "would have preferred a note" from the driver. And so, swaddled firmly in his own naïveté, he resolves to track her down. The remainder of this very short book traces his attempts to do so. He also muses on his past, his relationship with his father, and some inexplicable gaps in his memory. He feels a strange gratitude toward the woman: "I needed the shock. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on what my life had been up to that point. I had to admit that I was 'heading for disaster'—to use the words I'd heard others say about me."

Perhaps because of the narrator's faulty memory, he doesn't give a very thorough account of himself, and the reader is left to wonder in what sense he might have been headed for disaster. Is it to do with his recklessness, borne of his naïveté? Or is it perhaps to do with his aimlessness, his apparent inability to do something useful with himself? It is equally difficult to get a firm grasp of what might have passed between the narrator and his father, who is mentioned only in oblique passages like this one:

> I recalled those last meetings with my father, when I was about seventeen years old, when I never dared to ask him for any money. Life had already drawn us apart and we met up in cafés early in the morning, while it was still dark. The lapels of his suits became increasingly threadbare and each time the cafés were further from the city centre. I tried to remember if I had met up with him in the neighborhood where I was walking.

What was the nature of those meetings? Just how did life draw the narrator and his father apart, given how little "life" the narrator seems to have going for himself? Did the father reject the son? If *Paris Nocturne* were a longer book, it would be all but impossible to engage with; it raises questions to which the author himself may not even have answers in mind. It is all atmosphere, all mood, like a Simenon novel minus its plot or resolution. It generates suspense like a thriller but is content to do nothing, at least nothing very dramatic, with it. Whether our narrator gets the disaster he seems fated for is left ambiguous. About that, as about many other things, the reader can only speculate.

It would be silly to suppose that this is anything but what Modiano intended. *Paris Nocturne* is more interested in memory and its vagaries than it is in being a detective novel. Yet, one can't suppress a philistine wish that Modiano had seen what is clear as day to the reader: if creeping down dimly-lit city streets is fun, it would be that much more fun with a proper Harry Lime darting in and out of the shadows. Would *Paris Nocturne* really have suffered for having a more conventional, more satisfying resolution?

If *Paris Nocturne* disappoints by delivering less incident, less catastrophe, than it promises, the fifteen stories in Ann Beattie's collection *The State We're In* delight by promising little and delivering even less.[3] The book is subtitled "Maine Stories," but the state alluded to in the title might as well be one of suspended animation. The conflicts navigated by Beattie's characters are, by and large, vanishingly small. They lead lives in miniature, lives that recall the ships-in-bottles or snow globes one might find in a rental property. At their lowest-key, Beattie's stories can elicit a kind of anti-schadenfreude: at least my misfortunes aren't *that* boring. Yet more often

3 *The State We're In*, by Ann Beattie; Scribner, 224 pages, $25.

they show that human beings do not measure their own difficulties against the Worst That Could Happen. Even a relatively trivial challenge or experience can carry a weighty significance.

Several of the stories in *The State We're In* are connected by shared characters. (The rest are connected, of course, by the fact that they take place in Maine, but the details of Beattie's setting make little impression on the imagination. Fleeting references to, for instance, the Bose outlet in Kittery only serve to remind the reader that he shouldn't expect fireworks from this volume.) Jocelyn, a teenager trapped with her aunt and uncle for the summer, appears in "What Magic Realism Would Be," "Endless Rain into a Paper Cup," and "The Repurposed Barn," stories strong enough that the reader wonders whether this character might not have merited a novel of her own.

In the first of these stories, Jocelyn is in summer school, struggling to write an essay about Magical Realism:

> Now was the hour: Uncle Raleigh would look at what she'd written and offer advice and encouragement, while she mentally corkscrewed her finger outside her ear and pitied him because he had no job, and he limped, and he was a nice man, but also sort of an idiot. In any case, he—her mother's brother—was a lot nicer than his dim wife, Aunt Bettina Louise Tompkins, whose initials were BLT. Hold the mayo.

Jocelyn doesn't read like an anthropologically accurate rendering of a twenty-first-century adolescent—that BLT joke is pretty tin-eared stuff for a writer with a strong sense of detail—but she doesn't need to. She effectively represents every young person whose consciousness, though not yet fully formed, is developed enough to register that the adults surrounding her are not quite on the ball—and may in fact, as in the case of Aunt Bettina, have unignorable deficiencies of their own. This discovery is a piece of bad luck that befalls most adolescents at one time or another. Beattie does some of her best work reminding us of how growing up can be a tragedy in itself.

"Silent Prayer" and "Road Movie" elegantly capture the tensions beneath the surface of adult relationships, a marriage on the one hand, an adulterous affair on the other. "Silent Prayer" consists almost entirely of dialogue—the bickering and recriminations of a husband and wife as the former makes final preparations for a business trip. It is the kind of tedious domestic scene we could generally do with less of, but it succeeds by calling attention to and slyly ridiculing its own characters. "Do you have any idea at all where my black Nikes are?" asks the husband, just after delivering a self-pitying lecture about the thankless fulfillment of his duties. "Not the Pumas that are mostly black, but the Nikes?"

"I wonder how other couples talk to each other," his wife says a little later. "Maybe Roz Chast has some idea. That's about the only person I can think of." These people, with their petty concerns—the inconveniences of upward mobility—are nobody we envy or would ever like to emulate, but Beattie manages, ultimately, to humanize them. In "Road Movie," an unpleasant man—the boss, in fact, of the unpleasant husband from "Silent Prayer"—stands revealed to his mistress when he thoughtlessly insults a motel employee:

> Moira said to Kunal, "I know you're busy, but I wanted to apologize for him. We're not married, you know, and he's never going to marry me, but that's neither here nor there. You've seen to it that we had a lovely time here, and he appreciates that just as much as I do. He's just one of those guys. You read him right. I apologize."

We may be unlucky in whom we love, these stories say, but the lucky among us learn to accept the bad in others and perhaps to be enlarged by the experience.

Sometimes Beattie seems content to dispense with gravity and just indulge in wicked fun. A case in point is "The Little Hutchisons," the funniest story in *The State We're In*. It seems to be about the dullest sort of domestic drama. The narrator is agonizing over how to refuse a friend's request to use her backyard for a wedding party. "I might simply have said yes," she tells us, "if not for the fact

that I once saw [the groom] deliberately run the lawn mower over a turtle. He wasn't a child when he did this; he was a junior at Colby." She ultimately finds the inner strength to say no, ruining the friendship. Bored yet? Out of nowhere the sleepy story becomes a diabolical meditation on karma, and the only "gravity" in evidence is, with the help of a tent and a windstorm, the instrument of the groom's punishment.

Many of the stories in *The State We're In* shouldn't really *work*, and yet they linger in the mind. They are no less potent for being so slight and self-contained. At their best they remind us how little life we sometimes have to work with, what small things our joy or misery may turn on. And they urge us, if we read them in the right state of mind, to reach beyond the confines of an easygoing Vacationland reality after greater joys, even if they bring with them bigger trouble.

Jane Urquhart's novel *The Night Stages* is a book positively swimming in misery and trouble.[4] Unlike *Quicksand*, which allows us to laugh even as we experience the higher emotions of pity or compassion, it is unrelievedly bleak. Even its settings—a fogbound airport in Gander, Newfoundland; the wild hills and mountains of Ireland—militate against our sense that anything might improve for Urquhart's characters. *The Night Stages* would be an exhausting read at half its considerable length. Yet it is a beautiful book, both beautifully written and invaluable in its attention to how suffering shapes and ennobles the soul. In its treatment of loss, loneliness, heartbreak, and thwarted dreams, it possesses an emotional maturity rarely found in books about happier lives.

The Night Stages is the sort of novel typically called "sprawling," that critical shorthand for a book whose author has forced it to accommodate more characters and narratives than it ought to contain. In this case, though, the term really applies. Urquhart has woven together three storylines that not only complement each other without ostentation but also convey a powerful sense of time's passage and pain's long reach.

The first of these threads is about a woman named Tamara who, leaving behind Ireland and her married lover, Niall, finds herself stuck in the aforementioned Gander airport. She has nothing to do but contemplate its massive mural—Kenneth Lochhead's *Flight and Its Allegories* (1957–1958)—and her own past, including her service during the Second World War, flying planes for Britain's Air Transport Auxiliary. The second thread, the book's biggest gamble, follows Lochhead's development as an artist and at last the creation of the mural, a labor of love in egg tempera requiring over one thousand eggs. The ghostly "dialogue" set up between Tamara's act of memory and the fruits of Kenneth's creativity affords a melancholy reminder of how rare human connection can be. We take it where we can get it.

The third thread, the one with the emotional fuel to have been a book unto itself, treats the youth, early manhood, and rivalry of Niall and his brother Kieran. Their lives begin with the tragedy of their mother's secret drug addiction and eventual suicide; Kieran develops a penchant for emotional outbursts so severe that he must live apart from his father and brother with the family's housekeeper. As he grows older, Kieran discovers the pleasures of bicycle riding and then racing. Under the tutelage of a local coach, in fact more of a guru, he trains to ride as an independent in an eight-day stage race, the Rás Tailteann. (The "night stages" of the title are the competitors nickname for their drinking bouts, which "were an antidote of sorts to the day's suffering and . . . an acknowledgment of more to come.")

The Rás, as it is known, is the novel's centerpiece, its deftly rendered action a welcome respite from *The Night Stages*'s persistent gloom. Until it isn't. Kieran, already in the throes of a deadly serious romantic rivalry with his brother, is pitted against him in the Rás as well. This lends the proceedings a special urgency, to be sure, but the turn things take leads to still more tragedy. Kieran, defeated

4 *The Night Stages*, by Jane Urquhart; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 416 pages, $27.

in the only thing that really mattered to him, withdraws from life—disappears, in fact. The loss of his brother is a wound from which Niall cannot recover. His unshakable obsession with Kieran's whereabouts plays a great role in Tamara's decision to leave him at last.

It is difficult to convey how something that sounds so emotionally overwrought can play out with such grace and sophistication on the page. Granted, there are elements of *The Night Stages* that do more than flirt with melodrama. One must suspend some disbelief: Though it would take a lifetime to get over a mother's suicide or the loss of a sibling, most men would not take quite so long as Kieran does to get over a romantic failure. And we have passed over in polite silence (until now) Urquhart's tendency to flog the figurative language of flight and of Niall's own profession, meteorology. (The Book of Job even reappears: "*Hast thou entered into the storehouses of the snow*? . . . *Hast thou beheld the treasures of the hail?*") The symbolism at times becomes a crutch.

But all in all, *The Night Stages* works. Why? Perhaps because, unlike books that merely seek to manipulate our emotions, this one wrestles honestly with one of the few questions that matters: is there anything to be gained from suffering? The answer is plain, though it isn't easy to swallow: it's the pain of losing things that teaches us what we can't live without. The good news is that, as it happens in Kieran's case, the lesson isn't always the one we were expecting. Even the God of Job cuts us a break once in a while.

Books

Family ties

by Gerald J. Russello

Albania does not, typically, sit at the center of most accounts of the conflict between the nations of Christendom and the empire of the Ottoman Turks. Yet a simple look at a map will show its importance. Modern Albania and parts of present-day Montenegro, Bosnia, and Croatia were by turns under the control of the Ottoman Empire and the European powers, especially Venice, and they sit a short distance across the Adriatic from Italy. That control was at times tenuous; composed of semi-autonomous hill clans, quasi-free towns, and a welter of religious and ethnic loyalties, this part of the Balkans was, in the sixteenth century, crisscrossed with intrigue and complicated alliances.

Exactly how complicated is revealed in Noel Malcolm's masterful account of three interrelated families in Albania and their roles in the political, military, and diplomatic convulsions of a crucial period of European history.[1] The sixteenth century for Europe was the century of both Martin Luther and the battle of Lepanto, a great age of discovery and exploration but still with the memories of Muslim domination of Spain and the constant threat of military attack. The Turks had taken much of the Kingdom of Hungary in the 1520s and had even laid siege to Vienna, capital of the Holy Roman Empire.

Malcolm, one of Britain's leading historians and an expert on, among other things, the work of Thomas Hobbes, found this engrossing story almost by accident. Malcolm came across a passing reference to an all-but-lost book on Albania by a sixteenth-century Albanian author—a first, if it existed. Years of searching finally resulted in a mention of the treatise by one Antonio Bruni among the manuscripts in the Vatican Library. His suspicions were confirmed; the book itself had been forgotten for centuries, as had the member of the remarkable family who wrote it.

This discovery lead Malcolm on a quest to uncover the Bruni and in the process tell a remarkably rich story, filled with voivods and Vlachs, sancaks and dragomans—terms unfamiliar to Western European ears but central to this history. And Malcolm also recovers a history of Albania, a nation deeply and firmly entrenched in the political and military history of Europe. Albanians fleeing the Turks settled in Italy (as they continued to do more recently under the Communists), and then throughout Europe.

> At the battle of Avetrana (in Apulia) in 1528, Albanian stradiots [Venetian-trained fighters] recruited by the Kingdom of Naples found themselves fighting against other stradiots, both Albanian and Greek, who had been recruited by Venice. At the siege of Boulogne in 1544 troops serving under the English king included "Arbannoises"; a generation later, Albanian soldiers fought in the King of France's army during the Wars of Religion; the Spanish army in Flanders in the 1570s had Albanian stradiots

1 *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World*, by Noel Malcolm; Oxford University Press, 604 pages, $34.95.

armed with javelins and there were Albanian soldiers in Brussels in 1576.

This diaspora originated with the defeat in 1478 of the Albanian fortress of Krujë, held until his death in 1468 by Gjergj Kastriota, known to the Turks as "Iskander Bey:" Lord Alexander, another name from the East.

The Brunis at this time lived in the Albanian town of Ulcinj, which in the sixteenth century was a Venetian possession, although hard by the Ottoman border. There the Bruni family had moved from Vincenza in Italy some centuries before and intermarried with the local families. One of those families was the Bruti, who had been living in the city of Durrës until that fell to the Ottomans in 1501. Barnaba Bruti survived the conquest and fled. His son Antonio Bruti was born in 1518 and made his way to Ulcinj as a result of pressure from the Ottomans due, presumably, to his family's questionable loyalties. Antonio Bruti married a sister of three Bruni brothers, linking the two families. If that were not enough, a third family, the Armanis, married into the Bruni and Bruti families and brought with them a certain military flair. For they were chieftains of one of those hill clans, the Pamaliotis, and commanded a force of warriors in the countryside, unlike their more urban relations.

So as we enter the sixteenth century, we see a well-established set of families in a small Venetian possession on the Albanian side of the Adriatic, with repetitive names and strange backstories. What's the big deal? Well, it turns out that these families ended up involved in everything from the Huguenot wars in France to Lepanto and embassies to the Ottomans, Jesuit schooling to lords of Moldavia, before their tales go cold. Malcolm has mastered a wealth of detail and massive amounts of original and academic sources to bring us a truly synthetic work of European history, which places the existential threat of Turkish conquest against a backdrop of other crises and trends. And, moreover, it is simply a delight to read.

Malcolm traces the fortunes of these families through twenty-two chapters, detailing Antonio Bruti's service for Venice against the Ottomans, Gasparo Bruni's induction into the Knights of Malta, and the dragoman "dynasty" started by Antonio Bruti's son Cristoforo. Along the way, we are treated to descriptions of a range of subjects, such as Ottoman and European administrative practices, maritime strategies, the difference between a pirate and a corsair, and Balkan linguistics. A dragoman was an interpreter, and Cristoforo lived in Istanbul initially in the pay of the Venetian government. Istanbul was a sixteenth-century Casablanca, with agents of England, Spain, Venice, the Hapsburgs, as well as the Sultan, all vying for information, influence, and power. To show how fluid these power relations were, in 1588 Cristoforo stopped working for the Venetians and instead became engaged as dragoman to Mehmed Pasha, a high Turkish official close to the Sultan. After Cristoforo's death, his descendants continued as dragomans, usually for Venice, for well over a century. The only regret in this chapter is that the Bruni dynasty did not seem to interact with Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the Hapsburg emperor's ambassador who was held quasi-captive in Istanbul in the 1550s and whose *Turkish Letters* provide a portrait of diplomacy in this same era. In the hands of a postmodern academic, the shifting loyalties and intermixed faiths and ethnicities of the time would be cause to claim the end of "identity" in the name of some ideological construct like "colonialism." Malcolm knows better. Who you are and where you came from mattered in the sixteenth century, and how society is organized also matters. That lesson from history remains as true today as it did for the Bruni and Bruti.

One set piece is the great naval battle of Lepanto, which took place in October 1571 and was one of the three significant events saving Europe from conquest, the others being the expulsion of the Moors from Spain and the defeat of the Turks at Vienna in 1683. It is a tribute to Malcolm's skill that Lepanto, as important as it was, does not steal the attention from the other events in the lives of his subject families, and indeed the battle becomes more comprehensible now that we

know what was occurring in the overlapping worlds the Brunis and Brutis inhabited. And the Brunis were, of course, in the thick of it. Gasparo was a captain of a papal galley (Pope Paul V obviously not being a believer that the use of arms was prohibited.) Only four years earlier, Gasparo had become very likely the first native Albanian admitted into the Knights of Malta. The Ottoman warship that rammed his own at Lepanto included among its slave-rowers his brother Giovanni. Giovanni, a Catholic archbishop, had been taken by the Ottomans when they reduced the city of Bar. In one of the tragedies of war, he was killed by Christian soldiers not, according to Malcolm, a hundred meters from where his brother was fighting. Gasparo survived and was later to serve as commander of the papal forces in defense of the Pope's French enclave, Avignon, against the Huguenots. He was joined in France by his son Antonio, who had entered the Jesuits the year after Lepanto.

Lepanto continues to astonish; a collection of squabbling European powers, already threatened by the Protestants in the north, coalesce against the great slave-empire in the world; Malcolm reminds us that in contrast to the largely free societies of Christian Europe, "[i]t was a basic feature of the Ottoman system that the government consisted primarily of slaves of the Sultan, who owed him their undying allegiance because they had been uprooted from, or had never belonged to, any local interest-group within the Empire"; this was especially true of Christians, whose sons were taken from them as part of a regular levy, converted to Islam, and trained to serve the Sultan. One need not engage in moral relativism or deny the real horrors of European history not to see real reasons why the Pope organized the Holy League against Istanbul. The aftereffects of the League's victory should not be underestimated. Malcolm opines that among the greatest consequences of Lepanto was that it eliminated any real opportunity of the Turks to invade Italy themselves.

There is much more in this chronicle, all told with scholarly precision but also with the drive of a well-told story. The book ends with a return to Bruni's rediscovered manuscript. Through painstaking research, Malcolm traces its echoes in succeeding accounts across the years, even as the original rested quietly in the Vatican. In *Agents of Empire*, Malcolm makes these documents live again.

Domestic disturbance

T. S. Eliot, edited by Valerie Eliot & John Haffenden
The Letters of T. S. Eliot:
Volume 5, 1930–1931.
Yale University Press, 862 pages, $85

reviewed by Denis Donoghue

T. S. Eliot edited *The Criterion* from October 1922 to January 1939, when he closed it down, telling his readers that "a feeling of staleness has crept over me." The fifth volume of the *Letters* is almost entirely a record of his day-to-day efforts to keep volumes IX and X of *The Criterion* going as a vehicle of European thought, not merely of English thought. But it never became European, despite his persistent efforts: he was not sufficiently in touch with European writers. As late as March 28, 1931, he wrote to Stephen Spender:

> There is a philosopher named Martin Heidegger—a disciple of the great Husserl, who really is good, I think, though far from lucid—whom I have been agonizing over.

He admired Jacques Maritain, Ramón Fernández, Rémy de Gourmont, and E. R. Curtius, but those four swallows did not make a summer. To fill the journal with essays and reviews, he had to rely on the home team: John Middleton Murry, Herbert Read, Montgomery Belgion, Bonamy Dobrée, Father Martin D'Arcy, I. A. Richards, William Empson, A. L. Rowse, and a few more.

As a correspondent, Eliot was hopeless. Nearly every letter begins with an apology. He discovered a hundred ways of saying "I'm sorry," sometimes adding "humbly" to ensure forgiveness. An instance: one day in October 1930, C. S. Lewis submitted to *The Criterion*

an essay, "The Personal Heresy in Criticism." No reply. Six months later, on April 19, 1931, he wrote to Eliot to enquire about the status of the essay. Meanwhile, on November 2, 1930, as Professor Haffenden reports, Lewis's friend and colleague Owen Barfield approached Eliot on Lewis's behalf. To no avail. Again, on May 28, 1931, Barfield pleaded:

> I dare not say that so helpless and unjustifiable a creature as a freelance contributor is "entitled" to anything, but in the circumstances it certainly seems to me that equity looks to you for an act of grace.

The act came forth, half-heartedly. Eliot's "Dear Sir" letter of June 1, 1931, started with an apology, followed by the suggestion that Mr. Lewis might care to submit the essay again in nine months' time, "if you have not meanwhile published it." Lewis replied, the following day:

> I have no objection to waiting nine months: what I should like to be more assured of is the prospect I have at the end of the nine months. . . . I am quite prepared for the risk of your "corrected impressions." What I am less ready to lie at the mercy of is the mere richness or poverty of suitable contributions—the fullness or emptiness of your drawer—nine months hence, which nobody can predict . . .

Having been so cheeky, Lewis relaxed to the extent of giving Eliot an account of the relation between the essay and the "neo-Aristotelian theory of literature" which the rest of the book, when complete, would enforce. The reference to "corrected impressions" indicates that at least one further letter from Eliot to Lewis is missing. In the event, it hardly mattered. Eliot did not publish Lewis's essay; it had to wait many more months than nine to be published in *Essays and Studies of the English Association* (1934).

Two of the letters in Volume 5 detained me. The first was from Eliot to Reverend Charles Harris on November 25, 1930, addressed "Dear Harris" and marked *Confidential*. It didn't stay confidential. Eliot intended writing something in reply to the Report of the Lambeth Conference (1930) and, before doing so, to discuss various issues with his ethical experts Reverend Harris, Reverend Francis Underhill, and the Bishop of Chichester. The discussion with Harris included the question of contraception. Eliot wrote:

> I agree with you about the actual odiousness both of idea and methods: it is one reason (among others) why in my younger and unregenerate time I found (without any sense of sin) adultery to be quite unsatisfactory.

He did not indicate when his younger and unregenerate time had ended: maybe it ended on June 26, 1915 when he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood, or on Shrove Tuesday, February 20, 1928, when he made his first Confession and, then or thenabouts, took a vow of chastity. He did not explain, in the letter to Harris, the additional reasons for finding adultery unsatisfactory. That is an awkward word to use even if we regard his sense of sin, for the moment, as null.

The second ambiguous letter is from Eliot to William Force Stead, dated December 2, 1930:

> *Could* you come up and lunch with me soon? I want to talk to you—as for your suggestion—my dear—it has been put *strongly* by my wife's R. C. doctor—by Underhill—and by others less qualified. But I shd like to talk to *you* because *you* know how difficult it is. I will say that I have now a certain happiness which makes celibacy easy for me for the first time. I think you will know what I am speaking of.

Professor Haffenden's note reads in full:

> Gordon, *T. S. Eliot*, 294, construes this letter thus: "Father Underhill took it upon himself to advise separation." Seymour-Jones [biographer of Vivienne], 465, concurs.

Haffenden doesn't say whether or not he too concurs. Celibacy doesn't necessarily entail separation. I concede that when Kenneth B. Murdock, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, wrote to Eliot on October 27, 1931, inviting him to take up the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship for the academic

session 1932–1933, Eliot did not delay long in accepting, and in deciding that he would travel to Cambridge, Massachusetts, by himself, leaving Vivienne to spend seven distraught months alone in London. In the event, the seven months extended themselves to nine, allowing Eliot to give a set of lectures at the University of Virginia and another set at Johns Hopkins. In the middle of May 1933 he wrote to his solicitor in London, instructing him to arrange a Deed of Separation from Vivienne—a document which, presented to her for her signature, she refused to sign.

In *Thoughts after Lambeth* (1931), the word "adultery" does not appear, but "contraception" does, as in Eliot's rebuke to the bishops for leaving unanswered the questions: "When is it right to limit the family and right to limit it only by continence? And: When is it right to limit the family by contraception?" He himself did not answer those questions in *Thoughts after Lambeth*, but in a letter of November 25, 1930, to George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, he wrote:

> As for the Sex Resolution, my own view is very simple: I welcome the independence of the Bishops in not slavishly following Rome, and I only regret the insertion of the clause allowing private judgement: it seems to me to be distinctly the place for insisting that the laity should take spiritual counsel and direction—and incidentally for gradually making the parish clergy prepare themselves for being able to give (perhaps with the collaboration of medical men) wise direction. You may find such suggestions impertinent from me, but these are among the matters which I should like to discuss with you.

Not for the first time, I am astonished by Eliot's creativity, in those two years, given the domestic turmoil with which it had to contend. "Ash-Wednesday," "Marina," and the two parts of "Coriolan"—"Difficulties of a Statesman" and "Triumphal March"—a translation of Saint-John Perse's "Anabase," six BBC broadcast talks on seventeenth-century poetry, three further talks on Dryden, essays on Tourneur, Dryden, and Heywood, and *Thoughts after Lambeth*: such an achievement disarms criticism. Not that the work is all of a piece. "Ash-Wednesday" and "Marina" issue from the same imagination under different propulsions, while the two parts of "Coriolan" adumbrate a different kind of poetry and an imagination in a virulent relation to itself. But I should report that Geoffrey Hill regrets that Eliot did not fulfill the promise of "Coriolan." If he had continued the "Coriolan" sequence beyond "Difficulties of a Statesman" and "Triumphal March," "he would have possessed an instrument of great range and resonance." "Coriolan" remains, as Hill writes in *Alienated Majesty*, "one of the major 'lost' sequences in English poetry of the twentieth century and *Four Quartets* is the poorer for Eliot's having 'lost' it."

As for the domestic woes with which Eliot, in those two years, had to contend: Vivienne was endlessly ill, bedridden much of the time, and, in the rare intervals in which her health improved, she was wild to a degree that raised a question of insanity. Eliot was patient and tender until his patience wore out and his tenderness sought relief in cruelty. I can't understand how he decided to go to Harvard for seven months and extended his absence for a further two months from the most vulnerable person in his world. The arrangements he made for *The Criterion* and his duties as a director of Faber and Faber seem, by comparison, almost light-hearted.

Ideas still matter

Frank M. Turner, edited by Richard A. Lofthouse
European Intellectual History from Rousseau to Nietzsche.
Yale University Press, 320 pages, $40

reviewed by Justin Zaremby

If you find yourself at a dinner party with a group of historians and the conversation begins to lag, fill your glass to the rim and ask your dining companions to define intellectual history. For decades historians have debated the field's elusive definition and relevance. Broadly speaking, intellectual historians study

ideas that have shaped politics, culture, and economics; the men and women who put such ideas to paper; and the circles in which such thinkers traveled. Beyond this list, however, intellectual historians and their critics agree on little. Some have suggested that intellectual history helps explain key moments in national and world history. Others accuse its practitioners of honoring the philosophical lives and ideas of elites while ignoring how little great ideas mattered for disempowered minorities or an intellectually unengaged majority. At the heart of debates about the role of ideas in history, and the place of historians who study them, is a question of whether ideas matter—and, if so, which ones.

For nearly four decades, Yale undergraduates (including this reviewer) were deftly and subtly guided through these questions by Frank Turner, the John Hay Whitney Professor of History. Turner's lecture course on European intellectual history filled the university's collegiate gothic lecture halls with students eager to believe that ideas did indeed shape politics, culture, and economics, who then left inspired to pursue further study of the arts and letters. His untimely death in 2010 deprived current and future students of this opportunity. Fortunately, Richard A. Lofthouse, the editor of *Oxford Today* and a former student of Turner's, has collected and edited the professor's lectures, thus preserving a comprehensive and accessible introduction to modern European thought.

Turner was a student of nineteenth-century British intellectual life. His books included studies of the tension between science and religion, as well as the influence of Greek thought on Victorian culture. His 2002 biography of John Henry Newman, the sainted Victorian convert and cardinal, was magisterial. *The Western Heritage*, a Western civilization history textbook he coauthored with Donald Kagan and Steven Ozment which is now in its eleventh edition, is one of the most widely used textbooks in the country. In addition to being a prolific scholar and award-winning teacher, Turner served as Yale's Provost, director of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and University Librarian.

European Intellectual History from Rousseau to Nietzsche consists of fifteen lectures that explore the ideas and oppositions that ushered Europe into modernity. Although they are not necessarily guided by one overarching argument, the lectures reveal the development of a decidedly modern mindset. Turner writes about the greats—Rousseau, Tocqueville, Mill, Darwin, Marx, Carlyle, and Nietzsche to name a few—relying heavily on primary sources to explore their ideas. He not only explicates their writings, but also focuses on the lasting impact of these thinkers on politics and culture, and how ideas like evolution, race, gender, and faith transformed European life. Turner's students recall him stating that the problem with intellectual history is that it too frequently lacks history, a sin his own work does not commit. In Turner's lectures, the history of ideas informs and is informed by art history, music history, social history, political history, economic history, and the history of science.

Alienated intellectuals struggling to reshape humanity bookend the lectures. Rousseau, Turner explains, transformed intellectuals from influential writers to critics of their societies. Rousseau called for liberation through a radically egalitarian society that would, through the creation of a general will and civil religion, free man from the corrupting influence of contemporary politics and society. Nietzsche, however, rejected this optimism. Turner's Nietzsche believed that human nature remained fundamentally indeterminable and thus subject at all times to the whim of the powerful. Only by repudiating bourgeois liberalism, with its false promises of transformation, could man recognize the fundamental nihilism of his existence. Having accepted this bleak view, certain men—his *Übermenschen*—might embrace true freedom. For Turner, both Rousseau and Nietzsche struggle with the uncertainty of human existence, and the power of men to overcome that uncertainty. Both intellectuals are, like many of his subjects, cynics and idealists.

Turner traces constant tensions in European thought between idealism and despair, and

between optimism and pessimism. He explores the rise of liberalism in the writings of Mill and Tocqueville, applauds its success in the political sector, and decries the failure of progressive thinkers to liberate women from their restricted role in nineteenth-century society. Two lectures focus on the influence of Darwin's evolutionary theories and Europe's confrontation with the question of how to defend ethical behavior in a new world where "man's most fundamental place in the universe was no longer just a little lower than the angels, but rather just a bit higher than the great primates." He carefully describes the appeal of Marx's materialist attack on liberalism, and Europe's devastating turn to nationalism, racial theories, and anti-semitism.

Turner's sources go beyond the printed page: he viewed intellectual history as encompassing not just the written word, but all forms of artistic expression. Two of his most important lectures focus on John Ruskin and the gothic revival and the rise of the cult of the artist in Romantic thought. He describes the emergence of the artist as social critic, and reveals how concepts of creativity and genius were transmitted from artists' studios to the political realm. The reader is thus troubled and moved by his claim in a lecture on Richard Wagner that "What is perhaps most remarkable and ultimately most thought-provoking about the phenomenon of Wagner is the capacity to join into one ball of aesthetic and cultural wax some of the most beautiful music ever composed in the Western world with political, social, and racial ideas that led to the most reprehensible events in modern Western history."

The lectures are truly interdisciplinary, bringing together print, paint, and sound, and provide insight into what made their author a great teacher. Turner was rigorous and exacting, but his deep familiarity with his subject gave him license to engage in a certain impish bluntness (we learn that "John Stuart Mill was reared to be an emotional cripple" and that "It was Rousseau who made the hatred of one's own culture the stance of the cultivated person"). His intellectual history was messy and avoided easy ideological categorization. He expected that his students would closely study texts, as well as the remarkable collections at the Yale University Art Gallery and Yale Center for British Art. Because the focus in his lectures is on ideas and their relationship to politics and culture, with academic debates being presented very subtly, the lectures were (and remain) accessible to a wide audience. Turner not only made students good readers and historians, but also taught them that they were the heirs to and participants in a vitally important and complicated intellectual tradition. For those lucky enough to have taken History 271, the lectures will feel like a homecoming. For those who did not have that privilege, the lectures will be a new and lasting treat.

Changes & chances

Andrew Hadfield
Edmund Spenser: A Life.
Oxford University Press, 624 pages, $27.95

reviewed by Paul Dean

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, written in a stanza form he invented and which bears his name, was published in two installments in 1590 and 1596. An eight-book Arthurian epic, whose intertwined quest narratives celebrate the principal moral virtues, it was admired by Pope, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats as an achievement to rank with *Paradise Lost*, while Yeats published, in 1902, a selection of Spenser's work with a long, brilliant, perverse introduction. On Spenser's death in 1599, Westminster Abbey was the obvious place to put him, next to Chaucer's grave, with a monumental inscription on the wall, hailing him "prince of poets." He is now, I suspect, the great unread poet of the Elizabethan age. Despite the pioneering advocacy of C. S. Lewis ("To read him is to grow in mental health") and the existence of excellent modern editions, his deliberately archaic style, his copiousness, his leisurely pace, his allegorical method, his Christian faith, his topical references to the political and

ecclesiastical controversies of the day are all deterrents. (Yeats, while admiring his symbolism, found the allegory unreal, concluding that "He had no deep moral or religious life.") Yet if we really want to understand the literary milieu of the mid-sixteenth century, we cannot ignore him.

Andrew Hadfield, a scholar well-known for his work on Shakespeare and Renaissance political thought, has produced a carefully researched biography. Spenser's life is patchily documented—we would like to know more about his two wives and his children—but its main lines are clear. Born in London in the early 1550s (the exact date is uncertain), he was educated at Merchant Taylors' School under the renowned classical scholar Richard Mulcaster, and proceeded, in 1569, to Pembroke Hall, Cambridge where he formed a crucial friendship with the humanist scholar Gabriel Harvey. Both Merchant Taylors' and Pembroke were staunchly Protestant institutions. After a brief period in which he disappears from view, Spenser turns up again as secretary to the bishop of Rochester in 1578. He must have been working on his first major poem, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), a linguistic as well as a literary landmark for its use of archaic spelling and vocabulary and its promotion of Protestant ideas through the genre of pastoral. The *Calender* balances nostalgia for the age of Skelton, Henry VIII's court poet, and beyond him Chaucer, Spenser's "well of English undefiled," and Langland, with strands of radical populism and social satire derived from those figures. Culturally, too, it looks backwards and forwards. As Hadfield says, it "covers what was considered to be virtually the whole tradition of English literature as it was then known," yet it was "designed to resemble a humanist edition of a work of Latin or Greek literature." It came complete with its own editorial annotations, supplied by someone calling himself "E. K." who has been plausibly conjectured to be Harvey, in conjunction with Spenser and perhaps their mutual friend Edward Kirk, who lent his initials for the subterfuge. Spenser's opposition, in the poem, to the projected marriage between Elizabeth and the Catholic Duc d'Alençon, and his support for Archbishop Grindal of Canterbury whom the Queen had placed under virtual house arrest for his Calvinist sympathies, were bold moves.

In 1580 Spenser was appointed secretary to Lord Grey, Elizabeth's vice-regent in Ireland, who became notorious for executing six hundred rebels at Smerwick after they had surrendered and sued for mercy. Grey appears in *The Faerie Queene* as Artegall, the executor of justice through his servant, the terrifying iron man Talus; Spenser's attitude to him personally is equivocal, Hadfield thinks. Subsequently, Spenser shuttled between Ireland (where he acquired valuable property and land) and England for the rest of his life, leaving a vivid record of the conflicts between the English mercenaries and the Irish chieftains—who were supported by the Catholic powers in Europe—in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, written in the mid-1590s but published only in 1633. The famous passage describing the rebels, beaten into starvation, "creeping forthe upon theire hands, for theire legges could not beare them," speaking "like ghoastes, crying out of theire graves," eating first carrion and then one another, is still shocking: yet even here, rebellion is seen as justly punished. In the troubles of 1598, Spenser and his family had to abandon their property and flee to England, where he died within the month—of hunger, according to Ben Jonson, but certainly in mysteriously straitened circumstances.

Spenser spent much of his life in exile, and his relationship to English court circles was never easy. His offences in the *Calender* were offset by complimentary verses and by the flattering portrait of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*, and he obtained an annual pension of fifty pounds (no small sum) in 1591. Yet in that very year his collection *Complaints* was impounded by the authorities on account of its thinly veiled attack on Lord Burleigh, Elizabeth's chief minister. Like many writers of the time he was dependent on patronage and had to tread carefully. On the basis of the letter to Raleigh, which formed part of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590 and which explained Spenser's intentions in composing what he

called his "Allegory, or darke conceit," it is often assumed that the two men were close. Hadfield questions this, seeing the letter as a useful piece of PR, rather than evidence of intimate acquaintance; its exclusion from the 1596 edition of the poem, by which time Raleigh had fallen from Elizabeth's favor, is telling. Raleigh was also the dedicatee of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (1595), written after Spenser's return to Ireland from a visit to London, but he can hardly have welcomed this distinction, for the poem, while lavishing conventional praise on Elizabeth in the character of Cynthia, contains a vitriolic attack on her court:

> that same place,
> Where each one seeks with malice and with strife,
> To thrust downe other into foule disgrace,
> Himselfe to raise: and he doth soonest rise
> That best can handle his deceitfull wit,
> In subtil shifts, and finest sleights deuise . . .

Spenser frequently represents himself as misunderstood and undervalued; the great poet of chivalric courtesy was also capable of bitterness and scorn.

Spenser has other claims on our attention besides his two major poems. The *Complaints* collection, "meditations of the worlds vanitie" as they were described in the printer's address to the reader, contains some first-class translations of du Bellay's *Antiquitez de Rome*; *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* (1595) are sonnets and a wedding poem for Spenser's first wife; the *Fowre Hymnes* (1596) are neo-platonic celebrations of earthly and heavenly love and beauty; *Prothalamion* (1596) is a wedding poem for the double marriage of the daughters of the Earl of Somerset, although even here Spenser has to mention his "expectation vayne/ Of idle hopes" from "Princes Court." It is always difficult for a modern reader to get beyond the conventional tropes of Petrarchan love-poetry to what is assumed to be "genuine" emotion, yet that is a false opposition; there was no other way of expressing genuine emotion, no higher compliment that could be paid, than by the use of these respected rhetorical strategies. Sometimes, it's true, the verse seems to quicken with a greater pressure and intensity, as here in *Epithalamion*, for instance:

> There dwels sweet loue and constant chastity,
> Vnspotted fayth and comely womanhood,
> Regard of honour and mild modesty,
> There virtue raynes as Queene in royal throne,
> And giueth lawes alone.

Like Milton, who hailed Spenser as "our sage and serious poet . . . whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas," Spenser could combine Puritan restraint with sensuousness. Yeats saw this, and praised Spenser as a laureate of the pre-Puritan Merry England, a place where "beautiful haughty imagination . . . full of abandon and wilfulness" had not yet given way to prayer meetings and the counting-house. This is an exaggeration. Spenser certainly held that the things of this world must not be delighted in for themselves alone but for what they tell us about God, and that earthly life is a preparation for eternity. Nowhere is this idea more finely treated than in the two cantos "Of Mutabilitie" which are all that Spenser wrote of the projected seventh book of *The Faerie Queene*, whose subject was Constancy. They appeared first in the 1609 edition of the poem and were clearly inserted by the publisher; they seem to date from the months immediately before Spenser's death. Heavily influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, by Lucretius and Boethius, and by Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules*, which is explicitly mentioned, they depict a debate, adjudicated by Nature herself, between Mutabilitie and the Olympian gods, with both parties contending for control of the universe. Mutabilitie's speech in her own defense calls as witnesses a virtual anatomy of the universe—brilliantly drawn personifications of its changing elements, seasons, and months, its alternations of day and night, finally Life and Death themselves. Jove, for the gods, counters that Time, with all its changes, is under his control. Mutabilitie objects that even the gods are subject to change, and among her examples is Cynthia. Given that

this was understood to be Queen Elizabeth, the description is the last and most audacious example of Spenser's refusal to flatter:

> . . . her face and countenance euery day
> We changed see, and sundry forms partake,
> Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown and gray:
> So that *as changefull as the Moone* men vse to say.

In a universe of ceaseless change, nothing is constant or certain; Mutabilitie is confident that Nature will give judgment in her favor. Nature, however, pronounces that change itself is part of a larger process, a universal law whereby all things seek to return to their primal constituents. "But time shall come that all shall changed bee," she adds, "And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see." This hints that Jove himself, whose "imperiall see" is apparently vindicated, does not have the last word. In the final two stanzas, assigned by the publisher to Canto VIII, Spenser, like Chaucer at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, takes a step back to regard the whole action of his poem from a Christian perspective, imagining a "time when no more *Change* shall be,"

> For, all that moueth, doth in *Change* delight:
> But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
> With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
> O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.

As A. C. Hamilton notes in his edition of *The Faerie Queene*, the two different spellings "Sabaoth" (armed hosts) and "Sabbaoth" (rest) imply a further pun on the name "Elizabeth," which means "the peace of the Lord." Spenser's prayer is for the rest that is not found in the chancy political world, but is the reward of the redeemed.

Hadfield alerts us to further political implications of the Mutabilitie cantos; the setting of the debate on Arlo Hill, a few miles from Spenser's house in Ireland, evokes his personal experience of the nightmare instability consequent upon the English attempt to impose an "imperiall see" upon a people fighting for independence. More broadly, the picture of the aging and childless Elizabeth, with Time sitting at her gates with his scythe, warns of an unstable future for her kingdom after her death. By 1609, when the cantos were published, this had of course been resolved, yet their appearance just then, in the age of Donne and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, that ferocious take on Chaucer's poem, gave them an accidental fresh topicality.

Spenser's grave was unmarked, and its exact location within the Abbey has become uncertain. Many poets attended his funeral, according to the antiquary William Camden, bearing elegies that, "with the pens that wrote them," were "thrown into his tomb." His reputation has itself been subject to mutability. Hadfield contends for a more nuanced understanding of him than has been common: he was a middle-class writer on the fringes of the court, a player in a brutal political game that he may not have endorsed wholeheartedly, a Protestant who cannot be assumed to be rabidly anti-Catholic. (I find that claim implausible.) He was aware of the degree to which human plans and dreams are thrown out of kilter by events. Hadfield implicitly agrees with Colin Burrow, author of the best short critical book on Spenser, who presents him as "a poet whose urge to make, shape, and control is always, more or less consciously, limited by external forces which he knows he cannot quite command." If one lesson of his work is that we ourselves will never quite see him completely in focus, Hadfield has at least sharpened the lens.

Notebook

Hemingway & Malraux: the struggle

by Jeffrey Meyers

Bear, like the Turk, no rival near the throne.
—Alexander Pope

Hemingway and Malraux, the outstanding modern examples of the artist in action, had hostile and combative relations. Each respected the other's great novels, but loathed many of his rival's personal characteristics and saw through his painfully constructed façade of lies. Malraux criticized Hemingway's machismo, boastfulness, and apparent simple-mindedness. Hemingway condemned Malraux's dandyism, pomposity, and tedious philosophical monologues. Malraux was fascinated by his own torrential disquisitions. His facial tics, which magnetized many, irritated Hemingway. Since Hemingway spoke French and Malraux had no English, they always talked to each other in the language of Malraux, who had an unfair advantage in their face-to-face confrontations. Hemingway tried hard to understand the voluble Malraux but didn't think the necessary concentration was worth the effort. The two writers were both vulnerable and aggressive, egoistic and abrasive. Sensing a formidable rival, each watched the other jealously and attacked him in verbal and printed combats that lasted for three decades. It was typical of Hemingway to challenge a threatening competitor and of Malraux to retaliate with caustic comments.

They had, apart from nationality and inherited religion, some notable differences. Hemingway was a good athlete; the awkward Malraux had no interest in sports. Hemingway lived simply and rejected a hedonistic way of life; Malraux liked luxurious living and expensive restaurants. Scrupulous about money, Hemingway (though cheated by his lawyer) left a sizable fortune; Malraux, living well above his income, left a pile of debts. Hemingway could be quite funny; Malraux was always serious. Hemingway distrusted abstractions and had no philosophical pretensions; Malraux, fond of the Metaphysical and always in quest of the Absolute, loved them. After becoming famous, Hemingway protected his privacy by retreating to the remote fastness of Cuba; Malraux increased his fame and power by becoming a government minister. More politically perceptive than Malraux, Hemingway never accepted Communist propaganda, adhered to the party line, or condoned Stalin's atrocities, purge trials, and gulags. He made André Marty, the French Communist commissar, the murderous villain of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway remained firmly on the liberal left; Malraux, enchanted by and advisor to De Gaulle, moved to the conservative right.

But their similarities were striking and significant. They were close contemporaries: Hemingway was born in 1899, Malraux in 1901. Both rebelled against their middle-class childhoods in Oak Park and Dunkirk. Like the great masculine writers—Melville, Conrad, and Orwell—they did not go to universities but were educated by violent experience. Handsome, charismatic, and photogenic, they filled a space with their impressive presence. Gerald Brenan told me that when Hemingway entered a room

there was not enough air for anyone else to breathe. They lived on their first wives' trust funds to jumpstart their literary careers and, with notable talent and ambition, were known as writers before they'd published anything. Both were cat lovers and serious collectors of art, though Malraux stole some of his precious objects. They attracted a cadre of flatterers and parasites. Both drank heavily and destructively in the last decades of their lives. Both suffered severe depressions and nervous breakdowns, though Malraux handled mental illness much better than Hemingway.

Hemingway and Malraux glorified male comradeship and the bonds of the virile fraternity, but had touchy temperaments and frequently severed relations with close friends. Both were committed to fight for the underdog and against injustice: Hemingway in "Who Murdered the Vets?" (1935) and with the Spanish Loyalists; Malraux in Indochina and China, as well as in Spain. Obsessed with death, they constantly confirmed their personal courage by taking risks and drinking the aphrodisiac of danger. Both believed, as Malraux wrote, "a man is what he does." They wanted to leave a scar on the map of world history and were themselves deeply scarred. Experts in generating publicity and legends (even, in Hemingway's case, accounts of his own death), they burnished their literary reputations with daring Byronic exploits. Malraux's biographer Olivier Todd observed of both of them: "They have a physical and intellectual need to see history at first hand to write about it. War is one of their powerful literary drugs; they have great admiration for physical courage and are themselves brave. This admiration leads to exhibitionism. . . . Spain satisfies both writers' appetite for bravery, blood and death."

Attractive to women but not great womanizers, they were more interested in long-term unions than numerous conquests. Absorbed in their writing, they were contentious husbands and difficult fathers. Hemingway had three divorces and four marriages. Malraux was married twice, to Clara Goldschmidt and to Madeleine Malraux (widow of his half-brother), and had three common-law marriages: to Josette Clotis (mother of his two sons) and Louise de Vilmorin, succeeded after death by her young niece, Sophie de Vilmorin. They each had three children. Hemingway's son was nicknamed Bumby; one of Malraux's sons was called Bimbo. Both men, while married, brought their lovers to Spain and intensified their sex lives with the excitement of war. Clara, Josette, and Hemingway's third wife, Martha Gellhorn, were openly unfaithful.

The families of Hemingway and Malraux acted out modern versions of a Greek tragedy. Hemingway killed himself, and his father, brother, and sister also committed suicide. Malraux survived every danger while his family disintegrated around him. His father committed suicide. Josette Clotis, in a freak accident in 1944, jumped off a moving train, fell under the wheels, and was killed. His two half-brothers, Roland and Claude, worked for the Resistance, were arrested by the Gestapo, and killed that year. His two sons, Gauthier and Vincent, died in a car crash in 1961. Malraux lamented, "almost all those I have loved have been killed in accidents."

Both creators of fiction were mythomaniacs. Hemingway exaggerated his World War I wounds and medals, heightened the number of "probable" and "definite" Germans he killed in World War II, and claimed to have been the first man to enter Paris and to liberate the wine cellars of the Ritz Hotel. Malraux, inter alia, awarded himself a doctoral degree from the School of Oriental Languages and claimed to have been a revolutionary leader in Canton. In *The Royal Way*, he insisted "every adventurer is born a mythomaniac." In his mind, as in Hemingway's, possibilities became certainties. More forthright than Hemingway, Malraux stated, "what is true is whatever amuses, suits or benefits me. . . . I lie but my lies become truths." When adventure coincided with impulse, both men were capable of heroism; when it did not, they escaped into myth. By transforming their lives into legends, they lived out their private fantasies. Like Vincent Berger, the autobiographical hero of Malraux's *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, Malraux "could perhaps have found some means of destroying the mythical person he was growing into, had

he been compelled. But he had no wish to do so. His reputation was flattering. What was more important, he enjoyed it."

Their works, like their lives, had important qualities in common. Both authors were strongly influenced by Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness* profoundly shaped Malraux's story of the quest for a madman gone native in the jungle in *The Royal Way*. In a weird 1924 obituary notice of Conrad, Hemingway said he would gladly grind T. S. Eliot into a fine powder if that would bring Conrad back to life. He portrayed the great Conradian theme in *Lord Jim*, of moral failure and recovery of self-esteem, in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and of victory in defeat in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

The two were, at first, generous in praising each other's major novels. Malraux considered *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) to be "the best love story written since Stendhal." Hemingway owned eight books by Malraux, four of them in French. In August 1935 he told the Russian journalist Ivan Kashkin that Malraux's *Man's Fate* (1933), a novel about the betrayal of the Communist revolution in Shanghai, "was the best book I have read in ten years" and added, "if you ever see him I wish that you would tell him so for me." But in the introduction to his anthology *Men at War* (1942), written after their personal relations had soured, he excluded that book and gratuitously attacked Malraux. He rightly called the famous scene where the prisoner-hero Katov, after giving away his cyanide pill, is waiting to be burned alive, "a marvelous piece of writing . . . magnificently written." He then lamely explained that he would have included it "for its literary value if I had not, knowing Malraux in Spain, come to doubt his accuracy. If there was any doubt as to the truth of the incident, I felt it should not be published in this book while we were at war, no matter how well written it was." This criticism was pointless, as Hemingway well knew, since factual accuracy is not essential in imaginative fiction. Hemingway would say almost anything to get the better of Malraux, especially if his rival was not able to respond.

Their first personal contacts, during the Spanish Civil War, provoked Hemingway's radical change from high praise to corrosive criticism. They met briefly at the Hotel Florida in Madrid in August 1937 and in Barcelona in November 1938. Malraux said that in New York in late 1937 Hemingway had talked about Shakespeare, in striking terms, just as he spoke "of life in his best writing." Both men were touring America to raise money to buy ambulances and medical supplies for the Spanish Loyalists. Malraux (his French translated for the Anglophone audiences) was a great orator; Hemingway, though less dramatic, was also an effective speaker. The only photo of them together was taken around the desk of Malraux's editor at Random House, Robert Haas, as they went over Malraux's fund-raising speech. Both writers wore suits and ties, and Malraux kept on his coat and scarf. Seated in the middle and looking down at his corrected typescript, Malraux seems to be speaking at the same time as Hemingway instead of listening to his advice. Hemingway, while staying overnight at the White House, also briefed President Roosevelt about the Spanish War.

Hemingway spoke fluent Spanish; Malraux knew little of the language. Emphasizing his rival's noncombatant role, Malraux said, "Hemingway had spent more time than I in Spain before the war, and he spent less time during it. In short, he knew a great number of civilian Spanish and I knew a great number of enlisted Spanish." Both authors wrote major novels about the Spanish War: Malraux's *Man's Hope* (1937) and Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Both portrayed in their novels their greatly admired friend the Spanish general Gustavo Durán, and Hemingway was jealous of Malraux's friendship with him. Both made important films about the Spanish war. Hemingway wrote and narrated a documentary, *The Spanish Earth* (1937); Malraux wrote and directed *L'Espoir* (also called *Sierra de Teruel*), a superb feature film that was shot during the war and finally released in 1945.

Though they fought for a common cause, the two literary Titans, struggling for supremacy, inevitably clashed. Georges Soria, a French

journalist who observed them in Madrid, noted Hemingway's obvious boredom with Malraux's torrential speeches, his criticism of Malraux's alliance with the Communists, and his dislike of Malraux's abstract theories and pompous predictions:

> "Ernie," staring at his glass and obviously "turned off," was waiting resignedly for Malraux to finish his breathless improvisations in order to get a word in edgewise. The two men respected, but hardly liked one another. "Ernie" tended rather to seek the company of simple, quiet people and hated theorizing about politics or literature. Without malicious intentions, he called Malraux "Comrade Malreux"—a bad pun [on "*malheureux*," unhappy] that expressed his aversion for this type of intellectualism.

Hemingway's satiric account, in a letter to General Buck Lanham in April 1948, about Malraux's supposed talk with the Polish General Walter expressed his own conviction that thought interferes with action in war:

> Malraux, a phony, kept asking him questions like what do you think, mon general, about all sorts of things, le masturbation parmi le chinoise, le valeur devant le mort de les indigene du classe super-intellectuelle etc. [masturbation among the Chinese, the courage when faced with death of the native super-intellectual class]. Finally Walter said, "Pour-quoi demande moi penser? *Penser*? Moi Generale sovietique. Moi pense jamais! [Ask me to think? Think? I'm Soviet general. Never think.]."

Malraux's abstract questions were absurdly inappropriate to a military conversation and there was no reason to believe that Walter would know the answers—if, indeed, there were any. Hemingway did not seem to realize that Walter may have been satirizing Communist control by saying that even Soviet generals merely obeyed orders and were not *allowed* to think. Hemingway's lively anecdotes were designed to amuse his correspondents and to enhance his reputation by denigrating his formidable adversary.

For personal reasons, Hemingway was much more critical of *Man's Hope* than he was of *Man's Fate*. He was angry that Malraux, who'd achieved a fine record in Spain, had left the war to write a novel and published *Man's Hope* as early as 1937, before the real war began—even though the novel concluded *after* the Loyalists' great victory in the battle of Guadalajara in March. In May 1938 he boasted to his editor Max Perkins, in telegraphic style, that when the war is "finished am going to settle down and write and the pricks and fakers like Malraux who pulled out in Feb 37 to write gigantic masterpisses before it really started will have a good lesson when write ordinary sized book with the old stuff unfaked in it." But the real cause of his anger was that Malraux had pipped him at the post by publishing a Spanish war novel before he could bring out his own work. Provoked by Malraux's impressive achievement, he was determined to write a better book than *Man's Hope*.

Hemingway's argument with Malraux was specious, and he was in no position to criticize the French war hero. Malraux went to Spain as soon as the war broke out in July 1936; Hemingway, coming from America, arrived as a war correspondent eight months later in March 1937. Malraux helped create the Loyalist air force with the Escuadra España, flew sixty-five combat missions as bombardier and gunner, and was wounded during one of the raids. Hemingway enviously allowed that Malraux must have acquired his nervous facial tic at well over ten thousand feet.

Hemingway didn't seem to see that in Malraux's *Man's Hope* the American character Slade (whom Olivier Todd and Isaiah Berlin strangely call "Shade") was partly based on himself. Malraux, noting Hemingway's emphasis on primitive feeling, wrote that "Slade was fifty. He had traveled a good deal and life had given him some nasty knocks—among others . . . the lingering, mortal illness of having loved a woman. And the only things to which he attached any importance he called idiotic or bestial; elemental things like pain and love, humiliation, innocence." Malraux attacked Hemingway's stubborn anti-intellectualism when Slade exclaims, "the only people I like are idiots—innocents. . . . Most people have the big head, and they can't do a thing with it."

Deliberately or not, Hemingway's last sentence in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* echoes Malraux's last sentence in *Man's Hope*. Malraux concluded: "this new consciousness within him was . . . [as] profound and permanent as the beating of his heart." Hemingway ended: "He could feel his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest."

After trumping him in combat, fiction, and film, Malraux could afford to be generous when *For Whom the Bell Tolls* came out three years after his own book. In a 1948 interview he compared Hemingway to two of the greatest novelists of all time—and to Stendhal for the second time: "I consider it a powerful work, with a bravura piece, a central moment—the sabotaged attack, the launching of the offensive—which is a model of descriptive literature and which, keeping everything in proportion, can be compared to Tolstoy . . . and to Stendhal." But in a second interview in the 1960s Malraux ignored the fact that both he and Hemingway had had love affairs in Spain, and expressed some illogical reservations about the novel: "When, like Hemingway, you introduce a love story into a revolutionary combat, you are pulling the reader's leg, because if you are having a love affair you are not in revolutionary combat." In fact, like Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, Hemingway intensified the emotions and deepened the drama of both *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by including love stories in the accounts of war. Malraux also committed an unforgivable solecism by declaring that William Faulkner, who had a considerable vogue in France, was a better writer than Hemingway. But Hemingway cheeked Malraux by invading his literary territory and going to China in 1941 to cover the war with Japan.

After their ill-fated encounters, Malraux criticized Hemingway's character as well as his novel. Bruce Chatwin concluded, "Hemingway thought 'Camarade Malraux' a poseur and Malraux thought Hemingway a fake tough . . . *c'est un fou qui a la folie de simplicité* [a madman with delusions of simplicity]." Some of Malraux's comments on his rival's public persona, myth-making, and braggadocio also applied, quite precisely, to himself: "As to the man Hemingway, I have reservations. I am afraid the personage may spoil the writer, that the legend in which he revels is prejudicial to the courageous, infantile and boastful man he has always been." In conversation with Isaiah Berlin, he repeated the very word Hemingway had used to degrade him: "Hemingway was a phony *solitaire*, unconvincing, no good; he knocked him out."

Their most contentious and absurd confrontation took place at the Ritz Hotel just after the liberation of Paris in August 1944. Hemingway, in his most self-aggrandizing mood, often retold this story while exaggerating both the numbers and the dialogue. In a letter of June 1946 to the Russian writer Konstantin Simonov, he wrote, "André Malraux came to see me and asked how many men I had commanded. I told him never more than 200 at the most and usually between 14 and 60. He was very happy and relieved because he had commanded 2,000 men, he said. So there was no question of literary prestige involved."

Hemingway sent this playlet version in a letter of February 1953 to Bernard Berenson.

> Malraux asked: "How many have you commanded?"
>
> Hemingway: "Dix aux douze. Au plus deux cent [Ten to twelve, two hundred at the most]."
>
> Malraux: "Moi: deux mille [I commanded two thousand]."
>
> Hemingway: "What a shame my colonel that we did not have the assistance of your force when we took this small town [of Paris]."

One of Hemingway's partisan bodyguards eagerly offered to end the conversation with Malraux by asking, "Papa, should we shoot this asshole?" But Hemingway mercifully "let him preen and jerk and twitch until he left." By the time this story got recycled by Malraux's biographer Pierre Galante, Malraux was astonished to find the voluptuary Hemingway "stark-naked, in the arms of two young women. The warrior's repose!"

It was ludicrous for Hemingway—rarely more than a journalistic observer—to compare himself with Malraux, who could have

given a creditable account of his war experience. He had been captured by the Germans in 1940 and escaped from a POW camp near Sens, southeast of Paris. He'd led 1,500 maquis in the Dordogne region of southwest France. He then commanded the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade under General Jacques Leclerc from September 1944, took part in the capture of Dannemarie in Alsace in November, the defense of Strasbourg—the last French city in German hands—against Gerd von Runstedt's counteroffensive in December, the march on Colmar and Sainte-Odilie, and the triumphant entry into Stuttgart in April 1945. A wanted man, traveling with false papers, he'd been captured by the Gestapo in July 1945 and had escaped torture and death only weeks before he met Hemingway. Malraux, who'd been promoted from private soldier to lieutenant colonel, had achieved what Hemingway, fantasizing in the Ritz bar, had only dreamed of doing.

Hemingway's unpublished story "A Room on the Garden Side," set in the Ritz Hotel, contains yet another version of his now legendary conversation with Malraux. According to Susan Beegel's useful summary in *Studies in Short Fiction* (1994), Colonel André is dressed in a fancy uniform: cavalry pants, high polished boots, and a tunic with stripes as long as a step-ladder. Robert, the Hemingway-hero and real soldier, wears a uniform scavenged from dead Americans. They have the now familiar exchange about how many men each had commanded: "When asked how he was able to feed 2,000 irregulars, Malraux responds, 'We were among patriots.'" Claude, one of Hemingway's French companions, cuts him down with a speech about how hungry troops had rapidly eroded French patriotism. "Both Robert and André are talented writers not writing because they have chosen to follow the war. The story questions whether their contributions to the war merit such 'sacrifice' and whether they deserve their celebrity."

Their personal rivalry continued until Hemingway eliminated himself from the fight. He won the Nobel Prize in 1954. Malraux did not win it, though he deserved it and was a much better writer than the contemporary French winners: Roger Martin du Gard, François Mauriac, and Jean-Paul Sartre. But he regretfully noted, "they will never give it to a Gaullist." Hemingway told the Paris-based journalist Janet Flanner, who wrote under the pen name "Genêt," he regretted that Malraux, often a rumored candidate, had not received the prize. He knew that Malraux had a suicidal father and feared that he might become depressed enough to kill himself.

Hemingway resented Malraux's shift to right-wing politics and acceptance of (his tremendously successful) high office, which took him away from writing novels, though he continued to publish innovative books on art. In another letter to Berenson of January 1953, Hemingway said that Malraux's "the sort that gets to be Minister of Culture in a new chicken-shit Republic where there are no standards except charm." Ignoring his own lies, he once again condemned those of Malraux: "how you can tell a man who has killed men (armed) is that usually his eyes do not blink at all. A liar's eyes blink all the time. Meet Malraux sometime."

Malraux's final judgment in *Anti-Memoirs* (1967), six years after his rival's death, perceptively traced the pattern of Hemingway's life and its reflection in his postwar novel *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950), which called Malraux's commanding general "that jerk Leclerc." Malraux observed, "Hemingway, throughout the curve which begins with the young man in love with an older woman, then with a younger one, and ends—after God knows how many instances of impotence and suicide—with a sixty-year-old colonel in love with a young girl, never ceased to foreshadow his own fate."

Though often engaged in violent sports, Hemingway was more focused on his fiction and wrote greater novels and stories than Malraux. But Malraux, more intellectual and ambitious, had greater achievements as an explorer, editor at Gallimard, aviator, warrior, filmmaker, politician, and art historian. Despite their acrimonious but fascinating disputes—which brought out the worst in the more insecure and offensive Hemingway and a lofty superiority in the more cerebral Malraux—the two authors, like extinct stars, continue to radiate light long after their deaths.